Original Article

A Phenomenological Study of Psychological Issues in Distance Learning: Identifying Challenges and Solutions to Overcome Problems

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this study is to examine how psychological problems—such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders, insomnia, and sleep issues—affect distance learning. Based on the experiences of experts and educators, this study will identify problems and potential solutions. Methodology: The study takes a qualitative approach, gathering and analyzing data using a phenomenological method. Twenty Ardabil primary school teachers and fourteen specialists from around Iran were among the participants, who were chosen via purposive selection until theoretical saturation was reached. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, and they were done both remotely and in person. Themes from the instructors' replies were found and categorized, and their frequency and percentage were then presented. The coding approach developed by Strauss and Corbin (2008) was used to examine the replies from the professionals. Triangulation, member checking, parallel data verification, and researcher self-review were used to guarantee the correctness and reliability of the interviews. Findings: The findings revealed that teachers encountered significant psychological challenges in the context of distance learning. To address these challenges, several strategies were proposed. Subsequently, specialists were consulted regarding the identified challenges, and solutions such as establishing a structured study routine, managing rest and sleep schedules, enhancing social interactions, providing psychological support services, training in stress management techniques, introducing flexible scheduling, prioritizing physical health, delegating tasks effectively, using visual aids, incorporating regular short breaks, reducing screen time, practicing breathing and relaxation exercises, applying cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and preventing avoidance behaviors were suggested. A more detailed presentation of these solutions is provided in the findings section. Conclusion: Education stakeholders are advised to implement the suggested strategies from teachers and specialists to identify and address the psychological challenges associated with distance learning effectively.

Keywords

Phenomenology, Psychological Issues, Distance Learning, Challenges, Solutions.

Introduction

Children's and teenagers' mental health has gained more attention in recent decades as a major social and health issue. The quote "Knowing oneself is the most beneficial knowledge" (Mizan al-Hikmah, Hadith 11903) originates from Amir Motaghian. Psychology has always played a vital part in humanity's quest to comprehend the many facets of its existence. The study of psychological illnesses is one of psychology's main topics; the most common ones include obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and sleep disturbances and insomnia.

ADHD is a neurological condition that is somewhat prevalent. There is currently no conclusive laboratory test for diagnosing it (Kitja, 2005, as mentioned in Assarian, 2005). According to

research, children with ADHD are more likely to struggle emotionally, socially, and behaviorally in addition to their primary symptoms of hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention. They also typically face greater academic challenges than their peers without the disorder (Barkley, 1990). In children and adolescents, anxiety disorders are among the most often diagnosed mental conditions (Kari, March, and Harvi, 2004). Excessive anxiety and worry, increased irritability, ongoing restlessness, and physical symptoms including headaches, nausea, and diarrhea are typical symptoms (Darmankadeh, 2022).

Furthermore, sleep disorders are prevalent in 25 to 40 percent of adolescents and young adults, often remaining undiagnosed and untreated. Sleep deprivation leads to neurological, behavioral, and physiological changes that result in diminished academic performance and reduced daily classroom engagement (O'Brien, 2009; Ehteshamzadeh, 2010). Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) manifests through intrusive and disproportionate thoughts, impulses, or images that cause significant distress and anxiety (Weiss, 1973, p. 257).

The rapid shift to distance learning, accelerated by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has exacerbated these psychological challenges for students, teachers, and parents alike. This study delves into these issues, aiming to provide evidence-based recommendations to improve psychological well-being and learning outcomes in remote education settings.

An examination of the current state of schools and even higher education institutions regarding psychological issues, particularly in the context of virtual learning (distance education), reveals a significant number of challenges and difficulties. For instance, in a study conducted by Sheivandi, Hasanvand, Abdollahi Moghadam, and Koushki (2022), it was demonstrated that immersion in the virtual world could, from various perspectives, lead to considerable harm for adolescents as knowledge seekers. This harm initially manifests in emotional aspects, potentially undermining essential developmental constructs such as a passion for learning, happiness, self-esteem, and optimism. Over time, these emotional disruptions may result in academic decline and poor academic performance.

Similarly, research by Ebadi, Roshani Khiavi, Kazemi, Eini, and Rezaei Malajagh (2021) indicated that excessive internet use is associated with adverse psychological consequences, including depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety. The experience of these psychological states fosters a cycle of negative emotions, which subsequently triggers addiction-like behaviors as a coping mechanism to alleviate distress. Students grappling with depression often withdraw from social interactions, exhibit negative affect, and lose interest in peer communication. Consequently, they seek solace by spending more time online, inadvertently deepening their sense of isolation.

Gholizadeh and Abdollahi (2021) also assessed the psychological impact of virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, concluding that children and adolescents experienced heightened levels of anxiety, post-traumatic stress, depression, maladjustment, internet addiction, and aggression. To address these challenges, the researchers emphasized the importance of equipping not only children and adolescents but also parents and teachers with strategies for stress management and resilience-building skills.

A review of previous research indicates that both domestic and international studies have explored related topics. For example, Derakhshanpour, Izadiar, Shahini, and Vakili (2016), in their study titled 'An Analysis of Anxiety Levels Among Elementary Students in Gorgan City,' reported that 14.5% of the students exhibited anxiety disorders. Among these, obsessive-compulsive symptoms were the most prevalent at 18%, followed by social phobia and separation anxiety at 17.6%, while agoraphobia had the lowest incidence at 11%. The study also found that higher anxiety levels were more prevalent among female students, children of unemployed mothers with lower educational attainment, families with fewer children, and students attending public schools.

Furthermore, Raisoon, Miri, Dastjerdi, and Sharifzadeh (2009) conducted a study titled 'The

Prevalence of Psychological Disorders in Birjand City,' revealing that a considerable proportion of the population experienced psychological distress. According to their findings, 6% of participants exhibited symptoms of depression, 5.5% presented with obsessive-compulsive tendencies, another 5.5% experienced paranoid thoughts, while 3.7% reported somatic complaints, 2.6% struggled with anxiety, 1.7% demonstrated interpersonal sensitivity, 1.3% dealt with specific phobias, and 1.2% showed signs of psychosis. Additionally, the study identified a statistically significant higher prevalence of these disorders among women compared to men.

In another study, Agha-Kathiri, Etezadi, and Shabani (2012), titled 'Distance Learning as an Innovative Approach in Education: Investigating Challenges from the Perspectives of Teachers and Students,' the results indicated that both students and teachers perceived substantial difficulties in technology integration, self-directed learning, evaluation processes, and external interactions. Students reported that technology-related challenges exceeded average levels, while teachers highlighted the inadequacies in technological infrastructure, information dissemination practices, and cultural awareness regarding distance education.

Lastly, Bahmanirad and Ghadimi (2023), in their study titled 'The Impact of Virtual Learning on Students' Mental Health,' found a positive correlation between virtual network engagement and mental health disturbances. Their research concluded that virtual learning environments could contribute to internet addiction, psychological distress, academic underperformance, and impaired professional functioning. Similarly, Liubetsky, Bendersky, Verina, Demyanova, and Arkhipova (2021) documented that many university students reported increased stress and anxiety due to the sudden transition to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the necessity of providing mental health support during such critical periods.

Uncertainty about the future of education, the inability to access educational resources in person, and the pressures resulting from a lack of social interactions were significant factors contributing to this increase. Students felt disconnected from their classmates and the university community, leading to a sense of isolation that negatively impacted their motivation and academic performance. Many students reported that the quality of remote learning was lower than that of in-person instruction, which diminished their overall satisfaction with their educational experience. Additionally, students faced challenges in time management and maintaining focus. Some struggled to adapt to the new educational demands, such as self-regulation and independent planning. Numerous students indicated that remote learning had adversely affected their mental health, citing increased depression, fatigue, and reduced motivation. A significant number also reported a notable rise in anxiety and stress levels during online learning. Various factors, including uncertainty about the quality of instruction, the added pressure of using unfamiliar technology, and health and economic concerns, contributed to this increase.

Lister, Seale and Doss (2023), in their study titled "Mental Health in Distance Education: Classifying Barriers and Facilitators for Student Psychological Well-being," argued that various studies have demonstrated the potentially negative effects of distance education on students' mental health. Issues such as anxiety, stress, and depression have been documented across different groups. The psychological impact of online learning can vary depending on individual and cultural characteristics. The research also explored strategies to improve mental health in distance education, including enhancing educational technologies, providing social and psychological support, and promoting stress management skills.

In a separate study, Cho and Shen (2013), in their research "Self-Regulation in Online Learning," highlighted the crucial role of self-regulation in determining the success of distance education. They emphasized the need for students to develop strong planning, time management, and motivation-regulation skills to effectively benefit from online learning. Difficulties in self-regulation can lead to decreased academic performance and increased stress.

Pan, Kok, Eikelenboom, Horsfall, Jorg, Lutejin, Rhebergen, Oppen, Giltay, and Penninx (2023), in their longitudinal study "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Individuals with

and without Depressive, Anxiety, or Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders: A Three-Group Dutch Cohort Study," reported that greater disorder severity and comorbidity correlated with increased mental health challenges. While individuals with depressive, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorders consistently scored higher on symptom scales compared to those without these disorders, both before and during the pandemic, they did not exhibit a greater increase in symptoms during the pandemic. In contrast, individuals without prior mental health disorders showed a more pronounced rise in symptoms during the pandemic, while those with the most severe pre-existing conditions experienced slight symptom reductions.

Irawan, Dwisona, and Lestari (2020), in their study "Psychological Impacts on Students during Online Learning Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic," found that students experienced online learning fatigue within the first two weeks of learning from home. Additionally, heightened anxiety was observed among students from low-income families, who faced difficulties affording the necessary data plans for online participation. Mood changes and increased irritability due to excessive assignments were also reported, with many students perceiving these assignments as ineffective. The researchers recommended collaborative efforts with counselors and psychologists to support students' psychological well-being.

In another study, Ramadhana, Putra, Pramonojati, Haqqu, Dirgantara, Ismail and Wijaksono (2021) identified a significant, moderate correlation between students' readiness for online learning and their academic resilience during remote education. Their research indicated that readiness for online learning could significantly predict academic resilience, primarily through motivational factors and self-directed learning. Overall, the study underscored the importance of preparing students for online learning and equipping them with effective strategies to enhance academic success and engagement during periods of remote education.

A review of both domestic and international research reveals that while various studies have examined psychological challenges associated with distance learning and proposed strategies for improvement, this study offers a novel contribution by going beyond merely identifying these psychological issues. Firstly, it presents practical, feasible solutions to address the challenges associated with mental health in distance education. Secondly, the study seeks to gather firsthand experiences regarding psychological issues in remote learning environments by conducting interviews with teachers and specialists. This approach enables the research to capture the lived experiences of professionals directly engaged with these challenges. The insights gained from these interviews will be shared with other educators, fostering a collective understanding and promoting the application of effective strategies to mitigate psychological challenges in distance education.

Research Questions
Questions for Teachers

- From your perspective, what psychological challenges do students face in distance education? (Examples include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders, sleep problems and insomnia, and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)).
- What roles do schools, families, the government, and other institutions play in addressing these psychological challenges in distance education?
- Should psychological issues among students be given attention in schools? Why or why not? If yes, how should this be approached?
- How can teacher-training universities, such as Farhangian University, equip pre-service teachers with the necessary skills and strategies to address psychological challenges rationally in distance education?
- What solutions would you suggest to overcome the psychological challenges associated with distance learning?

Question for Specialists
  - Based on the psychological challenges reported by teachers regarding distance education, what measures should be taken to address and overcome these issues?

Research Methodology
To investigate the viewpoints of educators and experts, a qualitative research methodology utilizing the phenomenological technique was used in this study. Instead than focusing on an objective reality separate from human experience, phenomenology examines lived experiences or the subjective world as experienced by individuals. Husserl's descriptive phenomenology and Heidegger's interpretative phenomenology are the two main schools of thought in phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl's descriptive phenomenological approach was used in this study.

The study's participants included teachers from various grade levels working in two randomly selected schools from districts 1 and 2 of Ardabil during the 2023-2024 academic year, as well as specialists in the field from across the country. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method based on specific criteria, combined with the principle of theoretical saturation. The saturation point was reached after the twentieth interview with teachers and the fifteenth interview with specialists when no new information emerged.

Teachers were eligible to participate if they were willing to be interviewed and had a minimum of one year of teaching experience. In total, 20 teachers were selected. Additionally, 14 specialists in curriculum planning and educational sciences were interviewed, chosen from well-established scholars in the field. It is worth noting that phenomenological research typically requires a sample size of 6 to 50 participants (Porvari, 2019, p. 98), and this study adhered to that guideline.

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were conducted through interactive conversations, both in person and via online platforms such as Eitaa, Bale, and Shad. The interviews aimed to capture participants' lived experiences with the psychological challenges of distance education. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and compiled into a single dataset.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed by explaining the study's purpose and significance to participants, ensuring voluntary participation, refraining from collecting personal information, maintaining confidentiality, deleting audio files after transcription, and using the findings solely to improve educational practices. Participants were also informed about the study's results.

For data analysis, teachers' responses were first examined to identify recurring themes, which were subsequently reported with frequency percentages. The specialists' responses were analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (2008) coding method. The analysis followed a multi-level process: first, open coding was applied, where transcripts were meticulously read, segmented into smaller components, and categorized. Then, axial coding was performed to organize and connect related categories into broader themes. Finally, selective coding was used to synthesize the data and present a cohesive narrative of the findings. To enhance the accuracy of the interpretations, member-checking procedures were employed, with participants reviewing the researcher's interpretations to validate their statements.

Regarding the validity of the questions, the study followed the guidelines of phenomenological research as outlined by Porvari (2019, p. 95), Moustakas (1994), and Creswell (2007, p. 83). These researchers emphasize that the core of phenomenological inquiry lies in understanding how individuals experience a phenomenon. To ensure reliability, transferability, and confirmability of the findings, techniques such as triangulation, member checks, parallel data verification, and researcher self-auditing were employed (Abbaszadeh, 2012, pp. 19-34).

Findings
In this section, the research questions are presented sequentially, followed by the corresponding data and findings for each question.

Question 1: What psychological challenges do students face in distance learning?

Table 1. Psychological Challenges in Distance Learning

No.	Psychological Issues	Frequency	Percentage	Reasons
1	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	12	24%	Availability of online classes – No location restrictions for teaching – Lack of remote control – High number of stimuli – Small phone screen – Excessive screen use – Long periods of staring at the screen – Lack of exercise, recreation, and effective interaction with friends and teachers – Absence of rules and regulations in school – Lack of encouragement, guidance, and feedback – More distractions at home compared to the classroom – Limited direct teacher supervision and absence of a structured classroom setting – Difficulty in time management and study planning
2	Anxiety Disorders	10	20%	Lack of familiarity with virtual education, evaluation methods at younger ages (typically in elementary school) – High volume of content – Online exams with limited time, often poorly designed and error-prone – Slow internet speed at higher education levels – Use of virtual space – Lack of face-to-face interaction – Social isolation – Lack of development of social knowledge and skills – Inability to express oneself – Difficulty in making friends and interacting with peers – Technological challenges – Technical issues (poor internet connection, computer problems, navigation difficulties on online platforms) – Evaluation anxiety – Absence of structured learning environment – Academic pressure – Lack of access to proper counseling and psychological support
3	Sleep Problems and Insomnia	12	24%	Easy access to virtual spaces and online content, leading to prolonged engagement – Continuous use of mobile phones and social media by students – Internet addiction – Changes in sleep and wake patterns
4	Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	6	12%	Assignment submissions and feedback processes in virtual education – Difficulty understanding time concepts, time passage, and time management – Increased stress due to changes in daily routines and patterns – Lack of direct interaction with teachers and classmates – Use of electronic tools in remote learning
5	Other Issues	10	20%	These issues cannot be explicitly discussed in childhood – Most of the mentioned disorders are typically identified through observing symptoms during daily activities and learning processes – Remote education, due to the absence of in-person interaction, limits timely detection of symptoms, making early intervention difficult – Communication barriers – Personal discipline – Motivation and engagement – Limited feedback – Screen fatigue

According to the data presented in Table 1, based on responses to the first question regarding psychological issues in distance education, the highest frequency corresponds to response number 1, "Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)," and response number 3, "Sleep Problems and Insomnia." These two issues were reported more frequently than others, highlighting their significant impact in the context of remote learning.

Question 2: What is the role of schools, families, and the government in addressing psychological challenges in distance education, and to what extent do they contribute?

Table 2. The Role of Schools, Families, and the Government in Distance Education

No.	Role	Frequency	Percentage	Reasons
1	School	12	40%	Providing educational content to enhance teachers' and parents' scientific and media literacy through interactive workshops, raising teachers' and school staff's awareness of students' developmental characteristics and individual differences – School experts play a crucial role in sensitizing families, raising awareness, and referring cases to healthcare professionals and counselors – Allowing students ample time to respond instead of restricting them to short timeframes – Remote training sessions for teachers to educate them on the disadvantages of distance learning, related psychological disorders, and prevention methods – Ensuring transparent communication – Creating a virtual community – Providing support services – Involvement of school counselors – Offering flexible learning options – Leveraging technology – Enhancing a positive learning environment – Regular check-ins – Producing engaging and creative content to capture the attention of students with psychological disorders – Teachers serving as role models in both educational and behavioral aspects – Consistent presence and interaction between teachers and students – Psychological and motivational support provided by school staff – Reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness – Promoting healthy social interactions and fostering a sense of belonging within the community.
2	Family	10	33%	Providing companionship, support, and follow-ups – Collaborating with schools to provide necessary infrastructure, such as smartphones and internet access, while avoiding excessive pressure on students – Assisting with assignments – Establishing a structured learning routine – Encouraging open communication – Offering emotional support – Monitoring students' well-being – Ensuring access to necessary technology – Cooperating with teachers – Promoting self-care – Observing and identifying signs of psychological disorders – Serving as a center of comfort and stability for children – Facilitating medical treatments and follow-ups when

No.	Role	Frequency	Percentage	Reasons
				necessary – Being a powerful source of psychological support for students – Managing stress and anxiety – Establishing daily routines, including sleep schedules, screen time regulations, and structured educational activities – Strengthening healthy family communication to foster a sense of belonging at home.
3	Government	8	27%	Intervention, treatment, and oversight of implementation processes – Assessing needs and providing smartphones and internet access for financially disadvantaged students – Developing solutions for interactive and two-way education – Implementing high-speed, secure internet services and communication devices – Preserving the core values of family life – Establishing national policies and strategies for managing and preventing psychological disorders – Defining clear and reasonable academic and social standards – Allocating financial and technical resources to support educational infrastructure – Training and educating specialized professionals in psychology and behavioral sciences – Recommending effective programs and strategies to support students with psychological disorders.

According to the data presented in Table 2, among the responses to the second question, the highest frequency corresponds to option number one: "School." This indicates that enhancing teachers' scientific and media literacy plays a crucial role in addressing psychological challenges in distance education.

Question 3: Should students' psychological issues be addressed in schools? If so, how?

Table 3. Addressing Students' Psychological Issues in Schools

Number	Yes/No	Frequency	Percentage	How?
1	Yes	20	100%	Designing psychological interventions and utilizing counselors and liaisons to improve students' mental health in schools – Engaging in direct conversations with children about their concerns and difficulties – Enhancing teachers' professional capabilities, including psychological knowledge and awareness of the impact of distance learning while considering its limitations – Motivational discussions, as intrinsic motivation is the driving force of education, ensuring effective teaching and learning – Developing questionnaires to identify students experiencing psychological challenges and referring them to counseling centers – Regular communication and early intervention to foster a supportive learning environment – Implementing interventions for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (early identification and collaboration, educational programs such as Parent Management Training (PMT), Individualized Education Programs (IEP), behavioral strategies,

Number	Yes/No	Frequency	Percentage	How?
				regular communication) – Addressing sleep disorders and insomnia (education and awareness, screening and evaluation, promoting healthy sleep hygiene, behavioral therapy) – Managing Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) (identification and support, school-based accommodations, counseling, and treatment) – Identifying students with psychological difficulties, providing special attention and tailored strategies when possible, and referring them to appropriate institutions if necessary – Transforming the classroom into a space that nurtures talents and recognizes individual differences – Ensuring the active presence of specialized counselors to effectively address this critical issue in schools.
2	No	0	0%	—

According to the data presented in Table 3, among the responses to the third question, option 1 ("Yes") holds the highest frequency. Every teacher unanimously agrees that addressing students' psychological issues in schools is essential. Moreover, they have provided various reasons to support their stance.

Question 4: How should Farhangian University train student teachers, and what measures should be taken to prepare them for a rational approach to psychological challenges in distance education?

Table 4. Measures Taken by Farhangian University in Training Student Teachers for a Rational Approach to Psychological Challenges

No.	Measures Taken by Farhangian University	Frequency	Percentage
1	Incorporating up-to-date content on psychology-related topics (including foundational courses on psychopathology, principles of psychological assessment and evaluation, developmental psychopathology, and developmental psychology)	5	12.5%
2	Applying theoretical knowledge in practice (visits and hands-on activities in treatment centers and special education institutions)	10	25%
3	Familiarizing student teachers with innovative teaching methods using modern technologies	5	12.5%
4	Completing coursework on distance and virtual education (developing knowledge and skills in using mass communication tools and media management)	12	30%
5	Training teachers in self-care strategies to manage their well-being	3	7.5%
6	Integrating strategies to build resilience in students	2	5%
7	Establishing peer support networks among teachers to share experiences	3	7.5%

According to the data presented in Table 4, the response with the highest frequency is option number 4: "Completing coursework on distance and virtual education (developing knowledge and skills in using mass communication tools and media management)." A significant number of

teachers believe that Farhangian University must take far more serious measures in training student teachers to approach psychological challenges rationally.

Question 5: What are the solutions for overcoming the psychological challenges present in distance education?

Table 5. Teachers' Suggested Strategies for Overcoming Challenges and Issues

No.	Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Providing necessary resources and equipment for distance learning, such as mobile devices and high-speed internet.	14	23.5%
2	Assigning tasks to students as part of distance education.	4	6.5%
3	Giving feedback on students' activities in distance learning.	6	10%
4	Identifying inactive students in distance education and following up until they become engaged.	8	13%
5	Collaboration and supervision by school principals, teachers, counselors, and parent-teacher association members in distance learning.	9	15%
6	Providing a precise and up-to-date definition of distance learning tailored to current educational needs.	5	8.5%
7	Raising awareness among parents and involving them in supporting teachers in distance education.	5	8.5%
8	Promoting time management awareness and fostering an interactive and healthy competitive environment in virtual education.	9	15%

According to the data in Table 5, the response with the highest frequency is "Providing necessary resources and equipment for distance learning, such as mobile devices and high-speed internet".

Question for Experts
Considering the psychological challenges associated with distance education, what measures should be taken to overcome these issues effectively?

Table 6. Experts' Suggested Strategies for Overcoming Challenges and Issues

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
Experts' Suggestions to Overcome Challenges and Problems	Suggestions and Solutions for Teachers	− Use of charts, images, and colors in lesson delivery − Diversification of activities, i.e., combining different activities in lessons to maintain attention and increase student motivation − Breaking down large tasks into smaller assignments − Enhancing social support through online or in-person support groups, or connecting with individuals who have similar experiences to reduce feelings of loneliness and anxiety in students − Assisting students in managing daily stress by providing a structured schedule for assignments and exams − Implementing flexibility in class schedules and assignments − Providing short breaks between lessons for hyperactive students − Maintaining regular communication with parents and school counselors − Encouraging students to face anxiety-inducing situations − Using therapeutic digital games, such as EndeavorRx, for children with ADHD

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
		− Strengthening social interactions through group sessions, joint activities, and classroom discussions to enhance a sense of belonging and reduce social isolation
	Suggestions and Solutions for Parents and Students	− Creating a consistent daily routine for studying, resting, and sleeping − Using wearable sleep technologies − Using wearable devices like smartwatches that track sleep patterns to analyze sleep quality, movement during sleep, and heart rate − Applying Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to identify and address negative and obsessive thought patterns − Using mobile apps for anxiety management, such as Headspace, Calm, and Mindshift CBT, which provide digital techniques for meditation, breathing, and CBT − Establishing a sleep routine − Educating students and parents about OCD − Providing study resources and supportive group sessions − Ensuring a suitable sleep environment − Encouraging regular physical activities at school and at home − Reducing the use of electronic screens at least one hour before sleep due to blue light exposure − Using relaxation techniques before sleep − Keeping journals and notebooks to identify and manage behavioral patterns − Preventing avoidance behaviors − Using time and attention management apps, such as Forest and Focus@will, to improve concentration and time management
	Suggestions and Solutions for Schools and Universities	− Applying visual techniques − Using neurofeedback methods − Utilizing brain signals (EEG) to regulate students' brain activity and reduce ADHD symptoms − Applying new technologies and modern therapeutic methods such as biofeedback − Teaching breathing techniques and relaxation exercises before sleep − Introducing relaxation techniques such as Progressive Muscle Relaxation or using calming music
	Suggestions and Solutions for the Government	− Providing psychological counseling with experts − Implementing artificial intelligence and machine learning techniques − Building infrastructure for the use of AI-based sleep apps (smart apps like SleepScore and SleepCycle for analyzing sleep patterns and offering personalized recommendations for improving sleep quality(− Creating robust infrastructure for students to use digital tools like visual timers, time management apps, and organizational software for task management − Enabling the use of virtual reality techniques − Creating spaces for therapeutic methods such as Light Therapy − Providing neuromodulation-based treatments

Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding
		– Techniques such as repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS), using magnetic waves to stimulate specific brain regions to reduce OCD symptoms – Utilizing digital psychotherapy apps like NOCD

Based on the data from Table 6, and according to the opinions of educational specialists, the suggestions and solutions have been categorized into four main areas: recommendations for teachers, parents and students, schools and universities, and the government. To elaborate further, some sample responses from the experts are provided below:

The fourth interviewee expressed their views on recommendations for teachers as follows: *"By enhancing social connections, students who feel lonely and anxious can be helped to reduce these emotions. Social support can be achieved through organizing group meetings, joint activities, and class discussions to strengthen the sense of belonging and reduce social isolation".*

The second interviewee, in the context of recommendations for parents and students, mentioned: *"Sleep should be regulated through a routine, and electronic screens should not be used at least one hour before bedtime. In my opinion, mobile apps for anxiety management, which offer meditation techniques, breathing exercises, and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) digitally, can be utilized".*

The sixth interviewee, with a strong focus on schools and universities, emphasized the importance of this area: *"Schools should be considered the leading institutions for addressing these issues, and we must equip schools with the most modern technologies available worldwide. The use of new technologies and advanced therapeutic methods, such as biofeedback, could be one of these useful approaches".*

The eleventh interviewee, in the context of government recommendations, stated: *"The government is responsible for providing the necessary infrastructure to solve student-related problems. In this regard, the government must train and develop psychological experts who can offer counseling services to individuals with mental health disorders".*

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the phenomenology of psychological issues in distance education and identified potential solutions by drawing on the lived experiences of teachers and specialists. This was done because excessive and one-dimensional use of distance education has psychological consequences.

In order to address the first research question, the study first looked at teachers' experiences with four different psychological problems that students in distance learning face: obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and sleep and insomnia issues. The results showed that ADHD was the most common, which was explained by a variety of variables, including the ease of access to online courses, the absence of geographical restrictions for instruction, the unstructured nature of distance learning, the abundance of distractions, and the tiny screen size of mobile phones. In a related study, Tabari, Mansouri, Rasti, and Ghamarani (2020) identified ADHD in students and discussed the effectiveness of virtual reality therapy with neurofeedback in reducing impulsivity in individuals with ADHD, which aligns with the findings of this study. This also resonates with neuropsychological theories of ADHD, such as Barkley's (2010) perspective, which posits that individuals with ADHD require structured educational environments and more controlled interactions due to impairments in executive functions. Additionally, Khoshim (2022) noted that in distance education, teachers face numerous challenges when dealing with students suffering from ADHD and propose solutions to improve the educational experience for these students, which is consistent with the findings of the present study.

Moreover, anxiety disorders were linked to issues like unfamiliarity with virtual learning, evaluation methods typically used in lower grades, the volume of content delivered, online exams with strict time limits, poorly designed platforms, and slow internet speeds in higher levels. OCD was associated with issues such as the release of assignments and feedback in virtual education, difficulties in understanding and managing time, heightened stress due to changes in daily routines, lack of direct interaction with teachers and peers, and the use of electronic tools by some teachers in distance education. Wang (2023) also found that distance learning negatively impacts students' mental health, particularly in increasing anxiety and depression, which supports the findings of this study. Additionally, Casio and Casio's (2014) theories on the detrimental effects of social isolation on stress and anxiety further corroborate the study's results.

In interpreting these findings, it can be argued that distance education, due to the absence of face-to-face communication, limits teachers' ability to promptly observe and identify psychological issues in students, thus preventing early intervention if needed. In essence, distance education reduces direct interactions and environmental control, which diminishes the capacity of teachers to identify and assist students with psychological disorders.

In the second research question, the study examined the roles of schools, families, governments, and other institutions in addressing psychological issues such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders, sleep problems, insomnia, and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) in the context of distance education. Overall, the findings revealed that schools play the most significant role in resolving psychological issues in distance learning. Specifically, schools can have a substantial impact by providing materials aimed at enhancing teachers' and parents' literacy in both academic and media-related domains, achieved through interactive workshops that draw attention to the developmental and individual differences among students. Additionally, school experts are responsible for initial sensitivity and awareness-raising among families, as well as referring them to treatment and counseling staff. Furthermore, schools can play a key role by not limiting students to limited opportunities, allowing them sufficient time to respond, fostering clear communication, or even creating virtual communities to address psychological issues effectively.

In a related study, McLean and Lowe (2022) highlighted the role of schools and teachers in identifying and addressing students' mental health needs. Their research focused on teachers' perceptions of their role in supporting students' mental health, the barriers they face in fulfilling this role, and their ability to provide support. The findings from this study are in complete alignment with those of the current research. However, some teachers, while acknowledging the importance of the school's role, also emphasized the significance of family and governmental involvement in addressing psychological issues, citing various reasons. These included family support and follow-up, collaboration from parents in providing infrastructure such as devices and internet access, not pressuring students, and working with teachers to ensure assignments are completed. Establishing a learning routine, encouraging open communication, and offering emotional support were also mentioned as crucial factors. Nasirin (2015) also emphasized the importance of the family-school relationship and argued that this connection is essential for ensuring a coordinated approach to goals, methods, and expectations between home and school. Additionally, this relationship allows parents to become more informed about their children's academic status and needs, thereby enabling them to better fulfill their parenting roles. Bowen's (1978) family systems theory stresses the family's role in regulating the emotional well-being of its members. The current findings, which suggest that families must engage in clear communication, provide emotional support, and monitor assignments to help alleviate stress and anxiety in students, align well with this theory.

Therefore, addressing students' psychological issues in distance education requires seamless cooperation among schools, families, and governments. Each of these institutions must perform its duties thoroughly to mitigate the negative effects of distance education on students' mental

health.

In the third question, the study focused on the attention given to students' psychological issues in schools. The findings revealed that all teachers unanimously agreed that psychological issues in students should be prioritized in schools. Suggestions for addressing these issues included designing psychological interventions, utilizing counselors and intermediaries to enhance students' mental health, having direct conversations with students about their problems, professional development of teachers to equip them with psychological knowledge relevant to distance learning, creating Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and ensuring active involvement of specialized counselors to address this critical issue in schools. Numerous studies, both domestically and internationally, have emphasized the importance of paying attention to students' psychological issues, demonstrating that this attention is essential for students' well-being. Teachers, due to their daily classroom experiences and close interactions with students, are in the best position to identify and assess students' psychological needs. They are directly aware of how these issues affect students' academic performance and relationships. Therefore, teachers rightly stress the need for a comprehensive approach to support students' mental health. Additionally, focusing on this issue not only improves students' academic performance but can also play a significant role in preventing long-term psychological problems. In this regard, regular training for teachers and providing adequate resources for psychological interventions in educational settings is crucial. Such attention benefits not only at-risk students but the entire educational community, as teachers believe that a healthy educational environment requires attention to the psychological well-being of all students. Ultimately, the unanimous agreement among teachers on the necessity of addressing students' psychological issues highlights the importance of this topic in the learning process. Enhancing psychological support can create a more effective educational environment and better prepare students for learning and healthier growth.

In the fourth research question, the study focused on examining the measures taken by the Farhangian University in training future teachers to rationally address psychological issues in distance education (in terms of content, teacher actions, etc.). The findings indicated that a large number of teachers believe that completing courses related to distance and virtual education (knowledge and skills in using mass communication tools and media management) could be the most crucial step for Farhangian University. Some teachers highlighted additional actions and emphasized that various steps should be taken, including incorporating up-to-date content related to psychology in distance education (such as including courses on psychological pathology, principles of psychological assessment, developmental psychopathology, and developmental psychology), making the curriculum more practical (such as organizing visits and practical work in therapeutic centers and special education institutions), familiarizing student-teachers with innovative teaching methods using modern technologies, educating teachers on self-care strategies to manage their well-being, integrating strategies to build resilience in students, and establishing peer support networks among teachers for sharing their experiences.

Several psychological theories from experts align with these findings, underscoring the importance of these measures. For example, Albert Bandura's (1971) Social Learning Theory emphasizes the significance of observational learning and the role of modeling in the learning process. In this study, it was suggested that teachers should acquire the necessary skills through hands-on work in therapeutic centers and special education schools, which is consistent with Bandura's theory. Additionally, contemporary researchers like Darling-Hammond (2017) and Shulman (1987) stress the importance of professional development for teachers, particularly in psychological issues and the development of technology-based teaching skills. This aligns with the findings of the present research as well.

Therefore, Farhangian University's efforts in training teachers to address students' psychological problems are not only essential but must be targeted and comprehensive. Educating

teachers who are both aware and skilled in this area not only contributes to improving students' mental health but can also have a positive impact on the entire educational system and society.

In the final question posed to the teachers, they were asked to provide solutions for overcoming the challenges they faced. Teachers suggested various strategies, such as ensuring access to essential distance learning tools and equipment, including mobile phones and high-speed internet, requesting assignments from students during distance education, identifying and following up with inactive students until they become active participants, and fostering collaboration and oversight from administrators, teachers, counselors, and parent-teacher association members. Furthermore, they stressed the need for a clear and up-to-date definition of distance education, the involvement of parents in virtual learning, the creation of an interactive and healthy competitive environment in the online learning space, among other recommendations.

The challenges reported by teachers were then shared with specialists for further analysis and potential solutions, leading to a range of valuable suggestions. Some of these included establishing a regular routine structure, task delegation, using visual assignments, scheduling short and regular breaks, developing a sleep routine, reducing electronic device usage, creating a calm sleep environment, practicing breathing exercises and relaxation techniques, providing psychological counseling, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to prevent avoidant behaviors, teaching stress management, promoting physical health, offering flexible schedules, enhancing group communication, utilizing assistive tools, diversifying instructional activities, using relaxation techniques before sleep, educating parents, promoting self-care, raising awareness, encouraging the use of notes and journals, supporting social networks, virtual reality-based therapy, mobile apps for anxiety management, neurofeedback therapy, digital psychotherapy apps, AI and machine learning, therapeutic digital games, time and attention management apps, wearable sleep technologies, light therapy, AI-powered sleep apps, and various other solutions, which are more comprehensively discussed in the findings section.

Overall, it can be asserted that the psychological issues of students in distance education—particularly concerning conditions like ADHD, anxiety, insomnia, and OCD—have profound effects on the learning process. Teachers, as the first point of contact with these issues, universally agree that these matters require special attention, and their professional training in this area is vital. In this regard, the role of teacher training universities and educational institutions in educating teachers to recognize and manage psychological issues is crucial. Moreover, cooperation between schools, families, and the government is essential to creating a supportive system for students. This paper demonstrates comprehensively that without a coordinated and holistic approach at all educational and support levels, addressing students' psychological issues and improving the quality of education will not be feasible.

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