

Self-paced learning: Is it right for your child?

By Jackie Cook

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The development of educational technology has resulted in the concept of "self-paced learning" emerging as an academic technique. While at first glance this may appear to be beneficial for learners, the pros and cons of it need to be examined closely. A parent should ask themselves the following question, "Do I want to consider a school that punts self-paced learning without fully understanding what it is?" Also, parents need evaluate whether this mode of learning suits their child's academic needs and whether it will achieve the required outcome.



Image source: Julia McCameron from [Pexels](#)

Let's start with the curriculum. The curriculum is a formal learning journey that maps out the content to be taught and learned. It provides a structured framework that guides the teacher through developmentally appropriate activities in a considered way.

Learning is made up of layers and concepts which build out within the curriculum as a student progresses through their school journey. In the traditional education space, it is the educator's role to ensure that a student understands each layer and concept before they move on – this is what we term "scaffolding" in the education realm. This brings a vital structure, with the teacher being the learner's guide.

However, learners do not all learn at the same pace – they are individuals, all at different points in their developmental journey. For 'self-paced learning' to be successful, a child needs to have time-management skills, an ability to self-manage, and a dose of self-discipline. Allowing a child freedom without structure is setting them up for failure. The ideal is achieved by learning to work at their own pace within a structure while meeting the curriculum requirements.



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Synchronous vs asynchronous models

Most South African online schools are hybrids between a predominantly asynchronous (pre-recorded) model, with small amounts of synchronous (live) interactions. In essence, the learner can learn at their own pace using the online materials available to them. A self-paced learning student is responsible for completing the curriculum at his own pace - an enormous task requiring consistent parental supervision.

Conversely, live (synchronous) online schools replicate the classroom environment and are highly beneficial in keeping learners engaged, implementing continuous assessment, and enabling a flexible, but supportive learning environment. Learners benefit from the live interactions and relationships with teachers and peers. Plus, they can opt to attend the scheduled live classes or watch the recordings in their own time, thereby putting an emphasis on balanced structure. A synchronous learning experience offers routine and timetables which build connection, stability, and higher functioning students.



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As an experienced educator, I strongly believe that quality learning happens with meaningful teacher and peer connections. Listening, learning and collaborating daily generates great opportunities to grow and thrive. Students make friends with classmates and grow together, driving a sense of community and belonging, as well as positive and motivating peer pressure. They are guided by the timetabled curriculum, therefore getting all the teaching they need for the year, setting them up for future success.

My recommendation to parents when choosing a school, your primary consideration must be your child's academic abilities and their emotional maturity. The rule must always be: the school must fit the child, not the child must fit the school. Self-paced learning cannot be the deciding point when evaluating school options, but rather parents must ask themselves, "Does my child have the qualities to make a success of pure self-paced learning model?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jackie Cook is the Chief Operating Officer at Teneo Online School. Cook has over two decades of teaching experience. She always dreamed of establishing quality schools, understanding that education is a key investment to unlock a brighter future for the next generation. Joining Teneo in 2018, Jackie played an instrumental role in designing the foundational architecture of Teneo's first online school. After discovering that schools can built, optimised and scaled quickly and efficiently online to allow thousands of children access to quality education, she never looked back. In her current role as COO, Jackie oversees all academic operations across Teneo's school offerings.