

Online education: Relieving the high levels of 'unplaced children' in schools

Every year, without fail, thousands of families struggle to get their child placed into a school. Previously, they might be battling for a spot at their school of preference, but recently it's about finding a spot at all.



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

All is not lost, however, as online schools are flourishing and should be seriously considered by families. According to John Shaw, CEO of Teneo Online School, online schools embody the new paradigm shift we've experienced over the past two years, proving that live, structured online schooling could be the tonic our education system so desperately needs.

Demand > infrastructure in a gentrified South Africa

South Africa's population was estimated at 60.14 million mid-year 2021, indicating that despite the mortality rates of the pandemic, our population continues to soar. Education is key to stimulating our economy and addressing inequality, yet we do not have the capacity to adequately accommodate all students. The emotional toll this has on families is evident every year, as parents shut down schools and take to social media in protest.

The biggest issue contributing to the vast number of unplaced children at the beginning of each school year is simply infrastructure. Most parents are location-driven and enrol their children at a school nearby, but gentrification has changed the game.

"If we look at Gauteng, for example, developments continue to shoot up. On a property which five years ago housed one family with two kids, there are now five families with 10 kids – yet few, if any, new public schools are being built," says Shaw. He contends that these families are often pushed into a scenario where they have to weigh up between having their child in a class full of 40 children or having to transport their child 40kms away. The newer schools being built are often being done via the private sector, and many of them are further travelling distances than someone's local school would be and are therefore not quite feasible for some.



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Fighting for a spot in “feeder” schools

As South Africa ramps up efforts to address inequality, one must look at how hard it can be to get children into public schools that can only accommodate a limited number of students. “The question then becomes: how do they choose who gets accepted, and this is a contentious issue,” says Shaw.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) states that different provinces adopt different policies that ensure that learners are based in schools. It is still legal for schools to add feeder zones as their own admission criteria, and cities like Cape Town are known to prioritise those in the immediate areas which, often, are within the wealthier areas such as Rondebosch’s “Golden Mile” where starting prices for a small home sit at approximately R4m.

“Within this conundrum lies opportunity. Live, online schools that are engaging and structured in the same way as a brick-and-mortar school – with excellent subject choices, a variety of extramurals and social opportunities - are a great option for parents and students to look into as there is so much more to them than meets the eye,” says Shaw.

The solution: focus on the new paradigm

The world is not behaving as it did before the pandemic began. There has been a shift in paradigm where people are now looking at the optimal way of doing things.

“One no longer needs to go to the shops when items can be delivered, or go to the office when one can work from anywhere – and the same is true for education,” says Shaw, citing the huge increase in enquiries Teneo Online School continues to receive despite the fact that the pandemic is subsiding.



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“With anything involving change, there will always be those who adapt quickly and those who require a bit more time to come around – but now that both children and parents are seeing the opportunities of tertiary education being done online, they are realising that the opportunities of online school are endless,” says Shaw, adding that many of SA’s best teachers are also embracing this shift.

Teneo is celebrated for its offering of various curricula including the South African National (CAPS) curriculum, Independent Examinations Board (IEB) curriculum and British International curriculum, recognised both locally and internationally, making it easy for students to transition into an international online university.

If those who have the interest and ability to attend an online school do so, this will alleviate some of the capacity issues on public schools, but it will only be a long-term solution if people see the benefits of online schooling for their future.

“At the end of the day, parents send their children to school with one goal in mind: to set them up for future success. There are countless students thriving within the online education environment who walk away with their accredited Matric certificate just like everybody else, but actually being better prepared for the future of work in the mid-21st century than their less digitally savvy peers. It’s about finding what works best for your child and what will yield the best results for their future,” concludes Shaw.

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