

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Obstacles for Children' Physical, Social, Emotional and Moral Development (PSEM) – With Special Reference to COVID-19

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## Abstract

Human beings become the human resource while humans possess good Physical, Social, Emotional, and Moral Development (PSEM). This PSEM is developing during formal and concrete operational stages. But the contemporary school, schooling, social, and family environment are not providing sufficient opportunities for children for sound physical, social, emotional, and moral development (PSEM). The socio-economic changes, reevaluation in information and communication technology are becoming great challenges to the children's physical, social, emotional, and moral development. Keeping these as a background the author intended to describe the challenges and obstacles in the development of PSEM by 21st-century children with special reference to the Covid-19 situation.

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## Introduction

Social harmony is associated with the quality of life of the people and it is determined by the sound physical, social, emotional, and moral development (PSEM). But it is very unfortunate that the contemporary family system, lifestyle, habits, socio-economic changes all together influence the school and schooling system, physical health, emotional and moral development of the children. Along with these, the 21st century started with Covid-19 and it will be extended next few years. The Covid-19 environment becomes very crucial to young children because it is not allowing for physical development, social, emotional, and moral development. The epidemic environment creates a scare among the young children and the Covid-19 guideline instructed them not to engage with outdoor activities, avoid face to face to social interaction, social and cultural functions, etc. The continuous lockdown forced the young children to engage online in different platforms like online classes, social media, online games, etc. Beyond that, in the 21st century the nuclear family system, social isolation, detached from the common stream of society, distinguished lifestyle, etc. are diminished the opportunities for children to develop sound physical, social, emotional, and moral development. The UNESCO (2017) stated that the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

## Obstacles for Children' Physical Development

The 21st century is the age of knowledge; hence the parents, schools, educational administrators, core curriculum, etc., are forced to focus only on the cognitive domain. But the physical activities and students' psychomotor are very important for physical development. Contemporary society reduces and ignored the importance of physical development. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) stated that 38 million children under the age of five were overweight or obese in 2019. Narayana (2019) stated that childhood obesity is now an epidemic in India. With 14.4 million obese children, India has the second-highest number of obese children in the world, next to China. Almost half of the children under the age of five who were overweight or obese in 2019 lived in Asia. The major cause of childhood obesity is an imbalance between calories consumed and energy spent. It may be due to changes in food habits, indoor activities, urbanization, etc., which leads to an increase in sedentary lifestyles and a decline in physical activity. The young children are not allowed to engage in Physical Training during school hours, the parents also forcing and asking the children to concentrate on scoring more marks rather than physical development. The urbanized physical environment also decreased outdoor activities. Beyond that, the continuous lockdown during Covid -19 forced the children to stay within four walls.

There are many contemporary research findings such as Robinson, Boyland, Chisholm, Harrold, Maloney, Marty, Mead, Noonan, & Hardman (2021) Obesity, eating behavior and physical activity during COVID-19 lockdown: A study of UK adults, Zhang, Chen, Jia, & Han (2021) Locked on Excessive consumption of high-

sodium foods during COVID-19 presents an underappreciated public health risk: a review, Skotnicka, Karwowska, Kłobukowski, Wasilewska, & Małgorzewicz (2021) studied the Dietary Habits before and during the COVID-19 Epidemic in Selected European Countries, etc., reveals the during lockdown, higher Body Mass Index was associated with lower levels of physical activity and diet quality, and a greater reported frequency of overeating.

### **Obstacles in Social and Emotional Development**

Social and emotional development helps to sustain social harmony which includes valuing, expressing, and promoting love, trust, admiration, peace, respect, generosity, equity upon other people in any particular society regardless of their national origin, weight, marital status, ethnicity, colour, gender, race, caste, age, occupation, etc. Social and emotional development helps children start to understand who they are, what they are feeling and what to expect when interacting with fellow friends, known and unknown people. The positive social and emotional development is important because it creates and sustains positive relationships with communities, experience, manage and express social emotions, explore and engage with the social and cultural environment.

School is the best place to develop and strengthen social and emotional development among children. Social interaction is also very important to understand the cultural background which helps the children to make a psychological bond to the local community. The socio-emotional development helps to promote the commitment to duty, love the environment, increase patriotism, and identify their nationality, expression of various emotions, to identify their ability, impulse and other emotional control. But it is very unfortunate that the contemporary school environment and social environment such as nuclear family system, isolated houses, social isolation due to unnecessary prestigious issues, etc., are altogether becoming the worst barrier to children's social and emotional development. It is very unfortunate that the Covid-19 situation did not allow doing proper schooling and social interaction. The continuous social isolation and lockdown are prohibiting social and peer interaction. The young children are all engaged with digital classroom, social media, and digital gaming. The digital environment is a great threat to the socio-emotional development of children.

The empirical evidence such as Idoiaga, Berasategi, Eiguren, & Picaza (2020) made a study on Exploring Children's Social and Emotional Representations of the COVID-19 Pandemic and observed that the children who are continuously engaged in social isolation and digital environment are affecting emotions of fear, nervousness, sadness, happiness, calmness, boredom, and anger. To overcome these issues Coyne et al (2020) recommended to give special attention must also be paid to the emotions of fear, worry, guilt, loneliness, boredom, and anger, with an emphasis on strengthening resilience and offering psychological support to parents and children. Children must be given specific training in social-emotional skills is taught how to solve their own problems independently, to see other perspectives, negotiate, and make compromises.

### **History of Moral Development Theories**

Moral development is the process through which children develop proper attitudes and behaviors toward other people in society, based on social and cultural norms, rules, and laws (Encyclopedia of Children's Health, 2021). According to the surrounding social and physical environment, the children's moral development is determined. The school, community, and family altogether should provide a suitable environment for moral development. There are many theories that described moral development. Jean Piaget ((1932) explored how children developed moral reasoning; Lawrence Kohlberg (1958) extended Piaget's work in cognitive reasoning into adolescence and adulthood. He felt that moral development was a slow process and evolved over time, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) studied children and schools in different cultures since many ethnic, religious, and social groups often have their own rules for moral behavior. Later the Carol Gilligan's (1982) morality of care theory opened up explorations of moral reasoning in many groups and cultures. He further explained that women's experiences in the world differ from men's in every culture; it would stand to reason that women's moral development might differ from men's, perhaps in significant ways.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century obstacles for Moral Development**

There are many obstacles are faced by 21st-century children for sound moral development. The researcher has taken Kohlberg's (1958) Theory of Moral Development to describe various 21st-century obstacles. This theory consists of three levels as Level 1. Preconvention Morality, Level 2. Conventional Morality and Level 3. Post conventional Morality. In this contemporary covid-19 pandemic physical environment, the social and economic situation leads to many challenges in these three levels and six stages. This is the era of the digital world and the Covid-19 pandemic forced us to adapt to digital learning. As a result, the moral developments among young children become very challenging for teaching communities. Table No - 1 describes the possibilities and nature of moral development in the physical classrooms and 21st-century obstacles to moral development.

**Table: 1. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Obstacles for Moral Development**

Levels	Age	Stages	Nature of Moral Development In Physical Classroom	21 <sup>st</sup> century Obstacles for Moral Development
1. Pre-conventional Morality	Up to – 6	Stage 1. Obedience and Punishment.	Monitoring the Obedience and punishment are especially common in young children	It is not possible to impose positive punishment and monitor obedience in digital learning
	Up to – 9	Stage 2. Individualism and Exchange.	Possible and distinguish the individualism, things to be exchanges, sharing to friends, etc.	It not providing to the children to sharing, exchanging, assisting to others, etc.
2. Conventional Morality	Up to – 12	Stage 3. Developing Good Interpersonal Relationships.	It is possible physical interact with friends, peer group, society, etc.	The digital interaction may not develop psychological wellbeing.
	Up to – 15	Stage 4. Maintaining Social Order	The respect, patriotism, social order, respects, self control, etc., are possible.	Teaching and practicing the social order in Digital classroom is very challenge.
3. Post-conventional Morality	Above – 15	Stage 5. Social Contract and Individual Moral Rights	Understanding the social contract, its executions, identifying individual moral rights, etc., possible in physical classroom.	It is very difficult in identifying and execution of moral right in digital classroom.
		Stage 6. Universal moral Principles	Both physical and Digital classroom provides to understand the universal moral principles.	

(Source: Encyclopedia of Children’s Health & The Brain from Top to Bottom)

**Obstacles in Moral choice** – In the 21st century, the entire world is connected with Information and communication technology and there is a huge conflict in deciding whether to act in the morally right way. The 21st-century international citizens while engaged in the digital world they are struggling in personalizing the Low or myopic moral perception. The youths are failing to see the moral dimensions of given international E-environment and in the situations such as social media, online meeting, online interaction, online teaching, etc.

**Moral Disengagement and Mismanagement** – The modern Digital classroom and the continuous Covid – 19 situations force the students to engage in the online environment in which able to provide only theoretical experience and the practical experience is very poor in digital learning. Hence, the young generation forced to face moral conflicts, moral disengagement, and moral mismanagement. There are many informal norms and formal moral codes that are inculcated to the students during the physical classroom. Such norms and codes created by teachers, the school environment, etc., are practiced according to the situation in the physical classroom but it is not possible in the digital environment.

**Obstacles in Moral Judgment** - It is the process of perceiving an act as morally right or wrong. The digital classroom may not provide sufficient time and multiple situations to practice moral judgment. The ICT-based teaching and learning may boost the cognitive domain but may not give opportunities to strengthen the affective domain and practical experience. The modern online classes provide insufficient time and situation to ethical and moral decision-making.

**Cultural and Religious Bias in Moral Development** – Respecting to all culture and religious belief is one of the major moral behavior which is possible in the physical classroom. In the face-to-face classes, the students are having the opportunities to interact with peer groups who are maybe from different cultures, religions, socio-economic backgrounds, etc. In the formal classroom, informal moral development has happened in the school environment. Hence, the physical classrooms inject various practical strategies and experiences to overcome cultural and religious biases.

In the 21st century, the educational service converted into a commodity. As result, contemporary school education has many hierarchies, different infrastructure, different teaching and learning strategies materials, etc. As result, while increases the money the quality of education is also increasing. Equity is not given to all young students. The young students are trained as socially isolated citizens in the various hierarchy of the school system. As result, the students are struggling to relate themselves to the local community, culture, environment, spirituality, ethics, and moral behaviour.

### Summary

Moral development is very inevitable for school-age children. The school, teacher, family, and community must

provide suitable environments and situations for children to moral development. But the modern ICT development, various hierarchies in the school system, catastrophic shifts in teaching and learning methods are becoming great challenges in inculcation and practicing moral development among students' communities. Hence, it is need of the hour to redefine the right to education act to provide equal opportunities to all the students to access modern educational amenities. There should not be any differentiation in school education. Moral development will possible by providing equal school and schooling.

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