Educational
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An Analytical Study of Post-COVID Challenges in Holistic Development Among Primary Learners in Chhattisgarh

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions to education systems worldwide, profoundly affecting primary learners, particularly in rural and marginalized regions such as Chhattisgarh, India. This study explores the impact of the pandemic on the holistic development of primary learners, encompassing physical, emotional, social, vocational, and personal growth. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data was collected from 976 students across 21 primary schools in Durg and Mahasamund districts through surveys and focused group discussions. The findings reveal significant developmental gaps, including a decline in physical activity, emotional instability, reduced social interactions, and vocational skill regression. Additionally, students exhibited decreased motivation, poor academic discipline, and increased dependence on digital devices. The study highlights the compounded vulnerabilities faced by learners in rural areas, exacerbated by limited access to digital learning tools and educational resources. Based on the results, the study proposes targeted interventions, such as promoting outdoor activities, socio-emotional learning programs, vocational training, and structured academic routines, to address these gaps and foster the recovery of holistic development in the post-pandemic era. The findings emphasize the need for child-centric, inclusive educational strategies to ensure a resilient and well-rounded educational recovery.

Keywords: Primary Learners, Holistic Development, COVID-19, Post Pandemic, Challenges |

1.0 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented disruption in education systems worldwide, with young learners among the most severely impacted. In India, and particularly in states like Chhattisgarh, the abrupt shift from traditional classroom learning to remote, home-based education exposed deep-rooted inequalities and development gaps. Studies by UNESCO (2021) highlights that beyond academics, school closures have severely impacted children's physical activities, emotional stability, and social skills, leading to developmental delays in primary learners. Similarly, a report by UNICEF (2021) emphasizes that limited peer interaction and increased screen time have exacerbated emotional and behavioral challenges among young students.

Holistic development during early schooling is critical, laying the foundation for cognitive growth, emotional resilience, social competence, and vocational preparedness (Heckman, 2006). However, the prolonged closure of schools, limited access to digital tools, restricted social interactions, and heightened emotional stress during the pandemic have collectively impaired this critical aspect of child development. Research by Azim Premji University (2021) in India highlighted that, children, particularly from rural and marginalized communities, exhibited significant regressions in foundational skills and socio-emotional well-being after prolonged periods out of school. Similarly, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2021) indicated that access to digital learning remained low in rural India, contributing to learning discontinuities and widening developmental gaps. In regions like Chhattisgarh, socio-economic disparities and rural-urban divides further intensified the impact, limiting access to both academic and co-curricular growth opportunities (NCERT, 2021). Primary learners, being at a formative stage of growth, have been particularly vulnerable. The lack of structured physical activities, reduced peer engagement, increased screen time, and heightened familial and emotional stresses have created barriers to their holistic development.

In this context, this study seeks to explore and analyze these post-pandemic multi-dimensional challenges. Employing a mixed-methods approach involving surveys and focused group discussions (FGDs), this study captures the real experiences of 976 students across 21 primary schools in Durg and Mahasamund districts. By assessing the gaps in holistic development, the study aims to highlight critical areas of concern and suggest actionable strategies for educational recovery and advancement. The findings are intended to support educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in designing child-centric, inclusive, and resilient education systems for the post-COVID era.

2.0 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are
1. To assess the post-COVID impact on the physical, social, and emotional development of primary learners in Chhattisgarh.
2. To identify the specific challenges faced by primary learners in Chhattisgarh regarding their holistic development in the post-pandemic period.
3. To propose strategies and interventions for addressing the developmental gaps in primary learners in Chhattisgarh post-COVID.

3.0 Review of Related Literature

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound global impact on education, affecting over 1.6 billion learners across 190 countries (UNESCO, 2021). School closures not only disrupted formal learning but also significantly affected children's physical, emotional, and social development (UNICEF, 2021). Studies by Anderson et al. (2021) emphasized that young learners, especially in developing countries, struggled to maintain social interactions and emotional well-being due to the absence of face-to-face schooling. Holistic development, which encompasses cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and vocational growth, is crucial during the primary years, as it lays the foundation for lifelong learning and social integration (Heckman, 2006; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Disruptions during this formative stage risk long-term developmental setbacks if not addressed appropriately.

In India, national studies have highlighted the magnitude of learning and developmental losses. The Azim Premji Foundation (2021) reported that over 90% of primary school children regressed in at least one foundational skill, while the ASER 2021 report underscored that rural students faced major challenges in accessing digital education during the pandemic. Furthermore, Singh and Sengupta (2022) observed a sharp rise in emotional and behavioral issues among children, with stress, anxiety, and withdrawal becoming common phenomena. These findings underline that the impact of COVID-19 extended far beyond academics, significantly impairing students' holistic development.

Specific to Chhattisgarh, existing reports by the State Education Department (2021) and surveys conducted under Samagra Shiksha Mission (2022) indicated that many children, especially from marginalized and rural backgrounds, experienced prolonged educational deprivation. Students exhibited not only academic decline but also reduced physical activity, loss of social skills, and emotional insecurities. The state's rural and socio-economically disadvantaged population faced compounded barriers, including limited access to online learning and psychosocial support.

In response to these challenges, innovative practices aimed at educational recovery have emerged globally and nationally. Blended learning models, socio-emotional learning (SEL) initiatives, community-based teaching strategies, and mobile-based education platforms have been promoted as pathways for holistic development recovery (World Bank, 2021). Indian efforts such as NCERT's "Vidya Pravesh" program have aimed to bridge developmental gaps through play-based and experiential learning for early grades. Mental health initiatives launched by organizations like Sangath further illustrate the growing focus on emotional well-being as an integral part of post-pandemic educational strategies. Bhatia and Bhabha (2021) argue that recovery efforts must not only target academic gaps but also nurture children's physical, emotional, and social needs to ensure they grow into resilient and well-rounded individuals.

In light of the above, this study seeks to deepen the understanding of the post-pandemic challenges faced by primary learners in Chhattisgarh, with a specific emphasis on holistic development domains. It addresses an important gap in the research landscape, particularly for regions where compounded vulnerabilities have intensified the effects of the pandemic on young learners.

4.0 Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods design to assess the post-COVID impact on the holistic development of primary learners in Chhattisgarh. A multi-stage sampling method selected 976 students of grade III and V from 21 primary schools across Durg and Mahasamund districts. To assess physical, social, and emotional development, a student checklist was administered and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with students, identified specific challenges. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were thematically analyzed. Based on the findings, strategies and interventions were suggested to

address the developmental gaps and support the recovery of holistic education among primary learners in the post-pandemic period.

5.0 Results and Discussion

5.1 Learning Gaps in the Holistic Development of Learners
The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted the schooling and overall growth of primary learners, impacting not only their academic progress but also their physical, social, and emotional development. To understand these effects, a self-reporting checklist was administered to students of Classes 3 and 5 across selected schools in Chhattisgarh. This tool captured students' experiences and behaviors related to different aspects of holistic development. The following section presents the findings, highlighting the extent of learning gaps observed in physical well-being, social interaction, emotional adjustment, vocational skills, and personal habits. The results provide critical insights into the areas most affected by the pandemic and form the basis for recommending targeted interventions to support learners' complete development.

5.1.1 Analysis of Physical Wellbeing Practices Among Primary Learners Post-COVID
We analyze the physical wellbeing of primary learners in Chhattisgarh, focusing on key aspects of their daily routines and health-related habits. The data collected from the students provides valuable insights into their hygiene practices, physical activity, and overall health awareness in the post-COVID period. The table-1 presents responses from students regarding their physical wellbeing, shown in the table, offering a snapshot of the habits they have adopted during and after the pandemic. These responses reflect both positive practices as well as areas where gaps in development and engagement may still exist.
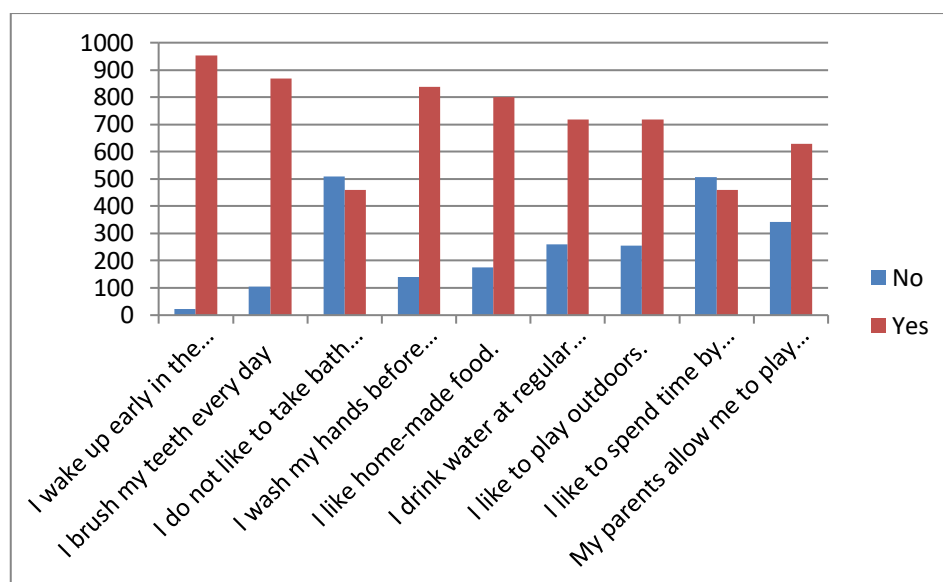
Table-1: Status of Physical Wellbeing Among Primary Learners

Sl. No.	Items	No (%)	Yes (%)
1	I wake up early in the morning.	23 (2.3)	952 (97.5)
2	I brush my teeth every	105 (10.7)	869 (89.0)
3	I do not like to take bath every day.	509 (52.1)	460 (47.1)
4	I wash my hands before taking food	139 (14.2)	837 (85.7)
5	I like home-made food.	175 (17.9)	800 (81.9)
6	I drink water at regular intervals.	259 (26.5)	717 (73.4)
7	I like to play outdoors.	256 (26.2)	719 (73.6)
8	I like to spend time by watching TV and mobile	507 (51.9)	459(47.0)
9	My parents allow me to play outside	342 (35.0)	629 (64.4)

The analysis of students' responses on physical wellbeing reveals a mixed pattern of healthy and unhealthy habits among primary learners. A positive trend is seen in fundamental routines such as waking up early (97.5%) and brushing teeth daily (89.0%), suggesting good discipline in basic hygiene practices. A large majority (85.7%) also reported washing hands before meals, reflecting an increased awareness of hygiene, possibly influenced by COVID-19 protocols.

However, concerning trends are also evident. Nearly half of the students (52.1%) admitted they do not like taking daily baths, indicating lapses in personal cleanliness. Additionally, only 73.4% reported drinking water regularly, and 73.6% enjoyed outdoor play, which suggests moderate awareness of physical health needs. Alarmingly, 51.9% preferred spending time on TV or mobile devices, highlighting a potential overdependence on screens for leisure. Moreover, only 64.4% of students reported parental permission to play outside, indicating possible restrictions on physical activities post-pandemic. Overall, while foundational hygiene habits are strong, significant gaps remain in physical activity engagement and personal cleanliness practices among learners.

Figure-1 illustrates the physical wellbeing habits of primary learners in Chhattisgarh, highlighting both positive practices and areas of concern. It provides a clear visual representation of the students' daily routines and health-related behaviors post-COVID.

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*Fig.-1: Status of Physical Wellbeing Practices Among Primary Learners*

5.1.2 Analysis of Social Wellbeing Patterns Among Primary Learners

To better understand the social wellbeing of primary learners in the post-COVID period, students were asked a series of questions related to their interactions with peers, family members, and participation in social activities. Their responses provide valuable insights into how the pandemic has influenced their social behaviors and emotional connections. The detailed findings are shown in Table-2.

Table-2: Status of Social Wellbeing Among Primary Learners

Sl. No.	Items	No (%)	Yes (%)
1	I like to play with friends.	284 (29.0)	687 (70.3)
2	I like to play video games rather than interacting with	549 (56.2)	418 (42.8)
3	I feel lonely at school.	645 (66.0)	321 (32.8)
4	I like to share my things (pencil/water bottle etc.) with	243 (24.8)	728 (74.5)
5	I like to interact/talk with neighbours.	147 (15.0)	828 (84.8)
6	I like to mingle with classmates.	184 (18.8)	789 (80.8)
7	I like to participate in school activities.	240 (24.5)	735 (75.3)
8	I feel happy after talking with friends.	273 (27.9)	702 (71.9)

It is found from the table-2 that 70.3% of students view that they like to play with their friends, whereas only 42.8% students like to play the video games rather than interacting with parents and their siblings. It is quite shocking that more than 32% students mark yes as they feel lonely at school. Further, more than 74% students like to share their things (pencil/water bottle etc.) with their friends. More than 80% of students like to interact with their neighbours, mingle with classmates and 75.3% of students like to participate in school activities. Lastly, it is found that around 71.9 % of students feel happy after talking with their friends presented in figure-2.
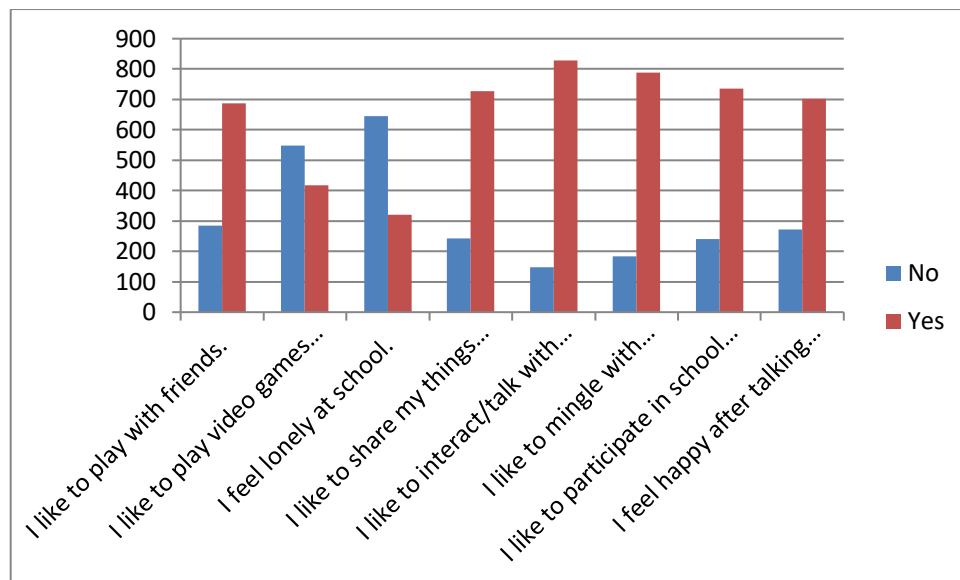
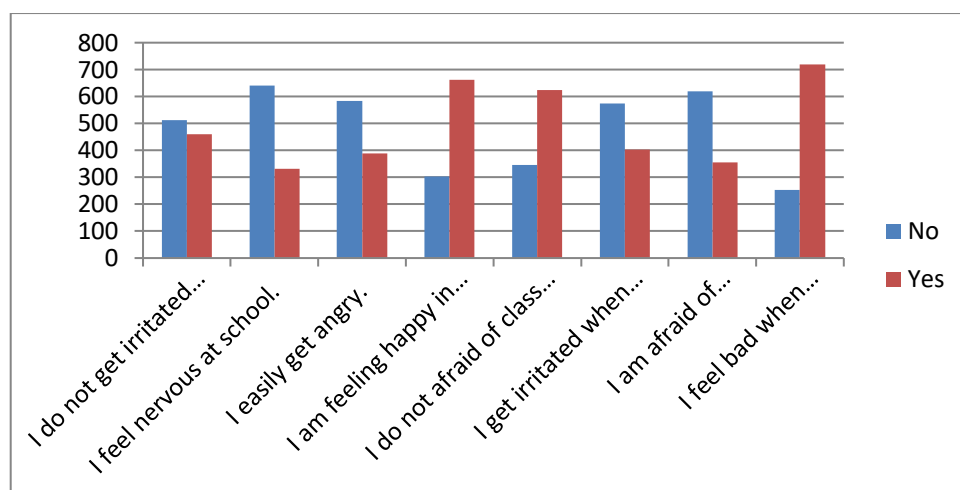***Fig.2: Status of Social Wellbeing among primary learners***

5.1.3 Emotional Wellbeing Status of Primary Learners

To understand the emotional wellbeing of primary learners in the post-COVID period, students were asked questions related to their feelings, reactions, and emotional responses in different situations. Their responses provide insights into their emotional stability, stress levels, and social sensitivity. The details of their emotional wellbeing are presented in Table-3.

Table-3: Emotional Wellbeing Status of Primary Learners

Sl. No.	Items	No (%)	Yes (%)
1	I do not get irritated when internet connection got	513 (52.5)	461 (47.2)
2	I feel nervous at school.	641 (65.6)	332 (34.0)
3	I easily get angry.	583 (59.7)	388 (39.7)
4	I am feeling happy in company of friends.	304 (31.1)	661 (67.7)
5	I do not afraid of class works.	345 (35.3)	625 (64.0)
6	I get irritated when parents do not fulfil my demands.	573 (58.7)	402 (41.1)
7	I am afraid of examination.	620 (63.5)	355 (36.3)
8	I feel bad when somebody hurts my friend	254 (26.0)	720 (73.7)

The emotional wellbeing of primary learners was assessed based on their responses to various statements, as shown in Table-3. The findings reveal that a significant proportion of students experience emotional disturbances. About 65.6% of learners reported feeling nervous at school, and 63.5% expressed fear of examinations. Additionally, 59.7% of students mentioned that they easily get angry, and 58.7% admitted to getting irritated when their demands are not met by parents. On a positive note, 67.7% of learners feel happy in the company of friends, and 64.0% do not feel afraid of classwork, indicating some emotional resilience. Furthermore, 73.7% of students showed empathy by feeling bad when their friends are hurt. Overall, the results highlight the need for targeted emotional support strategies to help learners cope with school-related stress and build emotional strength in the post-COVID context shown in figure-3.

*Fig:3: Status of Emotional Wellbeing among Primary Learners*

5.1.4 Status of Development of Vocational Skills among Primary Learners

Vocational skills play a crucial role in shaping a child's practical abilities, sense of responsibility, and self-confidence. In the present study, learners were assessed on their basic vocational competencies such as handwriting, use of technology, basic drawing skills, project completion, and participation in household activities. The responses recorded from the students regarding their vocational skills are shown in Table-4.

Table-4: Status of Vocational Skills among Primary Learners

Sl. No.	Items	No (%)	Yes (%)
1	I have good handwriting.	305(31.2)	666 (68.2)
2	I can operate mobile/laptop.	255 (26.1)	713 (73.0)
3	I can draw closed figures (circle, triangle).	240 (24.5)	734 (75.2)
4	I can measure length and breadth of geometric	217 (22.2)	755 (77.3)
5	I complete project/homework on time.	223 (22.8)	748 (76.6)
6	I like to do household works	216 (22.1)	757 (77.5)
7	I complete my homework independently	301 (30.8)	671 (68.7)

The data presented in Table-4 reveals that a majority of the students demonstrated positive vocational skills. About 68.2% of students reported having good handwriting, while 73.0% were able to operate a mobile or laptop independently. A strong 75.2% could draw basic closed figures like circles and triangles, and 77.3% could measure lengths and breadths of geometric figures accurately. Similarly, 76.6% of students completed project work and homework on time, and 77.5% actively participated in household tasks. Furthermore, 68.7% of learners mentioned completing their homework independently. These results suggest that despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic, a significant number of primary learners maintained or developed essential vocational skills, indicating a positive aspect of their holistic development shown in figure-4.
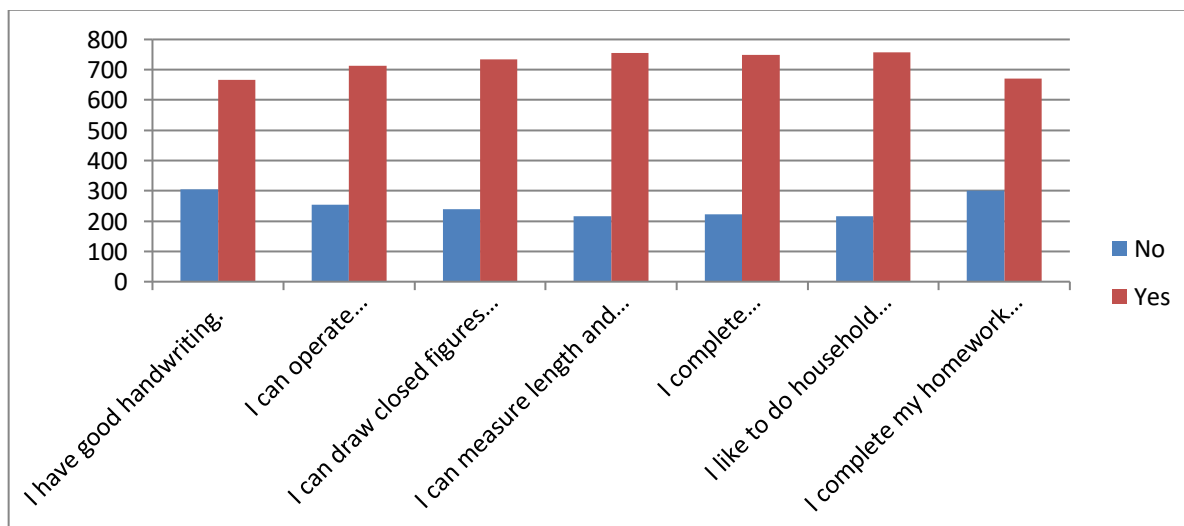
*Fig.4: Status of Vocational Skills among Primary Learners*

5.1.5 Assessment of Personal Development Among Primary Learners

Personal development is a key component of holistic growth that includes self-discipline, hygiene practices, digital learning habits, and social responsibility. To understand the level of personal development among primary learners in the post-COVID period, students were asked to respond to various statements related to their daily habits, school-related responsibilities, and digital engagement. Their responses are compiled and presented in Table-5.

Table-5: Status of Personal Development among Primary Learners

Sl. No.	Items	No (%)	Yes (%)
1	I easily communicate with teachers.	250 (25.6)	721 (73.8)
2	I plan time to manage homework and play.	269 (27.5)	702 (71.9)
3	I face difficulty in completing school work.	567 (58.0)	404 (41.3)
4	I do my work (arranging books/notes/dress/shoes).	223 (22.8)	749 (76.7)
5	I help in keeping the school and classroom neat and clean.	85 (8.7)	887 (90.8)
6	I put waste materials in dustbin.	147 (15.0)	821 (84.1)
7	I follow the school rules.	155 (15.8)	819 (83.9)
8	I attend school regularly	233 (23.8)	741 (75.9)
9	I learn lessons from YouTube	264 (27.0)	711 (72.8)
10	I lost interest in wearing school dresses	483 (49.4)	492 (50.4)

The data in Table-5 reveals encouraging trends in personal development among primary learners. A significant majority (73.8%) reported being able to communicate easily with teachers, and 71.9% could manage time between homework and play. While 58% still reported difficulties in completing schoolwork, 76.7% were able to take responsibility for organizing personal belongings. Hygiene-related habits were highly evident, with 90.8% helping to keep the school clean and 84.1% using dustbins properly. Moreover, 83.9% followed school rules and 75.9% attended school regularly. A promising 72.8% reported using YouTube as a learning tool, indicating growing digital adaptability. However, 50.4% expressed disinterest in wearing school uniforms, possibly reflecting lingering post-pandemic detachment. Overall, the findings suggest positive personal habits but also highlight areas like motivation and academic discipline where further support is needed. Shown in figure-5
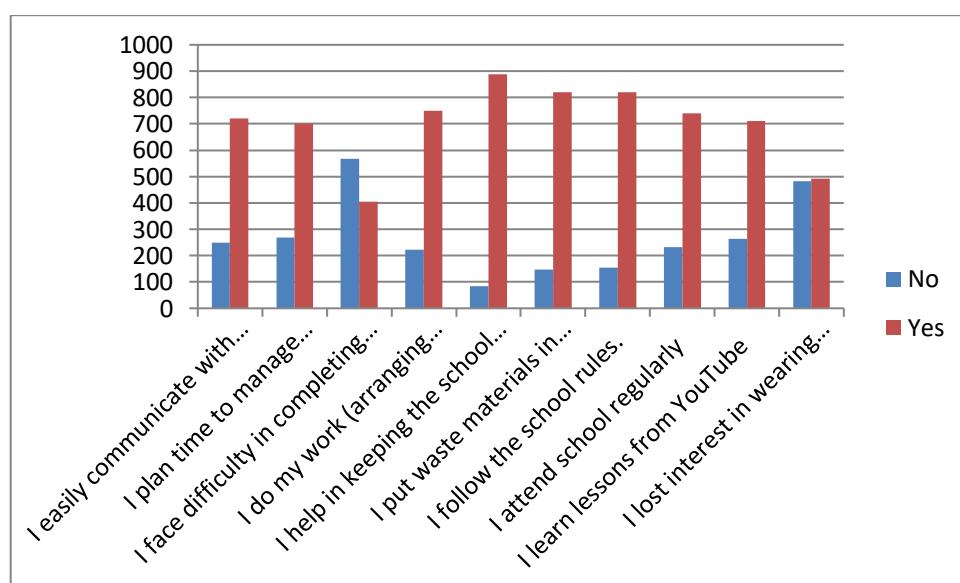
Fig.5 Trends in Personal Development Indicators among Primary Learners

5.2 Identifying the Challenges in Holistic Development of Primary Learners in Chhattisgarh Post-Pandemic

The second objective focuses on identifying challenges in the holistic development of primary learners in Chhattisgarh following the COVID-19 pandemic. Holistic development encompasses academic, physical, emotional, social, and vocational growth, all of which have been significantly impacted.

- Physical Development: Many students experienced reduced physical activity due to school closures and restricted outdoor play, leading to a sedentary lifestyle. A notable number of students lacked parental permission for outdoor activities, further limiting physical engagement.

- Social Development: Social isolation during the pandemic disrupted peer interactions, resulting in feelings of loneliness. This disconnection is also reflected in the growing preference for digital activities over socializing with peers or family.
- Emotional Development: Students faced increased emotional strain, with many expressing feelings of nervousness and anxiety about school and exams. This emotional toll has led to difficulties in emotional regulation, stress, and behavioral issues.
- Vocational Development: Limited exposure to hands-on activities and practical learning has hindered vocational development. While students possess basic skills, many struggle with time management and practical problem-solving tasks.
- Personal Development: Students showed signs of a decline in academic discipline and motivation, reflected in challenges like incomplete homework and a lack of interest in school routines, such as wearing uniforms.

In conclusion, the pandemic has left students in Chhattisgarh with significant challenges in physical, social, emotional, and vocational development. Addressing these gaps is essential for fostering holistic growth moving forward.

5.3 Suggesting Strategies and Interventions for Addressing Developmental Gaps in Primary Learners in Chhattisgarh Post-Pandemic

The third objective aims to propose effective strategies and interventions to bridge the developmental gaps observed in primary learners post-COVID.

- Physical Development: Encouraging outdoor activities, sports, and fitness programs within schools can help students regain lost physical health. Initiatives like "physical education days" and community sports events can foster engagement.
- Social Development: Rebuilding peer connections through group activities, cooperative learning, and community-based events is crucial. Schools can organize interactive workshops to improve social skills and emotional expression.
- Emotional Development: Implementing socio-emotional learning (SEL) programs can support emotional resilience. Schools can introduce counseling services, peer support groups, and mindfulness exercises to manage anxiety and stress.
- Vocational Development: Strengthening vocational training programs and integrating project-based learning into the curriculum can equip students with practical skills. Collaborations with local artisans or businesses may offer hands-on experiences.
- Personal Development: Fostering routine, responsibility, and academic discipline through structured programs and parent involvement is essential. Encouraging the use of digital learning tools, like YouTube and educational apps, can help maintain academic engagement.

In essence, a multifaceted approach involving community collaboration, school-led initiatives, and digital interventions is needed to ensure a well-rounded recovery of primary learners in Chhattisgarh.

6.0 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the holistic development of primary learners in Chhattisgarh, with profound impacts on their physical, social, emotional, vocational, and personal growth. The findings of this study highlight that while certain areas such as hygiene and basic personal routines showed resilience, other critical aspects of development, including physical activity, emotional well-being, and social interactions, experienced noticeable setbacks. Reduced access to outdoor play, increased screen time, feelings of loneliness, emotional distress, and declines in academic motivation point to the multifaceted challenges faced by these young learners in the post-pandemic period.

In light of these challenges, this study emphasizes the urgent need for targeted interventions that focus on re-establishing physical and social engagement, enhancing emotional support, and fostering practical skills development. A holistic recovery strategy, integrating physical education, social-emotional learning, vocational training, and academic support, is essential for bridging the developmental gaps. Collaboration between schools, communities, and digital platforms will play a pivotal role in supporting primary learners' recovery and ensuring their overall growth. Addressing these gaps is not just critical for academic success, but also for nurturing well-rounded, resilient individuals capable of navigating the challenges of the post-pandemic world.

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