

Problems with Students' Mental Health in the Context of Online Learning

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Abstract. The 21st century has witnessed a profound transformation in education, accelerated by global events and fueled by the emergence of online learning as the predominant mode of educational delivery. The COVID-19 pandemic has played a pivotal role in expediting this shift. This paper explores the intricate relationship between online learning and the mental well-being of students, dissecting five key factors that influence this dynamic. These factors encompass the complexity of navigating information in the digital age, the diminishing face-to-face interactions, dissatisfaction with academic performance, the historical backdrop of the pandemic, and the profound influence of students' personality traits. In response to these challenges, the paper offers a set of comprehensive suggestions. Digital literacy education equips students with the skills to navigate the online world responsibly. Enhancing communication and interaction fosters a sense of community in the virtual classroom. Providing academic support and setting clear learning objectives alleviates anxiety and bolsters motivation. Finally, mental health support services are essential for addressing the emotional toll of these changes on students.

Keywords: Online learning; mental health; education.

1. Introduction

The 21st century stands as a witness to a profound metamorphosis in educational paradigms, accelerated by unforeseen global events in recent years [1]. In this dynamic landscape, the conventional classroom setting has yielded ground to a burgeoning digital realm, wherein online learning has emerged as the predominant mode of educational delivery. The advent of online learning platforms and virtual classrooms has revolutionized the accessibility and adaptability of education, affording students an entirely new dimension of learning opportunities [2]. This paradigm shift has been especially conspicuous in recent times, propelled by the unparalleled challenges brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As this transformative journey continues to unfold, it becomes increasingly imperative not only to scrutinize the pedagogical ramifications of online learning but also to probe the potential impact it wields on the mental well-being of students [3,4]. In navigating this digital frontier, educators must navigate the intersection of education and psychology, seeking to understand how this brave new world of learning affects the holistic development and mental health of learners.

The central query that beckons people to explore is profound: How does the migration towards online learning exert its influence upon the mental health of students? This inquiry resonates deeply within an educational landscape that has undergone a seismic paradigm shift at an unprecedented pace. As educational institutions, dedicated educators, and inquisitive students grapple with the multifaceted challenges and opportunities ushered in by the advent of online learning, it becomes not merely desirable but essential to fathom the intricate ways in which this mode of education may intersect with the delicate fabric of students' mental well-being. The paper embarks on a voyage into the labyrinthine relationship that exists between online learning and the mental health of students.

2. Reasons for Students' Mental Health Problems

2.1. Misdirection Caused by Complicated Information

In today's information age, the internet is brimming with complex information, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. As students embrace online learning through convenient networks, they are exposed to a wider array of information compared to traditional learning methods [5]. However, many students lack substantial social experience, which can diminish their ability to exercise sound judgment. Consequently, students may find themselves susceptible to the influence of detrimental information, leading to the emergence of negative emotions, such as anxiety and depression. In this era of information overload, students must exercise caution to ensure their mental well-being and emotional equilibrium within the vast sea of the internet.

2.2. Lack of Face-to-face Interaction

As technology continues to advance, students increasingly prefer online communication with teachers and peers over traditional face-to-face interactions, often deeming the latter as less efficient [6]. Simultaneously, the demands of academic tasks can occupy a significant portion of students' time, leaving them with limited opportunities for in-person social engagement. This, in turn, can result in a decrease in students' motivation and inclination to express themselves, potentially fostering a sense of social withdrawal and isolation among students themselves. This evolving landscape highlights the need to carefully consider the balance between technology-mediated communication and in-person interaction to ensure students' holistic development and well-being.

2.3. Dissatisfaction with Academic Performance

Due to the change in learning methods (from offline learning to online learning), students' academic performance may also be affected to a certain extent. Students do not adapt well to the online learning format and their academic performance suffers. So students' dissatisfaction with academic performance may also cause anxiety and depression [4].

This was also illustrated in a 2021 study by Nikolay Lyubetsky and others on the impact of distance learning on student mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic [4]. The findings indicate that a significant portion of the sample, specifically 59 students (38.31%), continued to express dissatisfaction with their academic performance following the transition to remote learning. Among them, approximately 25.97% (n=40) expressed complete dissatisfaction, 22.08% (n=34) maintained a neutral stance, and only 13.64% (n=21) of respondents reported satisfaction with their academic achievements (Table 1).

Table 1. Satisfaction with academic performance

	Face-to-face training		Distance learning	
	n	(%)	n	(%)
Very dissatisfied	8	5.19%	40	25.97%
Dissatisfied	18	11.69%	59	38.31%
Neutral	32	20.78%	34	22.08%
Satisfied	96	60.34%	12	13.64%

2.4. The Influence of the Historical Background

The digital transformation within the contemporary era has propelled the rise of online education. Globally, numerous schools and educational institutions have had to swiftly pivot to remote learning in response to the pandemic. This rapid transformation of the educational paradigm may exert pressure on students, leading to a sense of discomfort and, consequently, triggering anxiety [7]. In addition, it is commonly acknowledged, that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 marked an extraordinarily severe global health crisis. Concurrently, this period saw the widespread adoption of online learning as a necessary response to the pandemic's challenges [8]. Faced with the substantial

health risks associated with traditional in-person education, students found themselves compelled to transition to remote learning from the comfort and safety of their homes. With the relentless progression of the pandemic, each passing day brought distressing reports of injuries and loss of life, fostering an overarching sense of melancholy and apprehension that permeated society at large. This prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty, accompanied by the persistent threat of the virus, inevitably cast a shadow over the collective psyche. Against such a complex and challenging backdrop, it is only natural to consider the potential psychological repercussions on students. The persistent anxiety and pervasive mood of depression that characterized this period could have profound effects on the mental well-being of students, impacting their ability to navigate the demands of remote learning and their overall quality of life.

2.5. The Influence of Students' Characteristics

There is a close relationship between the anxiety and depression caused by online courses and the student's personality. The personality characteristics of students can greatly affect their adaptation and coping with the online learning environment. First of all, outgoing and open-minded students may be more likely to adapt to online learning, because they are more willing to try new things, interact with others, and actively participate in online discussions. On the contrary, introverted or more conservative students may feel uneasy because they prefer traditional face-to-face learning, while online classes make them feel isolated. Secondly, anxiety and depression are often associated with self-demanding personality traits. Some students may feel a lot of pressure in online courses because they have set too high academic standards and are difficult to achieve. This perfectionist tendency may lead to increased anxiety and may even lead to depression. In addition, students' adaptability and the way they cope with stress are also related to their personality. Some personality characteristics make students more resistant to stress and can better deal with challenges and uncertainties in online classes, while other personality characteristics may lead to increased mood swings and anxiety. In short, students' personality traits play an important role in causing anxiety and depression in online classes. Understanding these relationships helps educators better support and guide students to ensure that they can maintain their mental health in an online learning environment.

3. Suggestions

3.1. Digital Literacy Education

First, Information Verification Skills: Students need to learn how to assess the credibility of information found online. This includes understanding how to check sources, verify publication dates, identify signs of false information, and confirm information through other reliable channels. Schools can provide training and materials to help students master these skills.

Second, Assessment of Information Credibility: Students need to understand the differences between various types of information sources, such as news outlets, academic journals, social media, and personal blogs. They should know which sources are more reliable and which may have biases or misleading information.

Third, Digital Privacy and Security: Students should be taught how to safeguard their digital privacy and personal information. This includes creating strong passwords, recognizing phishing attacks, and understanding data privacy policies.

Fourth, Information Consumption and Time Management: Students need to learn how to effectively manage their time spent online to avoid information overload. They should know how to filter and prioritize information to meet their academic and personal interests.

Fifth, Ethics and Digital Citizenship Awareness: Digital literacy education should also emphasize ethical and digital citizenship responsibilities. Students should grasp how their online behavior impacts society and others and learn to use digital tools and social media responsibly [9].

Lastly, Open Discussion and Critical Thinking: Schools can encourage students to engage in open discussions, allowing them to share their perspectives on online information and the digital world. Critical thinking is a vital component of digital literacy, helping students better understand and evaluate information [9].

3.2. Enhancing Communication and Interaction

Schools can create online social platforms or forums to facilitate interaction and communication among students. This helps students establish connections, share experiences, and alleviate feelings of loneliness. Additionally, through online collaborative projects, students can work together with their peers, enhancing their teamwork and social skills. This not only aids in learning but also fosters social connections. Furthermore, educators can schedule regular virtual interactions and discussion sessions, encouraging students to participate in discussions and ask questions. This can help students feel more closely connected with both their teachers and fellow students.

3.3. Academic Support

Firstly, schools can provide personalized academic support, including online tutoring, after-school remedial classes, and academic guidance. This helps students overcome learning challenges, improve academic performance, and reduce anxiety. Secondly, educators should work with students to define clear learning objectives and expectations to aid them in better planning their learning journey. Well-defined goals help alleviate anxiety and enhance motivation. Additionally, schools can organize academic achievement celebration events to recognize students' efforts and progress, encouraging them to persevere [10].

3.4. Mental Health Support

Schools should provide easily accessible mental health support services, including counseling and consultations. Through this channel, students can share their emotions and pressures, seeking support and guidance. Meanwhile, educators should undergo training to better understand and address students' mental health needs. They can offer encouragement and guidance to help students cope with the challenges of the current era. Lastly, schools can conduct regular assessments of students' mental health status, gather feedback, and adjust support measures accordingly.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the transformation of education into the digital realm, particularly the widespread adoption of online learning, has undeniably reshaped the landscape of modern education. This shift has been fueled, in no small part, by the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as educators navigate this new educational frontier, it is paramount to recognize the intricate relationship between online learning and students' mental well-being.

The five key factors explored in this paper shed light on the multifaceted ways in which online learning can impact students' mental health. From the complexities of navigating vast online information to the diminishing face-to-face interactions, from the dissatisfaction stemming from academic performance to the historical backdrop of the pandemic, and finally, the profound influence of students' personality traits – these factors collectively define the intricate web of challenges that students face.

Nevertheless, this paper also offers a roadmap for addressing these challenges. Digital literacy education equips students with the skills needed to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly. Enhancing communication and interaction fosters a sense of community and belonging in the online learning environment. Providing academic support and setting clear learning objectives help alleviate anxiety and boost motivation. Most importantly, mental health support services are essential for addressing the emotional toll of these changes on students.

By embracing these suggestions and weaving them into the fabric of educational institutions, people can empower students not only to thrive academically but also to safeguard their mental well-being in this brave new world of learning. In doing so, people ensure that education continues to be a force for enlightenment and empowerment, nurturing not only knowledgeable minds but also resilient and balanced individuals.

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