



Low Engagement, High Screens: Understanding Student Disinterest, Teacher Gaps, and Management Priorities - A Field Study Across Some Schools Covering 5000 Students in Relation to NEP 2020

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Abstract: This paper presents a qualitative field study conducted across a network of schools encompassing nearly 5000 students from Grades VI to X. Through classroom observations, counseling sessions, and assistance to an English professor, the study identifies significant patterns of academic disinterest, emotional fatigue, and behavioral disengagement among school students. The findings suggest that excessive screen exposure, poor teaching methods, limited teacher professional development, and managements' profit-driven orientation have jointly eroded classroom learning quality. Students were found to be increasingly attracted to high-stimulus entertainment media and detached from reflective academic learning (Joseph et al., 2022). Teachers often lacked practical pedagogical tools to re-engage learners (Schunk & Mullen, 2012). School managements prioritized revenue, infrastructure, and marketing over teacher capacity-building or student wellbeing.

Keywords: *Student disinterest , Screen addiction , Teacher development , School management ,NEP 2020 India, Adolescent Motivation, Educational Policy*

Introduction

The past decade has seen a drastic shift in student behavior, attention, and learning motivation across Indian schools. As part of an ongoing engagement with OEM partner schools, the researcher conducted counseling and observation sessions across multiple campuses representing roughly 5000 students from Classes VI–X. These observations align with growing national concerns over falling learning engagement and screen dependency (IC3 Institute & CISCE, 2025).

Students appeared fatigued, detached from academics, and heavily influenced by digital culture. Even high achievers displayed short attention spans and declining curiosity. Teachers, though sincere,



followed lecture-based instruction and reported minimal professional development opportunities (Times of India, 2025). School managements emphasized financial growth, mirroring national criticisms about the commercialization of schooling (Tilak, 2020).

This paper attempts to (1) document these field realities systematically, (2) connect them with educational theory and research, and (3) interpret them through the reformative framework of NEP 2020.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Understanding Student Motivation and Engagement

Student engagement encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive participation (Fredricks et al., 2004). Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) highlights autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core psychological needs. When unmet, disengagement rises. Indian classrooms, dominated by exam-driven approaches, suppress autonomy and relevance-based learning (Kumar, 2019).

Teachers who connect lessons to real-life contexts and provide authentic challenges significantly enhance motivation (Schunk & Mullen, 2012).

Screen Dependency and Cognitive Overload

Excessive screen exposure has been linked with reduced attention spans, cognitive fragmentation, and sleep disruption (Cain & Gradisar, 2010; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017). Indian adolescents now average four to six hours of mobile use daily, leading to sleep deprivation and lethargy (IC3 Institute &



CISCE, 2025). Adolescents' neural habituation to fast-paced digital stimuli results in academic tasks appearing slow or boring (Rosen et al., 2014).

Teacher Professional Development Gaps

India's teacher preparation remains theoretical, with limited exposure to active pedagogy (NCTE, 2021). Continuous professional development (CPD) is scarce in many schools, leading to outdated instructional practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

School Management Priorities

Commercialized schooling has shifted focus from pedagogy to profitability, undermining long-term learning outcomes (Tilak, 2020). Many schools prioritize branding and admissions over instructional quality.

Policy Framework - NEP 2020

NEP 2020 emphasizes holistic, experiential learning, teacher professional standards, CPD, socio-emotional learning, and reduced curriculum load (Ministry of Education, 2020). These provisions directly relate to issues observed in this study.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used, employing classroom observation, counseling notes, and semi-structured interviews to understand patterns of student disengagement, teacher challenges, and management priorities.

Field Observations and Findings



General Patterns of Disinterest

In most classrooms, only 10–15% of students engaged actively. Others appeared fatigued or distracted. Students described school as "monotonous" or "marks-based." Their preferences leaned toward digital content and creators over academic subjects (Rideout et al., 2022).

Screen Addiction and Peer Pressure

Over 70% of students reported more than three hours of daily screen use. Many watched videos late at night, affecting sleep (Cain & Gradisar, 2010). Peer influence was strong, with students equating online presence to social relevance.

Teacher Pedagogical Gaps

Teachers relied heavily on traditional teaching methods, rarely integrating active or experiential strategies. This aligns with national critiques of teacher preparation (NCTE, 2021).

Management Attitude

Management prioritized admissions and marketing over teacher development. Several schools diverted training budgets to infrastructure or promotional activities (Tilak, 2020).

Emotional and Cognitive Fatigue

Students showed signs of psychological and cognitive fatigue, consistent with global post-pandemic findings on adolescent mental health (Singh et al., 2020).

Discussion



The Digital Distraction Paradox

Technology intended to enhance learning has reduced students' cognitive stamina due to rapid dopamine-triggering content (Rosen et al., 2014).

Teacher Preparedness as a Pivotal Factor

Teacher capacity is the most significant determinant of classroom engagement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Lack of CPD undermines teachers' ability to connect with post-digital learners.

Managerial Dilemma

Profit-driven decision-making compromises instructional quality. NEP 2020 urges institutions to prioritize learning over business metrics (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Emotional Wellbeing and Learning

Students' emotional disengagement requires holistic interventions, including socio-emotional learning and counseling (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

Conclusion

This qualitative study reveals that students' academic disengagement is driven by digital overstimulation, outdated pedagogy, and managerial neglect. NEP 2020 provides a vision for reform, but its success depends on classroom-level implementation. Schools must prioritize teaching quality and wellbeing over profit.

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Saaradaa Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies

(A Unit of Saaradaa Learknowations Pvt Ltd)

2-3-78, Rd No 5, Cooperative Bank Colony, 500068, Hyderabad, India

www.journal.e2eindia.org www.e2eindia.org

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