

Is online learning a good fit for students with autism?

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Background: Adolescents with autism are heavy users of technology for entertainment (Kuo et al., 2013; Mazurek et al., 2012), but do they use it to support learning? Navigating the social demands of high school can be overwhelming for many students with autism causing stress and anxiety. Online learning may be a way for these students to reduce their stress and take courses, in particular in subject areas of interest that may not be available in their local high school, thus helping to better prepare them for life after high school. Taking courses from the comfort of a quiet classroom dedicated to online learning, or even from home, may be another way to help adolescents with autism better transition to higher education and/or careers of interest.

- What experience do secondary students with autism have with online learning?
- In what ways do they find online learning beneficial?

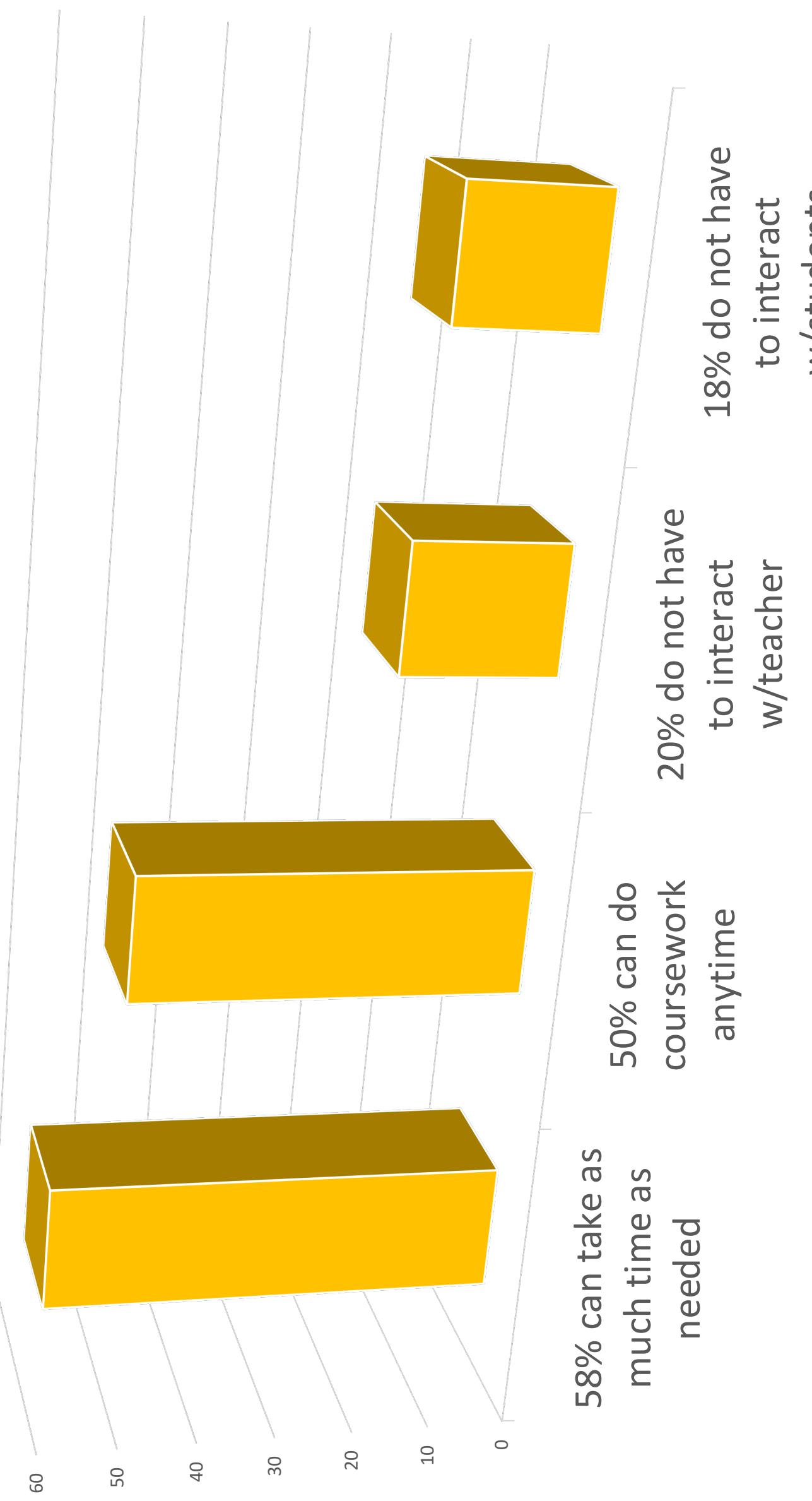
Method: A paper survey, using self-report from 350 high school students with autism in 30 high schools spread across 3 states in the US. These questions were part of a larger study regarding technology use by high school students on the spectrum.

Experience with online learning

29% of respondents reported having taken an online class in a wide variety of subjects mostly in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math

55% indicated they would like to take an online course in the future

Perceived benefits of online learning



Examples of Text Box Comments

It's very efficient

Something I'm interested in
Very organized

I could listen to music while online

I learn more when I'm by myself
If the course isn't offered f2f

Assignments are due at anytime
Not that hard

I think it's interesting, much better
It was fun

Faster

Conclusions: High school students with autism who have experienced online learning find it beneficial for the control it gives them over when and the amount of time they devote to the learning. Surprisingly, reasons related to a reduction in social interaction were less important. Online learning has potential to help young adults with autism to ease into higher education and/or to fill educational/vocational gaps as they transition to adulthood.

Researchers may want to investigate the effectiveness of online vs f2f courses on knowledge/skill acquisition.