CONNECTED BUT CONFUSED: THE DOUBLE EDGED – IMPACT OF DIGITAL LEARNING ON STUDENTS

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The digital age has significantly transformed education, particularly in the Philippines, where students can now learn in innovative ways thanks to the rapid adoption of online learning platforms and digital tools. Technology has opened up new possibilities, from interactive modules to AI-assisted lessons. However, it has also raised issues that make it more challenging for students to learn, stay healthy, and develop as individuals. Digital learning can be both helpful and overwhelming; therefore, teachers, parents, and policymakers need to strike a balance between connectivity and clarity.

One of the best aspects of digital learning is its ease of accessibility. Filipino students, especially those in remote or impoverished areas, can now access educational materials that were previously unavailable to them. DepEd Commons, Quipper, and Google Classroom are among the platforms that offer interactive lessons, quizzes, and exercises, enabling students to learn at their own pace. For instance, students in rural areas can utilize downloaded modules or offline apps to overcome issues with their internet connection. This means that learning can continue even when schools are closed or a natural disaster occurs.

Digital learning also enables students to learn independently and think critically. Students are encouraged to explore topics outside of class, conduct research, and apply their knowledge in new ways by utilizing online resources, e-books, and educational videos. For example, Filipino high school students can perform virtual science experiments, create digital presentations, or collaborate with classmates from different parts of the country using video conferencing and shared digital platforms. This freedom

enables people to learn how to solve problems, develop self-discipline, and remain flexible—all essential skills for the 21st century.

However, there are some issues with the transition to online learning. Many students suffer from "digital fatigue," shorter attention spans, and mental health problems because they spend too much time in front of screens. Research among tertiary students in the Philippines indicates that overdependence on digital platforms may result in stress, anxiety, and decreased academic performance. Students also struggle to stay focused and engaged due to distractions such as social media, online games, and messaging apps.

The digital divide is another worry. Some students have no trouble accessing high-speed internet and their own devices, but others struggle to connect or share devices at home. This unfairness has an effect on participation, test scores, and learning outcomes. To help close these gaps, teachers in Philippine public schools often devise new teaching methods, such as distributing printed modules, recording lessons for later use, or establishing community learning centers. However, the gap remains a significant issue for equitable education.

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