



CHAPTER - 4

ONLINE LEARNING, SOCIAL EXCLUSION, AND STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH IN THE DIGITAL ERA:

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Abstract

The rapid growth of digital technology has significantly transformed the education system, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning has become an important part of education. Although online learning helped continue education during the pandemic, it also created several social and psychological problems among students. Lack of face-to-face interaction, excessive screen time, internet-related issues, and social isolation caused stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression among many learners. Students from rural and economically weaker backgrounds faced greater difficulties due to the lack of digital facilities and internet access. The chapter also examines how digital inequality and social exclusion affect students' educational participation and well-being.

This chapter discusses the impact of online learning on students' social life and mental health. It also highlights the role of teachers, parents, and educational institutions in creating a supportive and inclusive online learning environment.

Keywords:

Online learning, social exclusion, mental health, digital education, students

1. Introduction

Society continuously evolves with technological and social transformations. In the present era, the rapid growth of science and technology has influenced almost every sphere of human life. The education system is also greatly affected by technological advancement. Particularly, the development of information and communication technology has created a new environment in the field of education. With the help of the internet, smartphones, laptops, and digital platforms, online learning has become an important part of modern education.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools, colleges, and universities remained closed for a long period, and online learning played a major role in continuing the educational process. Through digital platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Google Classroom, teachers and students continued teaching and learning from their homes. As a result, students developed greater interest in digital learning and online education became more popular.

Although online learning has created new opportunities in education, it has also led to many social and psychological problems. Education is not only a process of gaining knowledge but also a means of social interaction, personality development, and emotional growth. In online classes, students often lack direct communication with teachers and friends. Excessive use of screens, internet problems, and social isolation have negatively affected students' mental health. Many students experience stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression due to online learning.

Moreover, not all students have equal access to digital resources. Students from rural and economically weaker families often face difficulties due to lack of smartphones, laptops, stable internet connections, and electricity. As a result, social exclusion and digital inequality increase in the field of education.

Therefore, it is necessary to examine both the positive and negative aspects of online learning. Understanding these challenges is important for developing educational policies and practices that promote both academic success and student well-being.

2. Online Learning

Online learning is a system of education in which teaching and learning take

place through the internet and digital media. Students can attend classes from home using smartphones, laptops, or computers without physically going to schools or colleges. In the modern age, online learning has become an important part of the education system.

Advantages of Online Learning

- Online learning enables students to access education remotely from their homes.
- Study materials are easily available.
- Learning becomes flexible and convenient.
- Education can continue during emergencies.
- Students develop digital and technological skills.

Disadvantages of Online Learning

- Lack of face-to-face interaction.
- Internet and technical problems.
- Reduced social communication.
- Increased mental stress and screen fatigue.
- Decrease in students' concentration and interest.

3. Social Exclusion in Online Education

Social exclusion refers to a condition in which individuals or groups are unable to fully participate in educational, social, economic, or cultural activities because of various barriers and inequalities. In the context of online education, social exclusion occurs when students are denied equal access to learning opportunities due to limited availability of digital resources, technological infrastructure, financial support, or social participation. Although online learning has expanded educational opportunities, it has also increased disparities among students from different social and economic backgrounds.

Education is not only a process of acquiring knowledge but also a means of social interaction, personality development, and skill enhancement. When students are unable to participate effectively in online learning, they may become marginalized from the educational process. Such exclusion can negatively affect academic achievement, social development, emotional well-being, and future opportunities. Students experience social exclusion in different forms during online learning. Some of the major causes are discussed below.

i) Lack of Internet and Digital Devices

Access to digital devices and internet connectivity is the foundation of online education. However, many students, particularly those from rural and economically disadvantaged families, do not have smartphones, laptops, tablets, or reliable internet services. In many households, a single device is shared among multiple family members, making regular participation in online classes difficult.

Students without proper digital facilities often miss classes, fail to access learning materials, and struggle to communicate with teachers. Consequently, they fall behind academically and become excluded from the learning process.

ii) Financial Problems

Economic inequality is one of the major causes of social exclusion in online education. Many families face financial difficulties and cannot afford the expenses associated with online learning, including purchasing digital devices, internet subscriptions, electricity costs, and educational software.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous students from low-income families were unable to continue their studies effectively because of financial constraints. As a result, educational opportunities became unequal, widening the gap between privileged and disadvantaged learners.

iii) Lack of Social Interaction

Traditional classroom environments provide opportunities for direct communication, friendship, teamwork, and emotional support. Through face-to-face interaction, students develop communication skills, social confidence, and a sense of belonging.

Online learning significantly reduces such opportunities. Limited interaction with teachers and classmates often makes students feel disconnected from the educational community. Many students experience loneliness, isolation, and reduced participation in social activities, which may negatively affect both their academic performance and mental health.

iv) Lack of Digital Knowledge and Skills

Effective participation in online education requires basic digital literacy and technological competence. However, many students and parents lack adequate knowledge of online learning platforms, educational applications, virtual classrooms, and digital communication tools.

Students who are unfamiliar with technology may face difficulties in attending classes, submitting assignments, downloading study materials, or participating in online discussions. These challenges often discourage learners

and increase their risk of educational exclusion.

v) Rural–Urban Differences

Significant disparities exist between rural and urban areas regarding technological infrastructure and educational resources. Urban students generally have better access to high-speed internet, uninterrupted electricity, and advanced digital facilities.

In contrast, students living in rural and remote areas frequently encounter network problems, power shortages, and limited access to technological support. These inequalities create unequal educational opportunities and contribute significantly to social exclusion in online education.

vi) Challenges Faced by Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities often face additional barriers in accessing online learning. Learners with visual, hearing, physical, or learning disabilities may require specialized support services and assistive technologies to participate effectively in educational activities.

Many online learning platforms are not fully accessible to students with special needs. Lack of subtitles, screen-reading software, sign-language support, and adaptive learning materials may limit their participation and increase educational exclusion.

vii) Language and Cultural Barriers

Students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds may experience difficulties understanding online instructional materials when they are available only in a particular language. Limited language proficiency can reduce classroom participation and learning effectiveness.

Similarly, students belonging to marginalized cultural communities may feel disconnected if educational content does not reflect their experiences and needs. Such barriers can contribute to exclusion and reduced engagement in learning activities.

3.1 Consequences of Social Exclusion

Social exclusion in online education has serious educational, social, and psychological consequences. Students who experience exclusion often face difficulties in understanding lessons, participating in classroom activities, and achieving academic success. Their educational progress may be significantly affected compared to students who have better access to resources.

Social exclusion also reduces opportunities for friendship, communication,

teamwork, and social participation. Many students develop feelings of loneliness, frustration, helplessness, and low self-confidence because they feel disconnected from their peers and educational institutions.

Furthermore, prolonged exclusion may negatively affect students' mental health, increasing the risk of stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. In the long term, educational exclusion may limit future educational and employment opportunities, thereby reinforcing existing social inequalities.

3.2 Measures to Reduce Social Exclusion

Reducing social exclusion is essential for ensuring equal educational opportunities and promoting social justice. Governments, educational institutions, communities, and families should work together to address the barriers that prevent students from participating fully in online education.

Affordable digital devices and reliable internet services should be made available to all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Educational institutions should organize digital literacy programs to improve students' and parents' technological skills. Special support services and accessible learning materials should be provided for students with disabilities.

Teachers should encourage active participation and create inclusive online learning environments where every student feels valued and connected. Furthermore, governments should strengthen digital infrastructure in rural areas and implement policies that promote educational equity. These measures can help reduce social exclusion and ensure that all students benefit equally from online learning opportunities.

4. Mental Health Problems Among Students

Mental health is an essential part of students' overall development and educational success. Good mental health helps students think positively, concentrate on studies, maintain healthy relationships, and participate actively in academic and social activities. However, in the digital age, especially during online learning, many students experience different mental health problems due to academic pressure, social isolation, excessive screen time, and lack of emotional support.

Online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic created a new educational environment, but it also increased stress, anxiety, loneliness, and emotional difficulties among students. Lack of face-to-face interaction with teachers and classmates, technical problems, and uncertainty about academic progress negatively affected students' psychological well-being.

Students experience various psychological, emotional, and behavioral challenges during online learning. Among these are stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, screen fatigue, sleep disorders, lack of motivation, emotional instability, fear about the future, low self-confidence, cyberbullying, and digital addiction.

i) Stress and Academic Pressure:

Stress is one of the most common mental health problems among students. Online assignments, examinations, project work, deadlines, and continuous academic pressure create stress and mental burden. Technical issues such as poor internet connection, electricity problems, and device failures further increase frustration and anxiety among learners.

Students often feel pressure to complete tasks on time while managing online classes and home responsibilities simultaneously. Excessive workload and long study hours can negatively affect students' emotional balance.

ii) Anxiety:

Many students experience anxiety during online learning. Fear of poor academic performance, online examinations, internet problems, and uncertainty about the future increase feelings of nervousness and worry. Some students become anxious about speaking in online classes or using digital platforms due to lack of confidence.

Continuous exposure to stressful situations may affect students' ability to focus and participate actively in learning activities.

iii) Loneliness and Social Isolation:

Traditional classroom environments provide opportunities for friendship, communication, teamwork, and emotional connection. However, online learning limits direct social interaction. Staying at home for long periods and reduced communication with teachers and classmates increase feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Many students miss school life, classroom discussions, cultural activities, and spending time with friends. This emotional isolation often affects their happiness and mental stability.

iv) Depression:

Long-term stress, loneliness, academic pressure, and lack of social interaction may lead to depression among students. Depressed students often lose interest in studies, social activities, and hobbies. They may feel hopeless,

emotionally weak, or unmotivated.

In severe cases, depression may affect students' confidence, academic performance, and daily routine. Therefore, emotional support and mental health awareness are extremely important.

v) Screen Fatigue and Mental Exhaustion:

Students spend many hours in front of mobile phones, laptops, and computer screens during online learning. Continuous screen exposure causes eye strain, headaches, mental tiredness, and lack of concentration.

Long screen time also reduces physical activity and creates mental exhaustion, which negatively affects students' emotional well-being and learning capacity.

vi) Sleep Disorders:

Excessive use of digital devices and irregular study schedules often disturb students' sleeping patterns. Many students stay awake late at night attending classes, completing assignments, or using social media. Lack of proper sleep affects concentration, memory, emotional stability, and physical health.

Sleep disorders may also increase stress, anxiety, and irritation among students.

vii) Lack of Motivation:

Many students lose interest and motivation in studies during prolonged online learning. Repetitive online classes, lack of classroom environment, and reduced social interaction make learning less enjoyable.

Students who feel disconnected from teachers and classmates may become careless, inactive, and less interested in academic activities.

viii) Emotional Instability:

Online learning and social isolation sometimes create emotional imbalance among students. Frequent mood swings, frustration, irritation, sadness, and anger become common because of stress and lack of emotional support.

Students may find it difficult to manage emotions properly when they feel isolated or overwhelmed by academic pressure.

ix) Fear and Uncertainty About the Future:

The COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the education system created uncertainty regarding examinations, career opportunities, and future goals.

Many students became worried about academic loss, employment opportunities, and future success.

Fear and uncertainty about the future negatively affected students' confidence and mental peace.

x) Low Self-Confidence:

Limited classroom participation and reduced communication opportunities may decrease students' self-confidence. Students who struggle with online learning or face technical difficulties may feel inferior compared to others.

Lack of encouragement and direct interaction sometimes makes students hesitant to express themselves freely.

xi) Cyberbullying and Online Harassment:

Online learning increases students' exposure to digital platforms where they may face cyberbullying and online harassment. Such experiences can cause stress, anxiety, fear, low self-esteem, and emotional distress, negatively affecting academic performance and mental health. Therefore, promoting cyber safety awareness and creating a secure online learning environment are essential.

xii) Digital Addiction:

Excessive use of digital devices during online learning can lead to digital addiction among students. It may reduce concentration, affect sleep patterns, increase stress, and limit physical and social activities. Maintaining a healthy balance between online and offline activities is important for students' overall well-being.

4.1 Measures to Reduce Mental Health Problems

i) Providing Emotional Support:

Teachers and parents should maintain friendly communication with students and encourage them to share their feelings and difficulties.

ii) Reducing Academic Pressure:

Schools and teachers should avoid excessive assignments and create balanced academic schedules.

iii) Encouraging Social Interaction:

Online group discussions, cultural activities, and collaborative learning can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.

iv) Arranging Mental Health Counseling:

Educational institutions should provide counseling services and mental health awareness programs for students.

v) Promoting Healthy Lifestyle Habits:

Students should be encouraged to exercise regularly, sleep properly, eat healthy food, and participate in recreational activities.

vi) Limiting Screen Time:

Regular breaks during online classes and balanced use of digital devices can reduce screen fatigue and mental exhaustion.

vii) Increasing Mental Health Awareness:

Awareness programs should be organized to educate students, parents, and teachers about stress management and emotional well-being.

viii) Creating Positive Learning Environment:

Teachers and parents should create a supportive, understanding, and motivating learning environment for students.

5. Impact on Educational and Social Life

Online learning has brought significant changes to students' educational and social life. Although it has created many opportunities for learning through digital technology, it has also produced several challenges that affect students academically, socially, emotionally, and psychologically. The impact of online learning can be both positive and negative.

5.1 Educational Impact of Online Learning

i) Difficulty in Understanding Lessons:

Limited interaction and technical barriers often make it difficult for students to understand complex concepts effectively.

ii) Reduced Concentration and Attention:

Long hours of online classes and continuous screen exposure reduce students' concentration and attention span. Home environments often contain distractions such as television, mobile phones, family activities, and noise, which interrupt learning.

iii) Low Classroom Participation:

Students often hesitate to participate actively in online discussions, presentations, and question-answer sessions. Some students feel shy, while others face technical problems such as poor internet connectivity or lack of confidence in using digital platforms.

iv) Decreased Interest in Studies:

Continuous online learning may reduce students' interest and motivation toward education. Lack of physical classroom experiences, social interaction, and practical activities makes learning monotonous for many students.

v) Problems in Evaluation and Assessment:

Online examinations create challenges in evaluating students fairly and accurately. Teachers may find it difficult to assess students' actual performance because of cheating, technical problems, and lack of proper supervision.

vi) Development of Digital Skills:

One positive impact of online learning is the improvement of students' digital literacy and technological skills. Students become familiar with online platforms, virtual communication tools, digital presentations, and educational software.

vii) Development of Self-Learning Habits:

Online learning encourages independent learning. Students often study materials on their own, which helps develop self-discipline, time management, and responsibility.

viii) Educational Inequality:

Online education has increased inequality among students because not everyone has equal access to smartphones, laptops, internet facilities, and electricity. Students from rural and economically weaker backgrounds often face greater disadvantages.

5.2 Social Impact of Online Learning

i) Reduction in Social Interaction:

One of the major social impacts of online learning is the reduction in face-to-face communication among students and teachers. Traditional classroom environments encourage friendship, communication, and social bonding, which become limited in online education.

ii) Lack of Teamwork and Cooperation:

Traditional education provides opportunities for group discussions, teamwork, and collaborative activities. Online learning reduces these opportunities, affecting students' cooperative and leadership skills.

iii) Decline in Communication Skills:

Students get fewer opportunities to practice public speaking, classroom

discussions, and interpersonal communication. As a result, communication skills and confidence may gradually weaken.

iv) Reduced Participation in Co-Curricular Activities:

Sports, cultural programs, debates, drama, music, and other co-curricular activities become limited during online learning. This negatively affects students' creativity, personality development, and social growth.

v) Increased Family Time:

One positive social impact is that students spend more time with family members. This may strengthen family relationships and emotional bonding.

vi) Reduced Social Responsibility:

Students participate less in community activities, school programs, and social events during online learning. As a result, opportunities to develop social responsibility and leadership qualities decrease.

6. Role of Teachers, Parents, and Educational Institutions in Supporting Online Learning and Students' Mental Health

Online learning has become an important part of modern education. However, students often face educational, social, emotional, and psychological challenges during online learning. Therefore, teachers, parents, and educational institutions play a vital role in creating a supportive, healthy, and effective online learning environment. Their combined efforts help students maintain academic progress, emotional well-being, and social development.

6.1 Role of Teachers

Teachers are the most important guides in the teaching-learning process. In online education, their responsibilities become even greater because students need proper guidance, motivation, and emotional support.

i) Making Online Classes Interactive:

Teachers should make online classes interesting and interactive through discussions, quizzes, presentations, videos, and group activities. Interactive teaching increases students' participation and attention.

ii) Encouraging Student Participation:

Teachers should encourage students to ask questions, share ideas, and actively participate in discussions and classroom activities. This helps improve confidence and communication skills.

iii) Providing Emotional Support:

Many students experience stress, anxiety, loneliness, and frustration during online learning. Teachers should maintain friendly communication and provide emotional encouragement to students whenever necessary.

iv) Giving Clear Instructions:

Teachers should provide clear explanations, study materials, assignments, and guidelines so that students can easily understand lessons and complete their work properly.

v) Monitoring Students' Progress:

Teachers should regularly monitor attendance, assignments, classroom participation, and academic performance. Continuous feedback helps students improve their learning.

vi) Promoting Digital Literacy:

Teachers should help students learn how to use digital platforms, educational applications, and online learning tools effectively and safely.

vii) Encouraging Collaborative Learning:

Group discussions, teamwork, and peer-learning activities should be encouraged to improve social interaction and cooperation among students.

viii) Maintaining Communication with Parents:

Teachers should regularly communicate with parents regarding students' academic progress, behavior, and emotional condition.

ix) Motivating Students:

Teachers should motivate and appreciate students for their efforts and achievements. Positive encouragement increases students' confidence and interest in studies.

6.2 Role of Parents

Parents play a crucial role in supporting children's education at home. During online learning, parental involvement becomes more important because children spend most of their study time at home.

i) Creating a Healthy Study Environment:

Parents should provide a peaceful, comfortable, and distraction-free environment for online classes and study.

ii) Monitoring Children's Learning:

Parents should regularly check whether children are attending classes,

completing assignments, and following study routines properly.

iii) Providing Emotional Support:

Parents should talk with children regularly and understand their emotional condition. Love, care, and encouragement help reduce stress and loneliness.

iv) Managing Screen Time:

Excessive screen use can harm physical and mental health. Parents should ensure regular breaks and balanced use of digital devices.

v) Encouraging Healthy Habits:

Parents should encourage proper sleep, physical exercise, healthy food habits, and recreational activities to maintain children's overall well-being.

vi) Helping in Digital Learning:

Parents should guide children in using smartphones, computers, and online educational platforms properly, especially younger students.

vii) Maintaining Contact with Teachers:

Regular communication with teachers helps parents understand children's academic performance and behavioral changes.

viii) Encouraging Discipline and Time Management:

Parents should help children develop regular study habits, discipline, and proper time management skills.

ix) Protecting Children from Online Risks:

Parents should guide children about cyber safety, responsible internet use, and protection from harmful online content.

x) Encouraging Social and Creative Activities:

Parents should motivate children to participate in reading, music, art, sports, and other creative activities along with online studies.

6.3 Role of Educational Institutions

Educational institutions have the responsibility to provide quality education, proper digital support, and emotional assistance to students.

i) Providing Digital Infrastructure:

Schools, colleges, and universities should provide proper digital platforms, internet facilities, and technological support for effective online learning.

ii) Organizing Teacher Training Programs:

Educational institutions should arrange training programs to improve teachers' digital teaching skills and online classroom management.

iii) Supporting Economically Weaker Students:

Institutions should help poor students by providing digital devices, internet facilities, scholarships, and study materials.

iv) Providing Mental Health Counseling:

Schools and colleges should arrange counseling services and mental health support programs for students facing stress, anxiety, and depression.

v) Conducting Awareness Programs:

Educational institutions should organize awareness programs on mental health, digital literacy, cyber safety, and healthy online learning practices.

vi) Ensuring Inclusive Education:

Institutions should ensure equal educational opportunities for students from different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

vii) Improving Quality of Online Teaching:

Educational institutions should regularly evaluate and improve the quality of online classes and teaching methods.

viii) Encouraging Student Interaction:

Virtual seminars, workshops, group discussions, and cultural programs should be organized to improve students' social interaction.

ix) Developing Fair Evaluation Systems:

Institutions should create fair and transparent online examination and assessment systems.

x) Supporting Co-Curricular Activities:

Educational institutions should encourage participation in online debates, competitions, sports, cultural activities, and other co-curricular programs for students' holistic development.

7. Measures and Solutions for Improving Online Learning and Students' Mental Health

The rapid expansion of online learning has transformed the education system in the digital age. Although online education has created opportunities for flexible learning and continuity of education during emergencies such as the

COVID-19 pandemic, it has also produced several social and psychological challenges among students. Problems such as digital inequality, social exclusion, stress, loneliness, anxiety, and lack of interaction have negatively affected students' educational and emotional development.

Therefore, effective measures are necessary to create an inclusive, supportive, and healthy online learning environment.

i) Ensuring Equal Access to Digital Resources

One of the major barriers to online education is the unequal availability of digital facilities among students. Many learners, especially those from rural and economically weaker families, do not have smartphones, laptops, internet connectivity, or electricity facilities. As a result, they are unable to participate properly in online classes and educational activities.

To reduce digital inequality, governments and educational institutions should provide free or affordable digital devices to needy students. Internet services should be expanded to rural and remote areas at affordable costs. Schools and colleges may also establish community digital centers or smart classrooms where students can access online educational resources. Equal access to digital facilities is essential for ensuring educational equality and reducing social exclusion.

ii) Promoting Inclusive Online Education

Online education should be designed in a way that includes students from different social, economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Inclusive education helps students feel accepted and valued in the learning process.

Educational institutions should provide study materials in simple language and different formats such as recorded lectures, PDF notes, and audio-visual resources. Teachers should pay special attention to slow learners, students with disabilities, and those facing technological difficulties. Flexible learning opportunities and equal participation can help reduce feelings of exclusion and improve students' confidence.

Special attention should also be given to students with disabilities. Learners with visual, hearing, physical, or learning difficulties may face additional challenges in accessing online education. Educational institutions should provide accessible learning materials, assistive technologies, subtitles, screen-reading software, and appropriate support services to ensure equal learning opportunities for all students. Inclusive online education promotes educational equity and social participation.

iii) Reducing Academic Pressure and Stress

Excessive assignments, continuous examinations, and long hours of online classes often create stress and anxiety among students. Academic pressure negatively affects concentration, motivation, and emotional stability.

Educational institutions should develop balanced academic schedules that reduce unnecessary workload and screen-based activities. Teachers should focus more on conceptual understanding and creative learning rather than only marks and examinations. Flexible deadlines and supportive evaluation systems may also reduce students' mental stress and create a healthier learning environment.

iv) Encouraging Social Interaction and Participation

Social interaction is an important part of education because it helps students develop communication skills, emotional bonding, and teamwork abilities. However, online learning often reduces direct interaction among students and teachers, leading to loneliness and social isolation.

Teachers should encourage active participation through group discussions, presentations, online debates, quizzes, and collaborative projects. Educational institutions may organize virtual cultural programs, workshops, and extracurricular activities to strengthen social relationships among students. Peer-support groups and online communities can also help students share experiences and emotional problems with one another.

v) Providing Mental Health Support and Counseling

Mental health plays a vital role in students' educational achievement and personality development. Continuous online learning, social isolation, and academic pressure can create emotional problems such as anxiety, depression, fear, and frustration.

Schools, colleges, and universities should provide mental health counseling services for students. Professional counselors and psychologists may help students manage emotional stress and develop positive coping strategies. Educational institutions should also organize awareness programs, seminars, and workshops on mental health and emotional well-being. Students should be encouraged to openly discuss their emotional difficulties without fear of judgment or criticism.

vi) Developing Healthy Digital Habits

Excessive use of digital devices can lead to screen fatigue, eye strain,

headaches, sleep disorders, and reduced concentration. Therefore, students should be guided to maintain healthy digital habits.

Students should take regular breaks during online classes and avoid unnecessary use of mobile phones and social media. Educational institutions and parents should encourage outdoor activities, physical exercise, meditation, reading habits, and hobbies to reduce screen dependency. Maintaining a balance between digital learning and physical activities is important for healthy development.

vii) Improving Digital Literacy and Technical Skills

Many students, parents, and even teachers lack proper digital literacy and technical knowledge, which creates difficulties in online education.

Educational institutions should organize training programs on digital skills, online safety, and effective use of educational technologies. Teachers should receive professional training on online teaching methods and digital classroom management. Parents should also be made aware of cyber safety, digital responsibility, and online learning management so that they can better support their children.

viii) Government Initiatives and Educational Policies

The government has an important responsibility in strengthening the online education system and reducing educational inequality.

Government policies should focus on improving internet connectivity, digital infrastructure, and affordable technological facilities in rural and disadvantaged areas. Financial support and scholarships should be provided to economically weaker students for purchasing digital devices. Mental health education should also be included in educational policies and school curricula. Effective educational reforms can help create an equal, inclusive, and student-friendly digital education system.

8. Conclusion

Online learning has become an essential part of modern education in the digital age. It played a significant role in continuing the educational process during the COVID-19 pandemic and created opportunities for flexible and technology-based learning. However, online education has also created several social and psychological challenges among students.

Lack of direct interaction, excessive screen time, academic pressure, social isolation, and unequal access to digital resources have negatively affected

students' mental health and social development. Many students experience stress, anxiety, loneliness, depression, and reduced interest in studies due to prolonged online learning. Students from rural and economically weaker backgrounds face greater difficulties because of poor internet connectivity, lack of digital devices, and limited technological knowledge.

Therefore, it is necessary to create a balanced, inclusive, and supportive online education system. Teachers, parents, educational institutions, and governments should work together to reduce digital inequality and promote students' emotional well-being. Proper counseling services, interactive teaching methods, affordable digital facilities, and mental health awareness programs can help students adapt positively to online education.

Online learning should not focus only on academic achievement but also on students' emotional health, social participation, and personality development. A healthy and inclusive digital learning environment can ensure equal educational opportunities and contribute to the holistic development of students in the modern digital era.

Ultimately, the success of online learning depends not only on technological advancement but also on ensuring social inclusion, emotional well-being, and equal educational opportunities for all students.

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