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Online Coaching and its Effects on Student Identity Formation and Psychological Well-being

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Abstract

The increasing reliance on online coaching has reshaped traditional learning, offering flexibility, accessibility, and personalized education. This study examines the impact of online coaching on students' self-perception, academic confidence, and emotional well-being, based on data collected from 31 respondents through a Google Forms questionnaire using quantitative and qualitative analysis. The findings reveal that students compare themselves more with peers in online settings, leading to heightened academic pressure and self-doubt. While maximum number of students reported no change in confidence. A significant number of students identified lack of personal interaction as a major challenge, followed by technical issues, self-discipline struggles, and digital fatigue. Despite these challenges, most of students favoured a hybrid model over fully online or offline coaching, suggesting the need for blended learning approaches. The study concludes that while online coaching enhances academic accessibility, it also contributes to identity struggles, social detachment, and mental strain. Addressing these concerns requires stronger mentorship, peer interaction, psychological support, and an improved balance between digital and offline learning.

Keywords

Online coaching, Identity formation, Social interaction, Self-perception, Technical issues, Digital fatigue.

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Online Coaching and its Effects on Student Identity Formation and Psychological Well-being

1. Introduction

This paper revealed Online Coaching and Its Effects on Student Identity Formation and Psychological Well-Being. After LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization [1990]), the commercialized nature of the coaching traffic is making students pay the price. At the early age, students are thrown in an environment where every activity is focused on just one exam and under the surveillance society. As a result, success or failure in the exam is perceived as life and death phenomena leading to more mental pressure. With the dream of joining the prestigious higher education institution and gaining an identity, lakhs of students flock to online coaching centers to prepare for various “High Bankroll” exam.

The concept of “coaching” has a long history, originated from the 16th century, where it initially referred to a method of transportation, specially a horse-drawn carriage. Over the period of time, the term “coaching” has evolved from its literal transportation context to metaphorically represent the guiding and assisting individuals in their personal and professional development as well as establishment of their identity regarding social norm. As we moving from traditional coaching to online coaching, “online coaching” is a modern phenomenon enabled by technology including methods and tools employed, allowing tutors to connect with their students remotely and deliver coaching services across a particular geographical boundaries.

The rapid expansion of online education has transformed traditional learning paradigm, providing students with unprecedented access to knowledge and resources. Among these developments, online coaching offers flexibility, personalized learning, and cost effective alternatives to traditional coaching centers, it also raises significance concerns about student identity formation, social interaction, and psychological as well as human well-being.

In recent time, Identity formation is a critical aspect of adolescent and young adult development, influenced by social structures, peer interactions, and institutional settings. Identity is constructed through

social interaction and the meanings individuals attach to experiences (G.H.Mead & Erving Goffman). In traditional educational spaces, students engage in face-to-face learning, develop peer network, and establish a sense of academic identity through social validation and mentoring. However online coaching disrupts these processes, replacing interpersonal interactions with digital interface and algorithm driven learning. This shift had led to new challenges in identity formation, including feeling of isolation, increased academic pressure, digital fatigue, and an increased sense of self-worth linked to academic performance.

This research seeks to explore how online coaching affects students' academic identity, self-perception, and psychological as well as human well-being. It will examine whether online coaching promotes an empowering learning experiences or contributes to an identity crisis due to limited social engagement and increased performance anxiety. By analyzing students' experiences through virtual participation and sociological implications, this study main aims to provide insight into the challenges and opportunities presented by online coaching.

2. Theoretical Orientation

The rapid expansion of ICT (Information, Communication, and Technology), contemporary era is full of "Online Jargon", where online traffic have taken place. This study on "The role of online coaching students and their identity crisis" can be examined through multiple sociological and psychological theories. These frameworks provide insight into how online coaching influences students self-perception, social interaction, and overall identity formation as well as development.

- ▶ Symbolic interactionism explains identity as something shaped through everyday social interaction. In traditional classrooms, students develop their academic selves through direct engagement with peers and teachers. Online coaching reduces these interactions, replacing them with rankings, recorded lectures, and virtual feedback. This shift can blur self-perception, as students feel pressure to project an ideal academic image online, often resulting in stress and identity tension (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959).
- ▶ According to Erikson, adolescence and early adulthood are critical stages for identity formation. Limited face-to-face peer engagement in online coaching can intensify identity confusion,

as students begin to measure self-worth mainly through performance, competition, and rankings, increasing anxiety and emotional strain (Erikson, 1968).

- ▶ Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital highlights how online coaching, despite expanding access, advantages students with better technology, digital skills, and a stable internet. This unequal access reinforces class differences and may leave resource-poor students feeling academically alienated and insecure (Bourdieu, 1986).
- ▶ From Durkheim's functionalist perspective, education promotes social integration. Online coaching weakens this role by reducing classroom interaction and collective learning, often leading to isolation and a weakened sense of belonging (Durkheim, 1897).
- ▶ Finally, Marx's conflict theory suggests that online coaching reproduces social inequality by favouring students with economic and technological resources. The emphasis on competition and merit discourages holistic development and contributes to stress and identity struggles among disadvantaged learners (Marx and Engels, 1848).

By applying these theoretical perspectives, this study explains how online coaching reshapes student identity, creates psychological challenges, and alters socialization patterns. The findings suggest that online education needs stronger community-building strategies, mentorship, and emotional support to prevent identity crises and mental stress among students.

3. Literature Review

In recent years, online coaching has emerged as a critical educational format, especially during global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, raising deep concerns regarding its impact on student identity, academic pressure, and psychological well-being.

Research by Butcher (2012) explored how identity is an often implicit but powerful subtext in coaching practices. Coaches recognize that students or "coachees" hold multiple and shifting identities, including personal, professional, and social aspects. This fragmentation and negotiation of identities align with Symbolic Interactionism (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), suggesting that the online coaching environment where self-presentation is heavily managed and peer comparison is intensified amplifies identity tension.

Similarly, Steyn and Barnard (2024) argue that coaching is not merely about skill development but about facilitating identity work, where students engage in self-exploration, reflection, self-acceptance, and ultimately self-actualization. They highlight how metaphors used during coaching sessions become tools for sense-making and identity restructuring, further illustrating that online coaching offers both risks and opportunities for personal transformation. From a psychological development perspective, Erikson's theory remains foundational in understanding identity crises among youth and students. As discussed in Gholamrezaei (2016), identity crises often peak during adolescence and young adulthood and are significantly affected by variables like age, gender, and educational level. This supports the findings that younger online coaching participants may be particularly vulnerable to feelings of uncertainty and role confusion, especially when deprived of traditional peer interactions and mentor guidance.

Research focusing specifically on online learning environments (Hofer, Nistor, & Scheibenzuber, 2021) shows that the sudden shift to digital modes of education during the COVID-19 pandemic intensified issues such as academic self-regulation, digital fatigue, and psychological stress. The loss of a "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in online settings contributes to feelings of isolation and identity instability, issues that were sharply reflected in the survey responses analyzed in this study.

Arfini *et al.* (2021) provide a philosophical and cognitive foundation for understanding how online environments act as "virtual cognitive niches", deeply affecting personal identity. Their Attachment Theory of Identity emphasizes that while online and offline identities are continuous, digital settings often amplify identity dissonance through the filter bubble effect and algorithmic mediation of self-presentation. This directly supports your study's exploration of student self-comparison, digital anxiety, and identity confusion in online coaching environments.

In a similar vein, Kwon *et al.* (2021) analyze how identity in online learning is a dynamic, co-constructed process involving the learner, instructor, and the digital learning system (LMS). They argue that the shift from knowledge consumption to co-creation is fundamental for authentic online learning, but note that many platforms fail to facilitate this shift, resulting in fragmented learner identities and passive educational experiences. This aligns with your findings that many students in online coaching report feeling disconnected, stressed, and unsupported.

From a coaching psychology perspective, Butcher (2012) underscores that identity in coaching is often treated as a “subtext”, though it is central to how individuals make meaning of their academic and personal challenges. Drawing on Goffman’s dramaturgical model, Butcher highlights the performative nature of identity and the tensions between public (online) and private (inner) selves, especially relevant in high-performance contexts such as competitive online coaching. Your study echoes this by noting how students engage in constant self-presentation and peer comparison, which can destabilize self-confidence and increase pressure.

Moreover, the article by Selene Arfini *et al.* (2021) also raises the issue of “Bad Faith” (Sartre), where individuals deceive themselves about their freedom and responsibility in online contexts, attributing personal struggles to the system rather than internalizing them. This philosophical lens powerfully illustrates how students may suppress emotional strain and conform to competitive academic norms, intensifying identity fragmentation

Thus, the existing body of literature shows that online coaching environments, while flexible and accessible, often amplify the challenges associated with identity negotiation, academic competition, and psychological well-being. Moreover, the need for emotional scaffolding, peer support, and hybrid learning models is consistently highlighted across diverse studies, reinforcing the major objectives and findings of the present research.

4. Research Methods

The research aims to examine the impact of online coaching on student identity formation and role of social interaction as well as students’ preferences for online, offline, or hybrid learning models. This study employs a quantitative approach using a structured Google Forms questionnaire to investigate the impact of online coaching on student identity formation and the emergence of an identity crisis. The research follow a cross-sectional design and in based on 31 respondents selected through purposive sampling, focusing on students aged 14-22 currently enrolled in online coaching programs. The questionnaire consists of closed ended (a question that presents respondents with pre-populated answer choices) and Likert scale question (a rating scale used to measure survey participants’ opinions, attitudes, motivations, and more), covering demographic details, online coaching experiences, self-perception, academic pressure, psychological as well as human well-being, and preferred learning

modes. The survey was distributed through social media platforms such as Whatsapp, Telegram, and student forums, with data collected over 15 days. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages, mean values and frequencies distributions, while Likert scale responses were examined for trends. Correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between online coaching, identity crisis, and academic stress, with data visualization through bar graphs and pie charts.

Ethical considerations included informed consent, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, and voluntary participation, allowing respondents the freedom to withdraw at any stage. This structured methodology ensures a focused and statistically supported analysis of how online coaching influences student identity and psychological as well as human well-being.

4.1 Sampling Strategy

This study employs a purposive sampling strategy, specially selecting students who are actively engaged in online coaching programs. Purposive sampling ensures that the participants have relevant experiences related to the study's focus on identity formation and academic pressure in an online learning environment. Additionally, convenience sampling was used to facilitate accessibility, as the questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms across social media platforms such as Whatsapp, Telegram, and student forums.

The sample size consists of 31 respondents chosen to provide in-depth experiential insights within a qualitative research framework. This number was considered adequate for conducting thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring pattern while maintaining richness in individual experiences. Participants were selected based on their willingness to share detailed responses about their self-perception, peer interaction, and academic struggles in online coaching. The sample includes students across different age group, educational level, and socio-economic background to ensure a diverse range of perspectives.

5. Data Collection and Analysis

The study is designed to explore the impact of online coaching on student identity formation and the emergence of an identity crisis. The major objectives of this research are to assess students' engagement with online coaching, to examine the impact of online coaching on self-identity and academic perception, to investigate the role of social

interaction in online coaching and to analyze students' coping mechanism and adaptation strategies. The data collected through the Google Forms questionnaire distributed to 31 respondents engaged in online coaching. The analysis is structured around the key research objectives, integrating quantitative trends and qualitative insights to explore the impact of online coaching on students' identity formation, psychological as well as human well-being, social interaction, and academic pressure.

The demographic distribution revealed that the majority of respondents (61.3%) were aged 15-18 years, followed by 29% in the 19-22 years category, and a smaller 9.7% were below 15 years old. This age distribution suggests that the study mainly reflects the experiences of students in high school and early college years, when identity formation is particularly crucial. In terms of educational level, 35.5% were undergraduates, 12.9% were school students (9-12), and 22.6% were postgraduates, while others were preparing for competitive exams such as Ph.D. and bank exams. These findings indicate that online coaching is used across various academic levels, though it is most prominent among students in high school and undergraduate studies.

Enrollment in online coaching was reported by 61.3% of students (see Figure-02), while 38.7% were not currently enrolled. Among those enrolled, students took a diverse range of subjects, with a strong emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and competitive exam preparation (see Figure-02). This suggests that online coaching is particularly popular for technical and exam-oriented subjects, which may require specialized instruction and additional practice.

The amount of time spent on online coaching varied, with 41.9% of students spending more than 6 hours daily, while 25.8% spent 4-6 hours, 9.7% spent 2-4 hours, and 22.6% spent less than 2 hours per day (see Figure-02). The high percentage of students spending extended hours on online coaching raises concerns about digital fatigue, reduced offline social engagement, and increased academic pressure.

A key area of analysis was the impact of online coaching on identity formation. 71% of students stated that online coaching had no effect on their academic identity, while 19.4% reported a positive impact and 9.7% experienced a negative shift in self-perception (see Figure-02). Despite this, 58.1% admitted to comparing themselves more with peers in online coaching than in offline education, suggesting that competitive rankings and digital metrics play a role in shaping student identity. Additionally, 41.9% of students reported a

lack of belonging in online coaching (see Figure-02), indicating that digital learning environments may not provide the same sense of community and support as traditional classrooms.

Academic confidence and performance pressure were analyzed through student responses about their self-esteem and stress levels. 64.5% reported no change in academic confidence, while 25.8% felt an improvement and 9.7% noted a decline (see Figure-02). Despite this, a significant 54.8% of students felt pressured to perform better due to online coaching, with 35.5% unsure and 9.7% not feeling pressured at all (see Figure-02). The stress associated with online coaching was further reflected in the fact that 64.5% of students had considered quitting online coaching due to anxiety and academic pressure. This highlights the potential mental health impact of performance-driven online education (see Figure-01).

The study also examined social interactions and emotional well-being in relation to online coaching. 32.3% of students reported reduced interaction with friends and family, while 54.8% experienced no change and 12.9% claimed to interact more. These findings suggest that while some students are able to balance academic and social life, others experience social withdrawal due to increased screen time and academic commitments. A major issue faced by students was lack of personal interaction (41.9%), followed by technical difficulties (22.6%), self-discipline struggles (19.4%), and digital fatigue (16.1%). Additionally, 51.6% of students never felt isolated, while 16.1% always felt isolated, and 22.6% rarely experienced isolation (see Figure-02). These results indicate that while many students adapt well to online coaching, a significant proportion struggle with social disconnection and emotional stress.

When asked about preferences for online, offline, or hybrid learning models, 67.7% of students preferred a mix of online and offline coaching, highlighting the importance of blended learning approaches. 48.4% of respondents stated they would choose offline coaching over online learning, reinforcing the need for in-person engagement and structured mentorship. Additionally, 51.6% disagreed with the idea that online coaching could fully replace traditional classroom learning, suggesting that while digital education has benefits, it lacks certain elements essential for holistic learning.

Students also identified key challenges in online coaching. The most commonly reported issue was lack of personal interaction (41.9%) (see Figure-02), which hindered peer learning and mentorship opportunities. Technical difficulties (22.6%) were another concern,

with students struggling with internet connectivity issues and software-related disruptions. Self-discipline (19.4%) was also a challenge, as online learning requires a high level of time management and independent motivation. Additionally, 16.1% reported digital fatigue, which is a major concern given the extended screen exposure required for online coaching (see Figure-02).

A critical insight from the study was the psychological effects of online coaching. 54.8% of students reported feeling academic pressure (see Figure-01), while 64.5% had considered quitting online coaching due to stress and anxiety. Additionally, 35.5% of students noted that online coaching had negatively affected their sleep patterns, suggesting that excessive screen time and academic stress disrupt sleep cycles. 25.8% of students also reported feeling physically exhausted due to prolonged screen exposure, indicating that online coaching may have adverse physical and mental health impacts.

To cope with stress, 41.9% of students relied on talking to friends or family, 32.3% took breaks from screens, and 22.6% engaged in physical activities (see Figure-01). This suggests that students actively seek strategies to manage academic stress, but may still require institutional support for mental well-being. When asked about improvements in online coaching, 32.3% suggested more peer interaction, 32.3% called for reduced workload, 25.8% wanted psychological support, and 9.7% emphasized better mentorship. These findings highlight the need for a more supportive and interactive online learning environment.

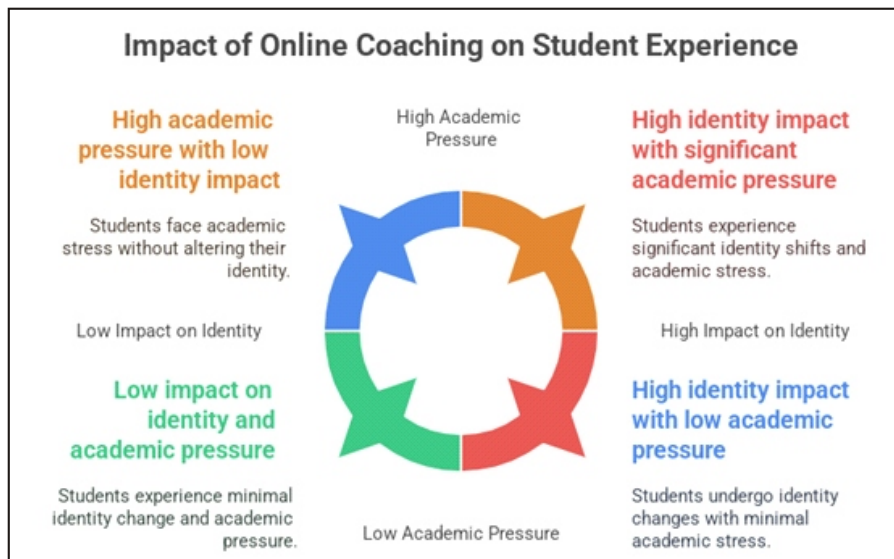


Figure-01: Impact on Identity and Academic Pressure.

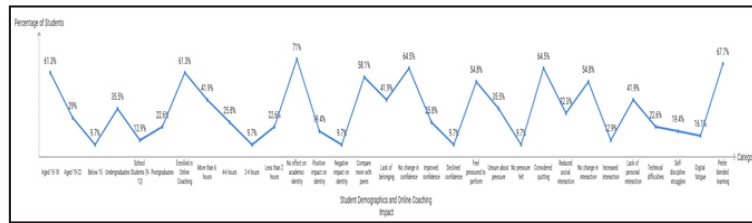


Figure-02: Student Demographic and Online Coaching Impact.

6. Limitation

This study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure participant consent, confidentiality, and data integrity. All respondents were informed about the voluntary nature of participation, and personal identifiers were not collected to maintain anonymity. The research was conducted neutrally, with no affiliations to coaching institutes, and aimed to minimize potential distress related to academic pressure and identity struggles.

7. Findings

The study's findings provide a comprehensive understanding of how online coaching influences student identity, academic confidence, psychological well-being, and social interactions. Based on responses from 31 students, the majority of students (71%) reported no significant change in their academic identity due to online coaching, while 19.4% experienced a positive impact, and 9.7% noted a negative shift. However, 58.1% admitted to comparing themselves more with peers in online coaching than in offline settings, indicating a competitive, performance-driven environment. Additionally, 41.9% of students felt a lack of belonging in online coaching, highlighting the absence of peer engagement and community interaction.

In terms of academic confidence and performance pressure, 64.5% of students reported no change in their confidence levels, while 25.8% saw improvement and 9.7% experienced a decline. However, 54.8% of students felt pressured to perform better, and a significant 64.5% had considered quitting online coaching due to stress and anxiety.

The study also explored social interactions and emotional well-being. 32.3% of students reported reduced interaction with friends and family, while 41.9% identified a lack of personal interaction as a major challenge. Technical difficulties (22.6%), self-discipline struggles (19.4%), and digital fatigue (16.1%) were other common issues. 51.6% of students never felt isolated, but 16.1% always felt isolated, indicating that while some students adapt well, others experience social detachment and digital loneliness. When asked

about preferred learning models, 67.7% of students favoured a hybrid learning approach, integrating both online flexibility and offline engagement. 48.4% stated they would choose offline coaching over online learning, reinforcing the need for structured mentorship and face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, 51.6% disagreed with the idea that online coaching could fully replace traditional classrooms. Challenges faced in online coaching included lack of personal interaction (41.9%), technical issues (22.6%), self-discipline difficulties (19.4%), and digital fatigue (16.1%). Additionally, 54.8% of students felt increased academic pressure, and 25.8% reported feeling physically exhausted due to prolonged screen time.

Overall, the results suggest that while online coaching provides accessibility and flexibility, it also contributes to stress, identity struggles, and social detachment. Most students favour a blended learning model that combines the advantages of digital education with in-person engagement. Addressing challenges such as peer interaction, mentorship, and psychological support can make online coaching a more effective and holistic learning experience.

8. Conclusion

This study highlights the dual impact of online coaching on students, offering flexibility and accessibility while also contributing to academic pressure, social isolation, and identity struggles. The findings indicate that self-comparison, lack of personal interaction, and increased stress are key challenges, with many students feeling disconnected from peer networks and real-time mentorship. However, the strong preference for a hybrid learning model (67.7%) suggests that blending online flexibility with offline engagement can create a more balanced and supportive educational experience (see Figure-03). To make online coaching truly effective, it must integrate structured mentorship, peer interaction, and mental health support, ensuring that students not only achieve academic success but also maintain emotional well-being and a strong sense of identity.

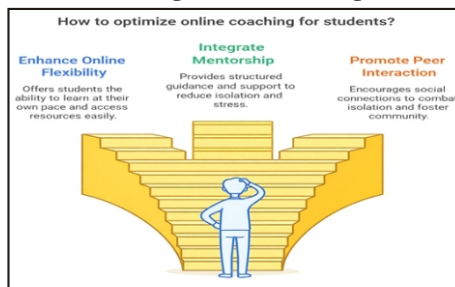


Figure-03

9. Suggestions

The discussion explores these key themes in relation to theoretical frameworks and existing literature, while also identifying possible solutions for improving the online learning experience. One of the most significant findings is that 58.1% of students compare themselves more with peers in online coaching than in offline settings. This supports Symbolic Interactionism (Mead & Goffman), which suggests that identity is shaped through interactions and social validation. In traditional classroom environments, students receive instant feedback, peer recognition, and mentorship, which helps them form a stable academic identity. However, the digital nature of online coaching creates a performance-driven environment, where students rely on rankings, test scores, and online discussions for validation. This leads to self-doubt and heightened academic pressure, as seen in the 54.8% of students who felt pressured to perform better due to online coaching.

The findings also align with Erikson's Identity vs. Role Confusion Theory, which states that young adults develop a sense of self through social interactions. A major concern highlighted in the study is that 41.9% of students reported a lack of belonging in online coaching, and 64.5% had considered quitting due to stress. The absence of peer engagement, structured mentorship, and in-person communication may contribute to feelings of academic alienation, making students question their abilities and future prospects. This further supports Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital, as students with stronger digital access and financial resources may find online coaching more beneficial, while those lacking resources experience exclusion and identity struggles.

From a psychological perspective, the impact of online coaching on self-confidence is mixed. While 64.5% of students reported no change in confidence, 25.8% saw an improvement, and 9.7% experienced a decline (see Figure-04). This suggests that students who can adapt to self-paced learning thrive, while those who rely on structured environments may struggle with motivation and self-worth. Additionally, 32.3% of students reported reduced social interaction with friends and family, which raises concerns about digital isolation and the decline of interpersonal skills. 41.9% cited a lack of personal interaction as the biggest challenge, reinforcing Durkheim's view that education functions as a social institution that integrates individuals into a shared learning culture (see Figure-04). Without real-time engagement, students may feel detached from their

academic community, leading to a fragmented sense of identity. Despite these challenges, 67.7% of students preferred a hybrid model of learning, combining online flexibility with offline peer engagement (see Figure-04). This suggests that a blended approach where students can access recorded lectures, live interactions, and in-person guidance could be the most effective way to balance academic rigor and social support. Furthermore, students identified several key areas for improvement, including more peer interaction (32.3%), reduced workload (32.3%), and better psychological support (25.8%). Addressing these concerns through mentorship programs, interactive learning methods, and mental health resources can make online coaching more student-friendly (see Figure-04).

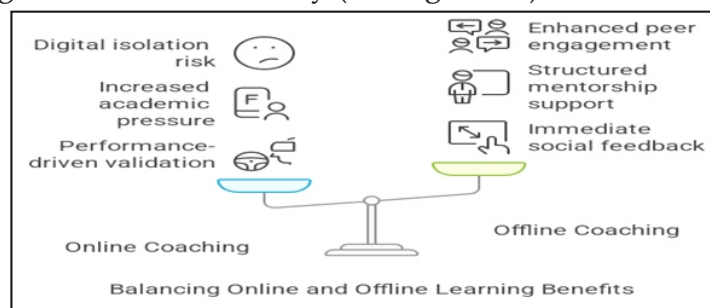


Figure-04

The research suggests that online platforms should focus on reducing academic stress, promoting peer discussions, and incorporating hybrid learning models to ensure a more holistic and identity-affirming educational experience. Future research should explore long-term effects of online learning on career development, emotional resilience, and cognitive adaptability, providing deeper insights into the changing landscape of education in the digital age.

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