Time management and planning: Why online learning has been a game-changer for Gen-Zs

Johannesburg - Online learning facilities across South Africa have noticed a huge increase in the number of high school learners signing up for online studying. Since the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, learners were forced to follow the online route, but experts say young people live online, and it comes as no surprise that many of them have taken to it the way they did.

Gabriella Gitari is a bright 19-year-old from Krugersdorp who studies psychology at the University of Cape Town (UCT). She is part of Gen Z and the so-called “lost generation” who began their studies during the pandemic. But Gitari is far from lost – having matriculated from a leading online high school prior to lockdown, she was among the first in the country to embrace online school

Gitari started out at a regular brick and mortar high school in Krugersdorp, but being a highly motivated student who didn’t enjoy distractions such as being shuffled from class to class or having to do compulsory extra-murals, she switched to Teneo Online School before her Matric year in 2020 to focus on her studies.

“I can decide how much time I need to spend on each subject and how I want to organise my week. You have the freedom to decide if you want to do extra-murals or not. I could focus on doing well, and by Friday, I was done with my tasks so I could enjoy my weekends as well.”

The switch paid off: Her marks drastically improved, and she was accepted to study Psychology at UCT

Gitari said the switch to online exams was one of the biggest pluses of online school. “I liked taking exams in normal school, but now I can do it without anxiety. You just wake up, prep, and sit at your desk for the exam. At regular schools, you have so many other stress factors, such as getting dressed and getting to school on time

“You also feel pressure when you see everyone else is done, and I was never done first because I’m a thorough person. Online school is different: it teaches you it’s you versus yourself.”

While the past two years have left many South African students feeling lost and anxious, Gitari said her early start with online schooling has helped her transition effortlessly to a university with a hybrid online/off-line set up, and even taught her a few important life skills.

“Online school makes you more open to learning and relating to others. You become more confident, open, forthcoming, and less judgmental. Everyone is equal. It carries over to your real-life friendships.

“Online school also teaches you to become self-motivated and to become really good at managing your own time. Being at UCT now, I have noticed some of my friends, who come from regular high schools, struggling with time management because nobody checks up on you anymore – you need self-discipline.”

Crucially, the live classes and online schooling also gave her the head space to really find herself and work out what she wanted to do with her life.

“Yes, we did miss out on certain things in the lockdown, but it was also a blessing in disguise because it gave us the chance to figure out our abilities and what we wanted to do with our lives – it gave us direction, and that makes us excited for our 20s and the rest of our lives.”

Looking at it all through the lens of organisational psychology – a subject she enjoys – Gitari sees how online education is priming her generation for the real future of work in the fourth industrial revolution era.

Gitari and her peers will build their careers in a time when humans need to work with technology.

“Everything is so digital and connected now. We’ll never fully go back to an off-line economy. We need to be more comfortable with digital systems and technology because it opens up so many opportunities.”

Director at the Think Digital Academy Vicky Moraitis said the global shift to online learning had enhanced the way young people already live and is “super-flexible”.

“You can learn and study from anywhere in the world. You have access to the best learning materials and the highest qualified teachers. The learners set their schedules, and they stick to them. They have to if they are to flourish at universities or even in the workplace,” she said.

Moraitis said online learning is particularly attractive to students with health issues, those who travel often and even those who pursue other interests like athletes, dancers and musicians.

“In the normal classroom set-up, there is no time to fall behind. You either catch up in your own time, or you just fall behind.

With online learning, you can view a lesson as many times as you need to, and the feedback is instant,” she added.

For those worried about costs, Moraitis said online learning requires as little as two to three gigs of data per month.

“We have also received outstanding results. We are shaping critical and independent thinkers, which are the life skills young people will need when they study and work.”

Moraitis said they have had a 15% increase in enrolments from 2021.

Meanwhile, Teneo said it had seen significant interest in enrolments for 2022. On average, there have been 60 to 100 new enrolments every day since the start of the New Year. The school said it aims to reach 13 000 enrolments by the end of February.

Valenture Institute CMO, Yazeed Osman, said, with this being the first year of the UCT Online High School, it has by far been their best performing year in terms of total enrolments within the schools of the Valenture Institute portfolio.

“Over 4,500 learners have already been confirmed to start this year, with over 30% starting in Grade 8, 20% in Grade 9, and even 50% split between Grade 10 and 11. By the end of January, we will enroll a total of 5,000 learners.

We publicly launched the school in July of 2021, and the early response from the market was so overwhelming that we had to work very hard to scale up our teaching and support teams to accommodate the demand.

“To date, we've received over 10,000 applications, with 5,000 of them starting in January 2022. While I wouldn't necessarily say these numbers are surprising, we are very pleased with the impact this project has already had on the South African education system,” he said.

<https://www.iol.co.za/saturday-star/news/time-management-and-planning-why-online-learning-has-been-a-game-changer-for-gen-zs-f999a364-ab94-444a-a2a3-eb00c0e45844>