



## Educational Disengagement and Alienation among Contemporary Youth: Challenges for Formal Education

**Dr. Praveen Rastogi**

Principal, PGI Of Management, Prem Prakash Gupta Institute, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh  
India.

Email: [rstg.praveen@gmail.com](mailto:rstg.praveen@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*The twenty-first century is characterized by rapid technological advancement, globalization, changing labour market demands, and profound socio-cultural transformations. In this evolving context, formal educational institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities continue to function as primary agencies of structured learning and social development. However, despite increasing access to education, a growing concern is the rising level of educational disengagement and alienation among contemporary youth. Educational disengagement refers to the gradual withdrawal of learners from active participation in academic processes, while alienation denotes a deeper psychological and social estrangement from educational institutions, learning experiences, and institutional goals. This paper critically examines the nature, causes, manifestations, and consequences of educational disengagement and alienation among contemporary youth, with special reference to the Indian context. Drawing on sociological, psychological, and pedagogical perspectives, the study highlights key contributing factors such as examination-oriented education, curriculum irrelevance, digital distractions, mental health challenges, socio-economic inequalities, and mismatch between education and employment opportunities. The paper also discusses the implications of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in addressing these challenges. It concludes by proposing comprehensive reforms including learner-centered pedagogy, curriculum restructuring, technology integration, inclusive education, and mental health support systems to re-establish meaningful engagement between youth and formal education.*

**Keywords:** Educational disengagement, alienation, contemporary youth, NEP 2020, formal education, student engagement, India.

### Introduction

Education has historically been regarded as one of the most significant instruments for human development, social mobility, and national progress. Formal education systems, comprising

schools, colleges, universities, and technical institutions, are designed to transmit knowledge, develop skills, inculcate values, and prepare individuals for productive participation in society. In theory, education serves as a bridge between individual potential and societal needs, thereby fostering both personal growth and collective advancement.

However, in contemporary times, a paradoxical situation has emerged. While enrolment rates in educational institutions have increased significantly across many countries, including India, the level of meaningful engagement among students has not shown a corresponding rise. Instead, many young learners appear increasingly disengaged from classroom processes and alienated from the broader objectives of education (Blumenfeld, P.C., & Paris, A.H., 2004).

This phenomenon is not merely behavioural but also psychological and structural in nature. Contemporary youth live in a world dominated by digital technologies, social networking platforms, artificial intelligence, and rapidly shifting career landscapes. These changes have redefined the ways in which young people access information, communicate, and construct knowledge. Traditional educational institutions, however, often continue to rely on conventional pedagogical models that emphasize rote memorization, examination performance, and teacher-centered instruction. This mismatch between learner expectations and institutional practices has contributed significantly to educational disengagement and alienation.

In the Indian context, additional complexities arise due to examination pressure, competitive entrance examinations, coaching culture, socio-economic disparities, and implementation challenges in policy frameworks such as NEP 2020. These factors collectively shape the educational experiences of youth and often determine their level of attachment or detachment from formal education.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Research in the last decade (2016–2025) has increasingly focused on understanding student engagement, disengagement, and alienation in formal education systems. With rapid technological advancement, post-pandemic educational shifts, and changing youth psychology, scholars have emphasized that disengagement is no longer an isolated classroom issue but a systemic educational phenomenon.

Recent studies consistently argue that while access to education has expanded globally, meaningful participation, emotional involvement, and institutional belonging among learners have not improved proportionately. Instead, many students experience declining motivation, reduced attention, and emotional detachment from formal education.

Balwant (2017) provides an important conceptual clarification by distinguishing student engagement and disengagement as multidimensional constructs, involving behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components. This work has been widely used in later studies to understand how disengagement develops not merely as lack of participation but as a structured withdrawal from learning processes. Similarly, recent educational psychology literature emphasizes that disengagement should be viewed as an active psychological process rather than passive absence

of effort (Jones, 2023). This shift in understanding has helped researchers analyze alienation as a deeper stage of disengagement where students lose meaning and connection with education itself.

A strong body of literature from 2016 onward confirms that student engagement is directly linked with academic achievement, retention, and well-being.

Fredricks, Reschly, and Christenson (2019) highlight that engagement consists of behavioral participation, emotional attachment, and cognitive investment, and all three dimensions are essential for successful learning outcomes. Their work shows that students with higher engagement levels are significantly more likely to complete schooling and achieve higher academic performance.

Salmela-Aro et al. (2021), through longitudinal analysis, found that engagement patterns in adolescence are stable over time and strongly influenced by teacher support, school climate, and peer relationships. This study reinforces the idea that engagement is not only individual but also institutionally shaped.

Santos et al. (2023) further emphasize that social and emotional competencies such as self-regulation, empathy, and resilience play a crucial role in sustaining engagement among youth. Their systematic review shows that emotionally supportive learning environments significantly reduce disengagement risks.

Recent research increasingly links disengagement with psychosocial alienation, particularly among disadvantaged learners.

Jones (2022) proposes the Psychosocial and Academic Trust Alienation (PATA) theory, which explains that disengagement arises when students lose trust in academic systems due to inequality, trauma, or lack of institutional support. This theory highlights that alienation is deeply connected to emotional safety and institutional trust.

Jones and Connor (2020) further demonstrate that trauma and emotional distress among students significantly reduce engagement in higher education. Their systematic review shows that students experiencing psychological stress often withdraw cognitively and emotionally from academic environments.

These studies collectively suggest that alienation is not merely academic failure but a reflection of deeper emotional and structural inequalities within education systems.

One of the most significant developments in the last decade is the impact of digital learning environments and social media on student engagement.

Post-pandemic research indicates that while digital education increases access, it also contributes to fragmented attention spans and reduced emotional connection to learning. Abedi and Khan (2022) demonstrate that disengagement in virtual classrooms can be detected through behavioral patterns such as inactivity and lack of interaction.

A recent review by Mohamed et al. (2024) highlights that digital disengagement can now be measured using artificial intelligence tools that track facial expressions, eye movement, and

interaction behavior. However, the study also warns that technological monitoring does not address underlying causes such as curriculum irrelevance and emotional disconnection.

Pérez-Juárez et al. (2024) found that excessive digital distractions, especially social media usage during academic tasks, significantly reduce cognitive engagement and academic performance among university students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been identified as a turning point in global education systems. Studies conducted between 2021 and 2024 indicate a noticeable increase in student disengagement following extended periods of online learning.

Research published in *Perspectives in Policy and Practice in Higher Education* (2024) shows that students experienced increased feelings of isolation, reduced motivation, and weaker institutional belonging during and after remote learning periods. These effects have persisted even after the return to physical classrooms in many regions.

Educational researchers argue that the pandemic accelerated pre-existing issues such as lack of engagement, emotional detachment, and learning fatigue, rather than creating them entirely.

Recent literature strongly supports the role of student voice and participation in reducing alienation.

Studies show that when students are actively involved in curriculum design, classroom decision-making, and institutional governance, their sense of belonging increases significantly. This participatory approach reduces emotional detachment and improves motivation.

Research in educational reform literature (2023) emphasizes that institutions adopting co-creation models—where students contribute to learning design—show higher engagement levels and reduced dropout rates.

This indicates that alienation is partly a consequence of lack of agency in educational spaces.

The rapid expansion of online education has led to a new research focus on detecting and understanding disengagement in digital classrooms.

Abedi and Khan (2022) and Mohamed et al. (2024) demonstrate that disengagement can be identified through computational models analyzing student behavior. However, these studies also reveal that disengagement in online environments is often higher due to reduced social interaction, lack of peer connection, and absence of physical classroom structure.

These findings suggest that while digital tools are powerful, they cannot replace the emotional and social dimensions of traditional learning environments.

A synthesis of the literature from 2016–2025 reveals several consistent conclusions, viz-

- Engagement is a strong predictor of academic success and retention.
- Disengagement is multidimensional: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive.
- Alienation is a deeper form of disengagement linked to trust, meaning, and institutional connection.
- Digital technologies both enhance and weaken engagement depending on usage.
- Post-pandemic education systems show increased vulnerability to disengagement.

- Student participation and emotional support significantly reduce alienation.

Overall, the literature indicates that disengagement is not an individual problem but a systemic and structural issue in formal education.

### **Research Gap-**

Despite extensive research in the last decade, several gaps remain:

Limited longitudinal studies on alienation in developing countries like India

Insufficient integration of psychological alienation theories with digital learning research

Lack of empirical studies linking NEP 2020 with student engagement outcomes

Overemphasis on measurement of engagement rather than understanding lived experiences

Limited rural–urban comparative research on disengagement patterns

These gaps highlight the need for further empirical and contextual research on educational disengagement and alienation among contemporary youth.

### **Understanding Educational Disengagement and Alienation-**

Educational disengagement is a multi-dimensional construct that includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive withdrawal from educational activities. Behavioral disengagement is reflected in absenteeism, lack of participation, incomplete assignments, and reduced academic effort. Emotional disengagement is evident in negative attitudes toward schooling, teachers, and learning environments. Cognitive disengagement refers to superficial learning strategies, lack of deep comprehension, and minimal intellectual investment in academic tasks.

Alienation, on the other hand, represents a more profound and structural disconnection. It refers to a state in which students feel that education is irrelevant, imposed, or disconnected from their lived realities and future aspirations. Alienated learners often experience feelings of meaninglessness, powerlessness, isolation, and detachment from institutional goals. In many cases, alienation develops gradually from prolonged disengagement and becomes embedded in the student's educational identity.

While disengagement can sometimes be situational or temporary, alienation tends to be more persistent and deeply rooted. Together, these phenomena reflect a growing crisis of meaning in contemporary education systems, where formal learning is increasingly perceived as instrumental rather than transformative.

### **Characteristics of Contemporary Youth-**

Contemporary youth represent a generation shaped by unprecedented technological and social changes. They are often described as “digital natives” who have grown up with smartphones, internet connectivity, and constant exposure to digital content. As a result, their cognitive styles, attention spans, and learning preferences differ significantly from previous generations.

A key characteristic of modern youth is their strong orientation toward relevance and applicability. They prefer learning experiences that are connected to real-life situations, practical problem-solving, and career development. Additionally, contemporary learners show a preference

for interactive, collaborative, and multimedia-rich learning environments rather than passive lecture-based instruction.

Another important feature is heightened career consciousness. In highly competitive labour markets, students are increasingly concerned with employability, entrepreneurship, and financial stability. This often leads them to evaluate education primarily in terms of its economic returns. Furthermore, contemporary youth are more socially aware and globally connected than earlier generations. Issues such as climate change, gender equality, social justice, and mental health are central to their concerns. Educational institutions that fail to integrate these dimensions into curricula risk becoming irrelevant in the eyes of learners.

### **Theoretical Framework of Alienation and Disengagement-**

Karl Marx's theory of alienation provides a foundational understanding of educational estrangement. According to Marx, alienation occurs when individuals lose control over meaningful aspects of their productive activity. In education, this translates into learners feeling disconnected from the learning process when it becomes externally imposed and examination-driven.

Émile Durkheim's concept of anomie further explains how rapid social change can lead to normlessness and confusion. Contemporary youth often experience conflicting expectations regarding education, career choices, and social identity, contributing to uncertainty and disengagement.

Seaman's (1959) multidimensional model identifies five forms of alienation—powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement—all of which are observable in varying degrees among disengaged students.

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy offers an alternative perspective, arguing that traditional "banking models" of education reduce learners to passive recipients of knowledge, thereby reinforcing alienation. He advocates dialogical and participatory learning to restore agency and engagement among students.

### **Causes of Educational Disengagement and Alienation-**

One of the most significant causes of disengagement is the examination-oriented nature of education systems, particularly in India. High-stakes testing environments encourage rote memorization rather than conceptual understanding. Students often perceive education as a means to obtain marks and certificates rather than as a process of intellectual and personal growth.

Curriculum irrelevance is another major factor. In many cases, school and university curricula are not adequately aligned with contemporary societal needs, technological advancements, or employment opportunities. This gap leads students to question the usefulness of what they are learning.

Teacher-centered pedagogy further contributes to disengagement. Traditional instructional methods that emphasize lectures and passive note-taking often fail to engage students actively. Lack of dialogue, creativity, and experiential learning reduces student motivation.

Digital distractions also play a crucial role in shaping learning behavior. Social media platforms, online entertainment, and instant digital gratification compete directly with classroom learning for students' attention. Without meaningful integration of technology into pedagogy, educational institutions struggle to retain student interest.

Mental health issues among youth have also increased significantly in recent years. Academic pressure, social comparison, uncertainty about the future, and family expectations contribute to stress, anxiety, and depression, all of which negatively impact engagement.

Socio-economic inequality remains a persistent barrier. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often face limited access to resources, learning support, and educational opportunities, leading to feelings of exclusion and alienation.

In addition, a mismatch between education and employment reduces student confidence in the value of formal education. When graduates struggle to find suitable jobs, education is perceived as ineffective or irrelevant.

In India, specific contextual factors such as coaching culture, competitive entrance examinations, and uneven implementation of policies like NEP 2020 further intensify these challenges.

#### **Manifestations of Educational Alienation-**

Educational alienation manifests in multiple observable forms. One of the most common indicators is declining academic motivation, where students show reduced interest in coursework and learning activities. Absenteeism and dropout rates also serve as strong indicators of disengagement.

In classroom settings, alienated students often display passivity, avoiding participation in discussions and collaborative tasks. Emotional withdrawal from peers and teachers is another key manifestation, reflecting a lack of belongingness.

In some cases, alienation may result in behavioral resistance, including disciplinary issues, non-compliance, or overt criticism of institutional structures. A deeper manifestation is the loss of educational identity, where students no longer perceive themselves as active learners within the system.

#### **Challenges for Formal Education-**

Formal education faces several interrelated challenges in addressing disengagement and alienation.

The first challenge is ensuring relevance in a rapidly changing world. Educational institutions must continuously update content and pedagogy to align with technological and societal transformations. A second challenge is balancing technology use in education. While digital tools offer significant opportunities for personalized and interactive learning, their misuse or superficial integration can further increase disengagement.

Diversity in classrooms presents another challenge, requiring inclusive pedagogies that address varied cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, institutions are increasingly expected to support students' mental health, extending their role beyond academic instruction.

Finally, preparing students for uncertain futures dominated by automation and artificial intelligence requires a shift toward skills such as creativity, adaptability, and critical thinking.

### **Indian Context and NEP 2020-**

In India, the issue of educational disengagement must be understood within the broader framework of systemic educational challenges. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a significant reform effort aimed at addressing many of these issues. It emphasizes holistic, multidisciplinary, and learner-centered education, flexibility in subject choices, and the integration of vocational education.

However, the effective implementation of NEP 2020 remains a critical challenge. Structural constraints, teacher preparedness, resource limitations, and institutional resistance often hinder the realization of its goals. Moreover, persistent issues such as examination pressure, coaching dependency, and unequal access to quality education continue to contribute to student disengagement.

Despite these challenges, NEP 2020 provides a strong policy foundation for reducing educational alienation if implemented effectively with adequate support systems.

### **Strategies and Recommendations-**

Educational disengagement and alienation can be addressed through comprehensive reforms. Learner-centered pedagogy must replace traditional rote-based instruction. Curriculum reform should ensure relevance, flexibility, and integration of life skills and contemporary issues.

Teacher-student relationships must be strengthened through supportive and empathetic interactions. Experiential learning opportunities such as internships, projects, and fieldwork should be expanded to enhance engagement.

Technology must be integrated meaningfully to support interactive and personalized learning. Career counseling services should be strengthened to help students connect education with future opportunities.

Mental health support systems, including counseling and wellness programs, are essential for addressing psychological barriers to engagement. Furthermore, democratic participation of students in institutional decision-making can enhance their sense of ownership and belonging.

### **Conclusion-**

Educational disengagement and alienation among contemporary youth represent a significant challenge for formal education systems worldwide. In the Indian context, this issue is further complicated by examination-oriented structures, socio-economic inequalities, and rapid socio-technological changes. While policies such as NEP 2020 offer promising directions, their success depends on effective implementation and systemic transformation.

Addressing educational alienation requires a shift from traditional content-driven education to a holistic, inclusive, and learner-centered approach. By making education more relevant, participatory, and responsive to the needs of contemporary youth, institutions can restore students' sense of meaning, engagement, and belonging.

## References

- Apple, M. W. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Durkheim, E. (1951). *Suicide: A study in sociology*. Free Press. (Original work published 1897)
- Finn, J. D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. *Review of Educational Research*, 59(2), 117–142. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543059002117>
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept and state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59–109. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
- Mann, S. J. (2001). Alternative perspectives on the student experience: Alienation and engagement. *Studies in Higher Education*, 26(1), 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070020030689>
- Marx, K. (1978). *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*. In R. C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx-Engels reader* (2nd ed.). W. W. Norton.
- Seeman, M. (1959). On the meaning of alienation. *American Sociological Review*, 24(6), 783–791. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2088565>
- Willms, J. D. (2003). *Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation*. OECD Publishing.
- Young, M. F. D. (1971). *Knowledge and control: New directions for the sociology of education*. Collier-Macmillan.
- Abedi, A., & Khan, S. S. (2022). Detecting disengagement in virtual learning as an anomaly using temporal convolutional network autoencoder. arXiv preprint arXiv:2211.06870.
- Fredricks, J. A., Reschly, A. L., & Christenson, S. L. (2019). *Handbook of student engagement interventions*. •Springer.
- Jones, C. S. (2022). Psychosocial and academic trust alienation theory and student engagement barriers. *Advances in Developmental and Educational Psychology*, 4(1), 1–18.
- Jones, C. S., & Connor, Z. (2020). Barriers to engagement in higher education students: Trauma and trust issues. *Perspectives*, 25(10), 1–10.
- Mohamed, A., Ali, M., Ahmed, S., et al. (2024). Detecting student disengagement in online classes using deep learning: A review. arXiv preprint arXiv:2411.10464.
- Pérez-Juárez, M. Á., González-Ortega, D., & Aguiar-Pérez, J. M. (2024). Digital distractions and student engagement in higher education. arXiv preprint arXiv:2402.05249.
- Salmela-Aro, K., Tang, X., & Upadyaya, K. (2021). Student engagement in adolescence: A scoping review. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 31(2), 256–272.

- Santos, A. C., Simões, C., Melo, M. H. S., et al. (2023). Social and emotional competencies and student engagement: A systematic review. *Educational Research Review*, 39, 100535.
- Willms, J. D. (2018). Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation. OECD Publishing.

**Cite this Article:**

**Dr. Praveen Rastogi, “Educational Disengagement and Alienation among Contemporary Youth: Challenges for Formal Education”** Shiksha Samvad International Open Access Peer-Reviewed & Refereed Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, ISSN: 2584-0983 (Online), Volume 03, Issue 04, Pp.201-210, June-2026. Journal URL: <https://shikshasamvad.com/>



This is an Open Access Journal / article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License CC BY-NC-ND 3.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. All rights reserved.





# CERTIFICATE

## of Publication

*This Certificate is proudly presented to*

**Dr. Praveen Rastogi**

**For publication of research paper title**

**Educational Disengagement and Alienation among Contemporary Youth: Challenges for Formal Education**

Published in 'Shiksha Samvad' Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Research Journal and E-ISSN: 2584-0983(Online), Volume-03, Issue-04, Month June 2026.

**Dr. Neeraj Yadav**  
Editor-In-Chief

**Dr. Lohans Kumar Kalyani**  
Executive-chief- Editor

**Note:** This E-Certificate is valid with published paper and the paper must be available online at: <https://shikshasamvad.com/>  
DOI:- <https://doi.org/10.64880/shikshasamvad.v3i4.22>