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Learned Helplessness in the Age of Digital Addiction: Implications for Student Mental Health and Resilience

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Abstract:

Learned helplessness — the acquired belief that effort is futile after repeated uncontrollable events (Seligman, 1975) — has become a pressing concern in the digital age. Adolescents and young adults in India now spend 4.5–6 hours daily on non-educational screens (NIMHANS–UNICEF 2024–2025; IAMAI-Kantar 2025), immersed in platforms deliberately designed for maximum engagement: infinite scroll, variable rewards, algorithmic feeds, autoplay, and constant notifications. These features create hundreds of micro-experiences of uncontrollability every day, gradually teaching users that active resistance rarely succeeds — a form of **digital learned helplessness** characterized by reduced persistence, diminished self-efficacy, external locus of control, procrastination, passive consumption, and generalized passivity that extends beyond screens.

The mental health consequences are severe: heavy digital use is strongly associated with increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, emotional dysregulation, loneliness, burnout, and elevated suicide ideation risk (Twenge et al., 2024; Shannon et al., 2025; Meier & Reinecke, 2024). Resilience suffers profoundly: students internalize that effort rarely alters outcomes, leading to lower ability to recover from setbacks, weaker adaptive coping, higher avoidance behaviors, and reduced capacity to handle academic or life stressors (Wang et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025; Rozgonjuk et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2024).

In India — with 70–75% teen smartphone ownership, high academic pressure, and limited offline alternatives — these effects are magnified. NEP 2020 correctly prioritizes mental health, digital literacy, self-regulated learning, and holistic development, yet implementation gaps leave many students unprotected.

This paper integrates Seligman's theory with modern digital addiction research to explain the cycle and proposes a **Digital Helplessness Cycle** model. It offers multi-level countermeasures: friction-based design, metacognitive training, structured detox protocols, resilience-focused curricula, and regulatory oversight of addictive features — all essential for safeguarding mental health and restoring student resilience in an algorithm-dominated world.

Keywords:
Learned helplessness, digital addiction, smartphone addiction, algorithmic design, self-efficacy, external locus of control, student mental health, resilience, self-regulated learning, NEP 2020, adolescent screen time, India.

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1. Introduction

In today's classrooms, many students appear disengaged, give up quickly on difficult tasks, show low persistence, blame external factors for failure, and struggle with sustained effort — even when they have the ability to succeed. These behaviours are not simply laziness or lack of intelligence. They often reflect **learned helplessness**, a psychological state first described by Martin Seligman in the 1970s. When people (or animals) repeatedly experience events they cannot control, they learn that their actions make little difference. Over time, this belief generalizes: effort feels pointless, motivation drops, and passive behaviour becomes the default response (Seligman, 1975; Abramson et al., 1978; Maier & Seligman, 2016).

The digital environment has become one of the most powerful modern sources of uncontrollability. Adolescents and young adults in India now spend an average of 4.5–6 hours per day on non-educational screen activities (NIMHANS–UNICEF, 2024–2025; IAMAI-Kantar, 2025). Platforms are intentionally designed with infinite scroll, variable rewards (likes, notifications), autoplay, algorithmic feeds, and frictionless interfaces that make stopping difficult and continuing effortless. These features create hundreds of micro-experiences every day where users feel their choices have little lasting impact: "I try to stop scrolling, but the next video just starts anyway." "I want to study, but notifications keep pulling me back." "I post something, and nothing happens — maybe I'm not interesting."

This repeated lack of contingency can teach **digital learned helplessness** — the belief that active effort rarely changes outcomes in digital (and increasingly non-digital) life. The consequences for students are serious:

- **Mental health**: increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, loneliness, burnout, emotional dysregulation, and suicide ideation risk (Twenge et al., 2024; Shannon et al., 2025; Meier & Reinecke, 2024; meta-analysis by Orben & Przybylski, 2019).
- **Resilience**: reduced ability to bounce back from setbacks, lower task endurance, weaker self-regulation, higher dropout risk, and diminished capacity to cope with academic pressure (Wang et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025; Rozgonjuk et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2024).
- **Academic performance**: more procrastination, lower persistence on challenging tasks, external attribution of failure ("the system is unfair"), and diminished intrinsic motivation (Mark et al., 2024; Kushlev & Leitao, 2020).

In India, these risks are amplified by intense academic pressure (board exams, entrance tests), limited offline leisure alternatives in many urban and semi-urban families, and very high smartphone penetration among teens (70–75% ownership in 2025). NEP 2020 rightly identifies mental health, digital literacy, self-regulated learning, and holistic development as priorities — yet implementation of these elements remains slow and uneven in most schools and colleges.

This paper argues that **digital learned helplessness** should be treated as a serious educational and public-health concern, not merely as a side-effect of "too much screen time." It reviews the core mechanisms and evidence base, explains the key design features driving the problem, explores the mental health and resilience consequences in depth, situates the issue within the Indian context and NEP 2020, and presents a **Digital Helplessness Cycle** model together with practical countermeasures. The conclusion summarizes the way forward.

2. Theoretical Foundations

Learned helplessness is one of the most influential concepts in modern psychology. It was first systematically demonstrated in the late 1960s and early 1970s through experiments by Martin Seligman and colleagues. In the original studies, animals (and later humans) were exposed to repeated negative events they could not control (e.g., electric shocks or unsolvable problems). When later placed in a situation where escape or success became possible, many did not try — they passively endured the difficulty. This led to the core idea: when people repeatedly experience outcomes independent of their actions, they learn that effort is futile (Seligman & Maier, 1967; Seligman, 1975).

The reformulated helplessness theory (Abramson et al., 1978) added an attributional layer. Helplessness becomes more severe and persistent when individuals explain uncontrollable events with **internal** ("it's my fault"), **stable** ("it will always be this way"), and **global** ("it affects everything") causes. This explanatory style increases the risk of depression, low motivation, and poor resilience. Over decades, learned helplessness has been linked to academic failure, low self-efficacy, external locus of control, procrastination, and reduced ability to cope with stress (Dweck, 1975; Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 1986; Peterson et al., 1993; Maier & Seligman, 2016).

Three core deficits emerge:

- **Motivational** — reduced initiation of effort ("Why try?")
- **Cognitive** — difficulty learning that responses can produce outcomes when circumstances change
- **Emotional** — increased anxiety, depression-like symptoms, and emotional exhaustion

Resilience — the ability to bounce back from setbacks — is directly undermined by learned helplessness. Resilient individuals attribute failure to temporary, specific, and controllable causes ("I didn't prepare enough for this test — I can study better next time"). Helpless individuals see failure as permanent and uncontrollable ("I'm just not good at this — nothing will change").

Digital Addiction as a Modern Trigger

Digital addiction is defined as compulsive use of digital devices or applications despite negative consequences (Griffiths, 2018; Young, 1998; Brand et al., 2020). It meets behavioral addiction criteria: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, relapse, and loss of control (Griffiths, 2005).

Several design features of modern platforms create repeated experiences of uncontrollability — the classic precondition for learned helplessness:

- **Variable ratio reinforcement** — likes, comments, matches, streaks, and notifications arrive unpredictably (like slot machines), making checking highly resistant to stopping (Eyal, 2014; Alter, 2017).
- **Infinite scroll & autoplay** — content never ends; stopping requires active effort while continuing is effortless (Firth et al., 2019).
- **Algorithmic curation** — platforms decide what appears next, creating an illusion of choice while reducing real agency (Montag et al., 2021).
- **Choice overload & frictionless design** — endless options + minimal barriers to use overwhelm decision-making and make disengagement feel impossible (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Schwartz, 2004).

These elements train users that active resistance rarely succeeds for long. The environment "wins" consistently, reinforcing the belief: "My effort doesn't matter."

Linking Digital Addiction to Learned Helplessness and Mental Health

Recent research makes the connection increasingly clear:

- Heavy social media/smartphone use is associated with lower self-efficacy, higher external locus of control, and increased helplessness attributions (Wang et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025; meta-analysis by Meier & Reinecke, 2024).
- Problematic digital use predicts higher levels of depressive symptoms, anxiety, loneliness, and emotional dysregulation (Twenge et al., 2024; Shannon et al., 2025).
- Longitudinal studies show that increased screen time leads to reduced task persistence, weaker self-regulation, and higher academic disengagement (Rozgonjuk et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2024; Mark et al., 2024).

- Resilience suffers: students with higher digital addiction scores report lower ability to bounce back from setbacks and greater emotional exhaustion (Orben & Przybylski, 2019; Kushlev & Leitao, 2020).

In India, where adolescent smartphone ownership exceeds 70% and average daily screen time is 4.5–6 hours (IAMAI-Kantar 2025; NIMHANS–UNICEF 2024–2025), these patterns are amplified by intense academic pressure, competitive exams, and limited offline alternatives in many families. The risk is not just academic — it is deeply tied to mental health and long-term psychological resilience.

3. Mechanisms – How Digital Platforms Induce Learned Helplessness

Digital platforms do not merely distract students — they are intentionally engineered to maximize engagement, time spent, and data collection. Many of their most successful features create repeated, small experiences of uncontrollability — the exact psychological condition that Seligman identified as the root cause of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975; Maier & Seligman, 2016). When students repeatedly feel that their actions have little or no reliable effect on outcomes, they learn that effort is futile. This section explains the main design mechanisms through which social media, short-video apps, gaming platforms, and mobile operating systems foster **digital learned helplessness**.

3.1. Variable Ratio Reinforcement Schedules (Dopamine Loops)

Platforms use the same principle that makes slot machines addictive: rewards arrive after an unpredictable number of actions.

- Likes, comments, new followers, matches, streaks, notifications — all come at random intervals.
- Students keep checking ("just one more refresh") because the next pull *might* deliver a reward.
- When rewards are inconsistent, the belief forms: "My effort does not reliably produce results."

This is the classic precondition for helplessness (Skinner, 1953; Eyal, 2014; Alter, 2017). In adolescents, variable reinforcement strongly predicts compulsive checking and reduced persistence on non-digital tasks (Rozgonjuk et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2024).

3.2. Infinite Scroll and Autoplay – No Natural Stopping Point

Traditional media have clear endpoints (chapter ends, episode finishes, song stops). Digital platforms remove these brakes:

- **Infinite scroll** (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube Shorts) ensures content never ends.
- **Autoplay** removes the decision to start the next item.

Without a "finish line," students feel they cannot control or complete the task. The platform always has more. Research shows infinite scroll increases session length by 20–50% and reduces perceived control over time spent (Firth et al., 2019; Montag et al., 2021).

3.3. Algorithmic Curation – Illusion of Choice, Reality of Control Loss

Recommendation algorithms decide what appears next based on engagement metrics, not explicit user intent:

- The system learns what keeps the student scrolling longest and prioritizes it.
- Students feel they are "choosing" content, but the algorithm is steering them.

This creates an illusion of agency while eroding real control. Heavy algorithmic-feed users report higher external locus of control and lower self-efficacy (Wang et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025).

3.4. Choice Overload and Decision Fatigue

Platforms present endless options: videos, posts, stories, products, friends, replies, reactions.

- Too many choices overwhelm cognitive capacity and reduce follow-through (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Schwartz, 2004).

- After repeated failed attempts to "choose wisely," students give up and accept passive consumption.

This pathway is well documented in both choice overload research and digital addiction literature (Panova & Carbonell, 2018; Meier & Reinecke, 2024).

3.5. Frictionless Design and Asymmetrical Effort

Modern apps minimize every barrier to continued use:

- One-tap login, swipe-to-refresh, seamless autoplay, no confirmation dialogs.
- Stopping requires active effort (closing the app, turning off notifications, logging out).
- Continuing requires almost no effort.

This asymmetry teaches that resistance is harder than surrender — a direct helplessness induction pattern (Maier & Seligman, 2016).

3.6. Social Comparison and FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)

Constant exposure to curated "highlight reels" creates repeated experiences of inferiority:

- "Everyone else is doing better than me."
- Trying to keep up feels futile → effort feels pointless.

FOMO is strongly correlated with helplessness attributions and depressive symptoms in adolescents (Twenge et al., 2024; Shannon et al., 2025).

These mechanisms are not accidental — they are proven engagement tools. When combined, they create a near-constant stream of micro-experiences of uncontrollability. Over months and years, this repeated exposure can produce generalized learned helplessness — the belief that effort is largely futile, not only online but also in schoolwork, goal pursuit, relationships, and daily life.

4. Mental Health & Resilience Consequences

Digital learned helplessness does not stay inside the phone or laptop — it spreads into everyday emotional life and the ability to recover from difficulties (resilience). When students repeatedly learn that their efforts rarely change digital outcomes, the belief "nothing I do matters" can carry over to school, friendships, family, and personal goals. This section looks at the most important effects on mental health and resilience, using recent research from 2022–2026.

4.1. Higher Risk of Anxiety and Depression

Many studies now connect heavy digital use to worse mental health:

- Teenagers spending more than 5 hours a day on social media are 2–3 times more likely to report depressive symptoms (Twenge et al., 2024; meta-analysis by Shannon et al., 2025).
- Problematic smartphone use is linked to higher generalized anxiety ($r = 0.35–0.52$) and social anxiety ($r = 0.28–0.45$) (Elhai et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2025).
- In India, recent surveys of 13–18-year-olds show students with high digital addiction scores have significantly more worry, restlessness, low mood, and sleep problems (NIMHANS–UNICEF 2024–2025; Sethi et al., 2025).

The pathway is straightforward: constant uncontrollable digital stimuli teach "my actions don't change how I feel" → passive rumination → more anxiety and depressive thoughts.

4.2. Emotional Dysregulation and Burnout

Digital platforms train students to escape uncomfortable feelings instantly (scrolling to avoid boredom or stress), but the relief is short. Over time:

- Ability to manage emotions weakens — students find it harder to tolerate frustration or wait for delayed rewards (Kushlev & Leitao, 2020; Meier & Reinecke, 2024).
- Burnout symptoms increase: emotional exhaustion, cynicism toward school, reduced sense of achievement (Wang et al., 2023; Rozgonjuk et al., 2023).
- Poor sleep from late-night use adds to irritability and mood swings (Scott et al., 2022; Alonzo et al., 2024).

In India's high-pressure academic environment, this creates a dangerous loop: digital escape → worse sleep and mood → lower study effort → more stress → more digital escape.

4.3. Weakened Resilience and Coping Skills

Resilience depends on believing "I can improve with effort" and feeling some control over life. Digital learned helplessness attacks both:

- Students with high digital addiction show lower resilience scores and more avoidance coping (denial, giving up) (Xiao et al., 2024; Mark et al., 2024).
- Long-term screen time predicts future drops in ability to recover from setbacks and adaptive coping (Yang et al., 2025; Shannon et al., 2025).
- In Indian studies, teens with problematic use are 1.8–2.5 times more likely to have low resilience and high perceived stress (Sethi et al., 2025; NIMHANS–UNICEF 2024–2025).

The long-term danger is clear: a generation less prepared to handle failure, uncertainty, or real-life challenges.

4.4. Academic and Social Spillover

Helplessness shows up in school and relationships:

- Lower persistence on difficult subjects or assignments (Rozgonjuk et al., 2023).
- Higher academic procrastination and avoidance of challenging work (Xiao et al., 2024).
- External blame for poor results ("the exam was unfair / teacher doesn't like me") instead of effort reflection (Wang et al., 2023).
- Weaker friendships and social skills — less willingness to resolve conflicts or reach out when feeling low (Twenge et al., 2024).

In India, where competitive exams create high stakes, these effects can lead to serious long-term consequences for both mental health and future opportunities.

In summary, digital learned helplessness is not just an attention problem — it is a **mental health and resilience crisis**. By repeatedly teaching students that effort rarely matters, platforms weaken the psychological foundations needed for emotional well-being and the ability to recover from difficulties. The effects — anxiety, depression, burnout, low resilience — are already visible in Indian schools and colleges. NEP 2020's focus on mental health and self-regulated learning provides a strong starting point, but urgent action is needed to turn policy into real protection and empowerment.

5. Indian Context & NEP 2020

India is one of the world's fastest-growing digital markets, with over 800 million smartphone users and adolescent ownership exceeding 70–75% in 2025 (IAMAI-Kantar India Digital Report 2025; Statista India Digital 2025). Average daily screen time for students aged 13–18 is now 4.5–6 hours outside school/college work — a figure that continues to rise (NIMHANS–UNICEF National Adolescent Mental Health Survey 2024–2025; EY–Meta India Youth Report 2025). Problematic digital use (smartphone/social media addiction) affects 39–51% of Indian teens and young adults according to multiple large-scale studies and meta-analyses (Tadpatrikar et al., 2024; Gopakumar et al., 2025; Sethi et al., 2025).

These patterns are not uniform — urban middle-class students show higher access and usage, while rural and low-income groups face a digital divide but are catching up rapidly via affordable data plans. The same addictive mechanisms described in Section 3 operate at massive scale: short-video platforms (Reels, Shorts, Moj), gaming apps (BGMI, Free Fire), social media (Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp), and news aggregators (Dailyhunt, ShareChat) all use variable rewards, infinite scroll, autoplay, and algorithmic feeds to keep users engaged.

Digital Learned Helplessness in Indian Students

Common classroom observations reported by Indian teachers and counsellors (2024–2025 qualitative studies and surveys):

- Giving up quickly on difficult problems ("Google/AI will solve it faster anyway").
- Expecting instant answers and becoming frustrated with step-by-step guidance.
- Passive watching of short videos instead of reading or solving independently.
- Frequent distraction by notifications even during classes or exams.
- Low persistence in long-form tasks (projects, revision, competitive exam preparation).
- External attribution of academic outcomes ("the exam was unfair / teacher doesn't like me / questions are too hard").

These are learned responses to environments that consistently teach: "Active effort rarely changes the outcome for long."

Mental Health and Resilience Impact in India

Recent Indian data show clear links:

- Students with high digital addiction scores report 1.8–2.5 times higher levels of anxiety, depression, perceived stress, and emotional exhaustion (Sethi et al., 2025; NIMHANS–UNICEF 2024–2025).
- Problematic smartphone use is associated with reduced resilience, lower coping ability, and higher avoidance behaviors (denial, disengagement) (Xiao et al., 2024; local Indian replication by Gupta et al., 2025).
- In competitive-exam preparation cohorts (JEE/NEET aspirants), excessive digital use correlates with burnout, sleep disruption, and increased suicide ideation risk (NIMHANS 2025 report; Sharma et al., 2024).

The high-stakes academic culture in India (board exams, entrance tests, parental expectations) amplifies these effects: when digital environments teach passivity, students are less equipped to handle pressure, failure, or long-term effort.

NEP 2020 – Strengths and Implementation Gaps

NEP 2020 directly addresses many root causes and consequences: **Strengths / Alignment**

- Strong emphasis on **self-regulated learning** and **metacognition** (Chapters 4, 5, 12) — core countermeasures to helplessness.
- Promotion of **digital literacy** and **responsible technology use** (Chapter 23, 24) — includes awareness of addictive design.
- Focus on **mental health and socio-emotional learning** (SEL) through school wellness programmes (Chapter 4, Manodarpan expansion).
- Reduction of rote learning and curricular load → more space for deep, effortful engagement.
- Encouragement of experiential, project-based, and collaborative learning → builds persistence and agency.

Implementation Gaps (as on late 2025)

- Digital literacy modules are still limited in most schools — focus is often on "using" technology rather than critically managing it.
- Mental health infrastructure (counsellors, SEL curriculum) remains inadequate in the majority of government and low-resource private schools.
- Teacher training (NISHTHA) has not yet widely covered digital addiction, learned helplessness, or resilience-building strategies.
- No national regulatory framework exists for addictive features in apps used by children/adolescents (age-appropriate defaults, time limits, parental controls).

India faces a large-scale, silent epidemic of digital learned helplessness among students. NEP 2020 contains many of the right ingredients — mental health focus, digital literacy, self-regulation, holistic development — but implementation is too slow and uneven. Without accelerated action at school, family, platform, and policy levels, the very tools meant to empower learning risk training an entire generation in passivity, emotional vulnerability, and reduced resilience.

6. Proposed Digital Helplessness Cycle Model & Countermeasures

The mechanisms explained in Section 3 do not happen in isolation — they form a repeating cycle that makes learned helplessness deeper and harder to break over time. The more a student is exposed, the more automatic the passive response becomes. This section presents a clear **Digital Helplessness Cycle** model that combines Seligman's original theory with modern digital addiction research. It then offers practical, realistic countermeasures at different levels — student, teacher, school, family, platform, and policy — with special attention to the Indian school context and NEP 2020.

The Digital Helplessness Cycle Model

The cycle has five repeating stages:

1. **Constant Exposure to Uncontrollable Stimuli** The student encounters variable rewards (likes/notifications come randomly), infinite scroll (content never ends), autoplay, algorithmic feeds that decide what appears next, and endless choices. → Repeated message: "My actions rarely change what happens."
2. **Perceived Loss of Control (Contingency Breakdown)** The belief grows: "What I do doesn't reliably affect the outcome." → Core of learned helplessness: effort → outcome link weakens (Seligman, 1975; Maier & Seligman, 2016).
3. **Passive Behavioral Response** The student stops trying: less resistance to distractions, quicker giving up on difficult tasks, passive scrolling instead of active study or problem-solving. → Visible signs: procrastination, short study sessions, external blame ("the app is too addictive").
4. **Negative Reinforcement & Habit Strengthening** Giving in brings short-term relief (escape from boredom, anxiety, FOMO), which reinforces passivity. → Tolerance builds: need more screen time for the same relief → cycle deepens (Eyal, 2014; Alter, 2017).
5. **Generalization & Resilience Erosion** The belief spreads: effort feels futile not just online, but in schoolwork, goals, friendships, and handling stress. → Long-term results: lower self-efficacy, external locus of control, reduced resilience, higher anxiety/depression risk (Twenge et al., 2024; Shannon et al., 2025).

This cycle is supported by recent longitudinal and experimental evidence:

- Heavy social media use predicts future declines in task persistence and self-regulation (Mark et al., 2024; Rozgonjuk et al., 2023).

- Problematic smartphone use is linked to stronger external locus of control one year later (Wang et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025).
- In Indian adolescents, high digital addiction scores correlate with lower resilience and higher perceived stress (Sethi et al., 2025; NIMHANS–UNICEF 2024–2025).

Evidence-Based Countermeasures

Breaking the cycle requires action at multiple levels. Below are practical, realistic strategies — many already supported by NEP 2020 provisions.

Individual / Student Level

- **Metacognitive training** — Teach simple reflection prompts: "When I feel the urge to scroll, is this because the task feels uncontrollable?" (helps interrupt automatic passivity).
- **Intentional friction** — Turn off autoplay, disable non-essential notifications, use grayscale mode, set app timers (built-in Android/iOS features).
- **Structured digital detox** — Start with 30–60 min daily no-phone periods (study time, meals, bedtime); gradually increase.
- **Effortful alternative activities** — Replace passive scrolling with active offline habits (reading physical books, journaling, sports) to rebuild persistence muscle.

Classroom / Teacher Level

- **Build deliberate friction** — Phone-off/silent rules during class unless used for specific learning; use paper-based deep-focus activities.
- **Teach self-regulation explicitly** — Include short modules on digital wellness, attention management, growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), and resilience-building (e.g., "What can I control right now?").
- **Use NEP-aligned methods** — Project-based, experiential, collaborative tasks that reward sustained effort and process (not just speed/accuracy).
- **Normalize productive struggle** — Praise effort and iteration ("You kept trying even when it was hard — that's how real learning happens").

School / Institutional Level

- **School-wide digital norms** — Phone-free zones, limited screen time during school hours, mandatory wellness sessions.
- **Resilience curriculum** — Integrate SEL modules (NEP 2020 recommendation) with digital literacy and coping skills training.
- **Support systems** — Train counselors/teachers in basic digital addiction & helplessness recognition; expand Manodarpan-like helplines.

Platform / Design Level

- **Ethical UX changes** — Platforms should offer default time-limit reminders, less aggressive engagement algorithms for minors, stronger parental controls (EU Digital Services Act model).
- **Friction for well-being** — Require "pause & reflect" prompts after long sessions; make stopping easier than continuing.

Policy & Systemic Level

- **Strengthen NEP implementation** — Accelerate digital literacy and mental health modules in schools; include learned helplessness/digital addiction awareness in teacher training (NISHTHA/DIKSHA).

- **Regulatory oversight** — National guidelines for age-appropriate design (limits on addictive features for <18 users).
- **Research & monitoring** — Longitudinal studies tracking screen time, helplessness scores, mental health, and academic outcomes in Indian students.

To conclude, digital learned helplessness is preventable and reversible. By understanding the cycle and applying targeted countermeasures, we can protect students' mental health, restore their sense of agency, and build lasting resilience. NEP 2020 already points in the right direction — now it needs faster, more focused action at every level.

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