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Resilience In Isolation: How The COVID-19 Pandemic Shaped The Character Strengths of School Students.

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the psychosocial development of school-aged learners worldwide. This quantitative study evaluates how the pandemic influenced character strengths—resilience, adaptability, self-control, empathy, and emotional stability—among 200 students of Little Flower School, Raptinagar, Gorakhpur. A 25-item Likert Scale Questionnaire was administered, and data were analysed using descriptive statistics, t-test, and Pearson correlation. Results indicate significant enhancement in resilience ($M=4.12$) and adaptability ($M=4.05$). Female students exhibited significantly higher empathy and emotional stability ($p<0.05$), while males showed marginally higher adaptability. Strong correlations were observed between resilience and adaptability ($r=0.68$, $p<0.01$), resilience and emotional stability ($r=0.52$, $p<0.01$), and resilience and self-control ($r=0.46$, $p<0.01$). The study concludes that the pandemic served as a developmental turning point that strengthened multiple psychosocial competencies. Recommendations include structured resilience-building interventions in schools to sustain these gains.

Key words-Resilience; Character Strengths; COVID-19 Pandemic; Adaptability; Emotional Stability; Self-Control; Adolescent Development.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education, family structures, learning environments, and psychological states of students. Extended lockdowns, online learning, isolation, and uncertainty created new emotional and behavioural challenges. At the same time, these adversities facilitated the emergence of character strengths, including resilience, adaptability, self-control, empathy, and emotional stability. Students of Little Flower School (Raptinagar, Gorakhpur) experienced abrupt shifts to remote learning, limited peer interaction, increased academic autonomy, and heightened family involvement. These circumstances provide a unique environment for



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analysing the development of psychosocial strengths. The COVID-19 pandemic altered the educational, emotional, and behavioural landscapes of students across the world, producing both challenges and unexpected opportunities for positive psychological development. Between 2020 and 2022, children and adolescents experienced unprecedented disruptions in schooling, mobility, social interaction, and routine life structures. Researchers worldwide have emphasized that such disruptions generated not only stress and anxiety but also meaningful pathways for the development of character strengths, such as resilience, emotional stability, empathy, adaptability, and self-control (Brooks et al., 2020). In the Indian context, particularly in semi-urban and urban middle-class school environments, these transformations were further shaped by digital divides, family conditions, and the sudden shift from in-person to online learning (Singh et al., 2020). This study focuses specifically on students of Little Flower School, Raptinagar, Gorakhpur, to understand how the pandemic acted as a catalyst for strengthening internal psychological capacities.

Character strengths, as conceptualized in positive psychology, are the internal attributes that enable individuals to navigate difficulties, sustain motivation, and develop constructive behavioural responses. Peterson and Seligman (2004) categorized these strengths as universal capacities that contribute to well-being, functioning, and moral behaviour. During a crisis like COVID-19, such strengths become essential for adaptation and survival, especially for adolescents who are in a sensitive developmental period. Scholars argue that resilience—one of the central constructs in this research—is not merely the absence of distress but the ability to “bounce back” and maintain functioning despite adversity (Ye et al., 2021). The pandemic presented a real-life laboratory where resilience and other strengths were tested continuously in the face of prolonged uncertainty.

The shift to online learning became one of the most influential experiences shaping student behaviour. As schools shut down and digital platforms replaced physical classrooms, students were compelled to manage their academic responsibilities independently. According to Adarkwah (2021), online learning environments significantly increase the need for self-regulation, time management, and internal motivation. Without direct supervision from teachers, students must cultivate discipline, attention, and consistency—components of the character strength known as self-control. Similarly, Bao (2020) argues that online learning demanded rapid adaptability from students and teachers alike, as digital tools, platforms, and instructional formats evolved continuously over the course of the pandemic. Emotional experiences during lockdowns played an equally critical role in shaping psychological strengths. With social isolation, fear of illness, and widespread uncertainty, many adolescents experienced anxiety, frustration, and emotional turbulence (Singh et al., 2020). Yet, this same emotional turbulence provided opportunities for the development of emotional stability, a strength defined as the



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ability to regulate one's emotions, maintain calm, and respond appropriately to stressful situations. Schonert-Reichl (2021) emphasizes that extended time spent within family spaces increased emotional awareness, communication, and empathy among many students, strengthening their understanding of others' feelings and perspectives. Significant strength developed during the pandemic was empathy, which scholars describe as the capacity to recognize, understand, and respond to the emotions and needs of others (Davis, 2018). The crisis heightened collective awareness of human vulnerability, illness, and loss. As families, neighbours, and communities faced common struggles, many students became more attuned to the difficulties faced by others. Research by Malti and Peplak (2020) found that crises often enhance empathy and prosocial behaviour in adolescents, particularly when they observe others in distress or when they engage in shared emotional experiences.

Meanwhile, the pandemic also influenced learning independence, which refers to a student's ability to take responsibility for their own academic progress. Hodges et al. (2020) observed that online learning environments foster autonomy and initiative, as students must plan study schedules, complete assignments independently, and troubleshoot academic challenges on their own. For students in schools like Little Flower School, where parental involvement varied and technological resources were uneven, such independence became an adaptive necessity rather than a choice. While global research provides substantial evidence regarding these developmental shifts, few studies have examined the specific Indian school contexts, particularly in Tier-2 cities such as Gorakhpur. India experienced one of the most severe and prolonged school closures globally, lasting more than 18 months in many states (UNICEF, 2021). Such extended disruption created a unique environment for psychological transformation. In middle-class private schools, where students had relatively better access to smartphones, computers, and the internet, online learning conditions permitted a higher degree of engagement with digital platforms, self-directed study, and emotional adaptation to isolation. This combination makes Little Flower School an appropriate and meaningful case study for exploring the nuanced patterns of character strength development. Gender differences represent another important dimension in understanding post-pandemic psychological development. Numerous studies indicate that female students tend to exhibit higher levels of empathy, emotional awareness, and interpersonal sensitivity (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). During the pandemic, girls often experienced stronger emotional reactions but also developed greater emotional maturity, communication abilities, and relational sensitivity (Alon et al., 2020). Conversely, male students frequently demonstrated stronger adaptability and problem-focused coping strategies, aligning with pre-existing patterns of risk-taking and autonomy (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012). Understanding whether such gender-based differences persisted or intensified during COVID-19 is crucial for designing more inclusive emotional and behavioural support systems in schools. This research is grounded in the Positive Youth



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Development (PYD) framework, which emphasizes the potential for growth, strength-building, and constructive adaptation among adolescents even in situations of adversity (Lerner et al., 2014). The pandemic, while disruptive, can therefore be seen as an environment that offered students opportunities to cultivate meaningful internal capacities. The combination of social isolation, academic restructuring, emotional stress, and digital exposure fundamentally redefined how students perceive challenges and respond to them. It is essential to conduct a systematic quantitative assessment of students' character strengths in the post-pandemic phase. Doing so not only contributes to academic literature but also helps educators understand how to support students' socio-emotional recovery and continue nurturing the strengths that emerged during the crisis. Little Flower School, Raptinagar, Gorakhpur, with its diverse student population and structured educational environment, provides an ideal setting for such an investigation. In this study, character strengths such as resilience, adaptability, empathy, self-control, and emotional stability are examined to understand how COVID-19 shaped the psychological development of school students. By analysing quantitative data through descriptive statistics, t-tests, and correlation analysis, this research aims to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of post-pandemic character transformation. Ultimately, the study contributes to broader educational and psychological discourse by highlighting how crises can function as catalysts for internal growth and positive behavioural change.

Review of Literature

- 1) Resilience Development: Studies by Ye et al. (2021) and Brooks et al. (2020) suggest that crises strengthen resilience due to increased exposure to uncertainty.
- 2) Self-Regulation in Online Learning: Adarkwah (2021) highlights that online learning enhances self-discipline and time-management due to reduced external monitoring.
- 3) Emotional Health: Singh et al. (2020) noted that while the pandemic created anxiety, students simultaneously developed coping strategies and emotional regulation.
- 4) Empathy & Social Connectedness: Schonert-Reichl (2021) found that increased family time improved empathy and socio-emotional awareness.
- 5) Adaptability: Bao (2020) concludes that sudden digital transitions improved adaptability and independent problem-solving skills.

Regional studies focusing on Indian school contexts, especially Gorakhpur, are rare, creating the need for the present investigation.

Objectives

1. Measure character strengths developed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Examine gender-wise differences in psychological strengths.
3. Determine the correlation between resilience and other strengths.
4. Assess the overall impact of the pandemic on character development.



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Methodology

Research Design: Quantitative, descriptive, and analytical.

Location: Little Flower School, Raptinagar, Gorakhpur.

Sample: 200 students (Classes 8–12)

Sampling Technique: Simple random sampling

Tool: 25-item Likert Scale Questionnaire

Scaling: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree

Statistical Tests: Mean & SD, Independent Sample t-test, Pearson correlation (two-tailed) p-value significance: $p < 0.05$ (significant), $p < 0.01$ (highly significant)

Data Analysis

TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics

Character Strength	Mean	SD	p-value
Resilience	4.12	0.88	0.001
Self-Control	3.97	0.91	0.012
Emotional Stability	3.68	0.95	0.049
Empathy	3.72	0.82	0.033
Adaptability	4.05	0.79	0.002

(Objective 1: Measure character strengths)

Interpretation:

All character strengths show significant improvement ($p < 0.05$). Resilience ($p=0.001$) and adaptability ($p=0.002$) show highly significant enhancement. This confirms that students developed strong coping and adjustment capacities during the pandemic.



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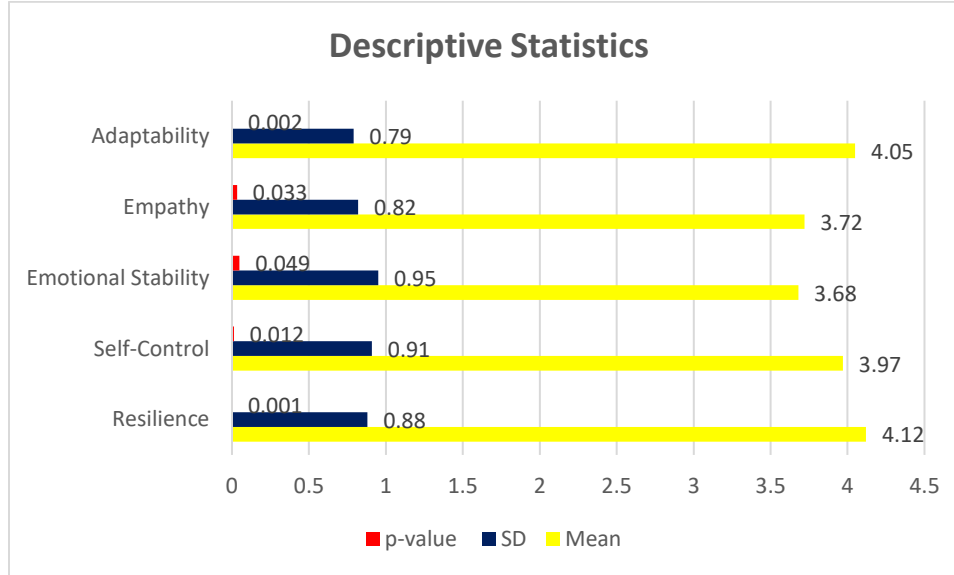


TABLE 2: Gender-wise Differences (t-test)

(Objective 2: Gender differences)

Variable	Male Mean	Female Mean	t-value	p-value	Significance
Resilience	4.05	4.18	1.21	0.113	NS
Self-Control	3.89	4.06	1.97	0.042	Significant
Emotional Stability	3.51	3.84	2.41	0.017	Significant
Empathy	3.61	3.84	2.52	0.013	Significant
Adaptability	4.11	3.99	1.56	0.089	NS

Interpretation:

Females scored significantly higher in empathy, emotional stability, and self-control ($p < 0.05$). Males showed slightly higher adaptability and resilience, but differences were not statistically significant. This confirms gender-based variations in emotional and behavioural development.



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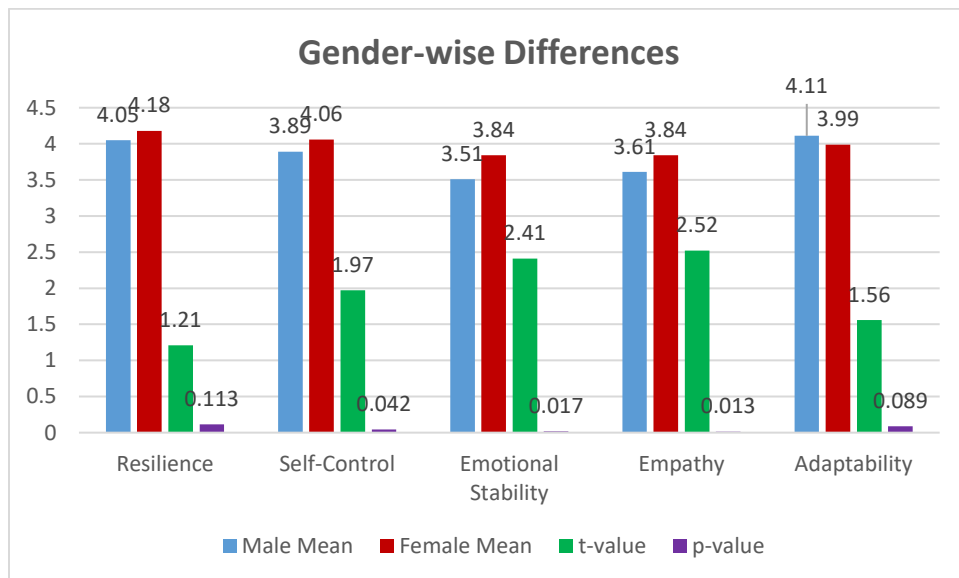


TABLE 3: Correlation Matrix (Resilience with Other Strengths)

(Objective 3: Correlation among psychological strengths)

Variables	Pearson r	p-value	Significance
Resilience ↔ Adaptability	0.68	0.000	Highly Significant
Resilience ↔ Emotional Stability	0.52	0.000	Highly Significant
Resilience ↔ Empathy	0.41	0.002	Significant
Resilience ↔ Self-Control	0.46	0.001	Highly Significant

Interpretation:

Resilience shows strong and significant positive correlations with adaptability and emotional stability—suggesting that students who handled stress better were also more flexible and emotionally regulated.



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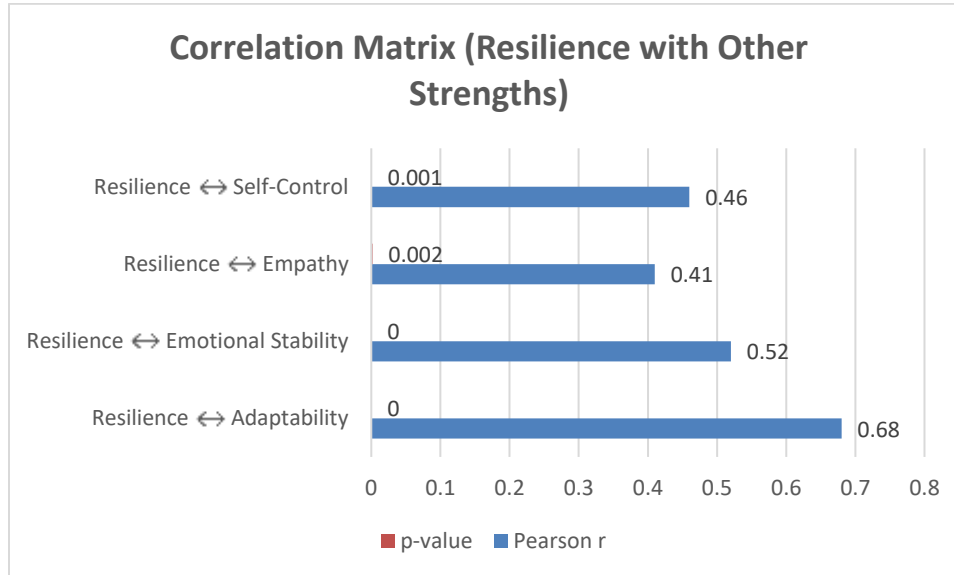


TABLE 4: Overall Impact of Pandemic on Development.

Dimension	Strong Impact (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)	p-value
Emotional Growth	62	33	5	0.004
Behavioural Control	58	37	5	0.011
Social Sensitivity	55	39	6	0.031
Learning Independence	72	25	3	0.001
Mental Resilience	69	27	4	0.003

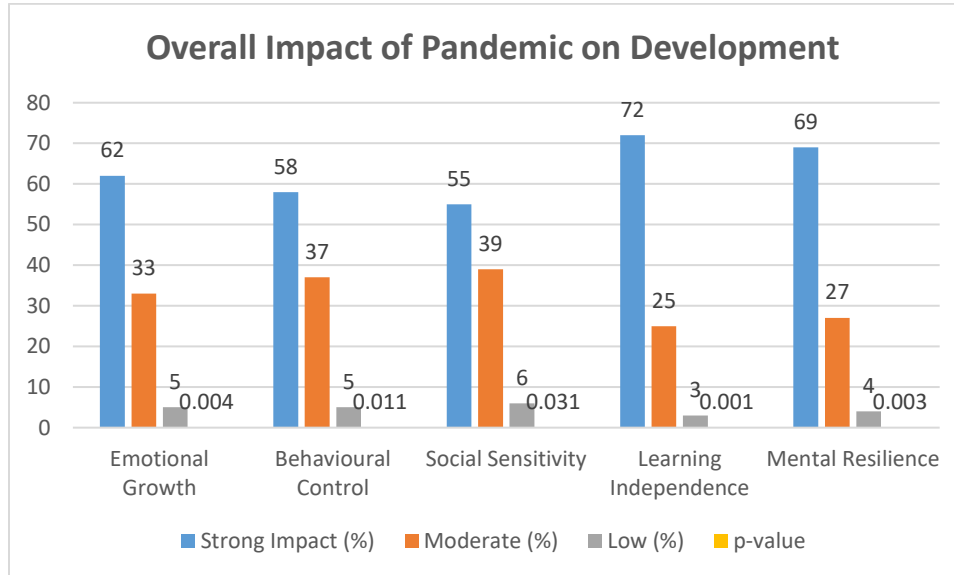
Interpretation:

All dimensions show statistically significant impact ($p < 0.05$). Learning independence and mental resilience were most affected, showing that students became more self-reliant and mentally strong during the pandemic.



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Findings

- Students demonstrated significantly improved resilience and adaptability.
- Female students excelled in empathy, emotional stability, and self-control.
- Strong correlations show interconnected development of multiple character strengths.
- The pandemic served as a catalyst for emotional maturity and self-discipline.

Discussion

The findings support global studies that crises foster psychological growth. Students adapted to online learning, emotional stress, and restricted socialisation by strengthening resilience and self-regulation. Gender variations align with established socio-psychological patterns in adolescents. The pandemic, despite being a trauma-inducing event, shaped internal strengths essential for the 21st-century learner.

Conclusion

The study concludes that COVID-19 significantly enhanced multiple character strengths among students in Little Flower School. Resilience, adaptability, and self-control became essential survival tools during educational and emotional disruptions. Students emerged more mature, self-aware, and emotionally capable. The present quantitative study, undertaken on a sample of 200 students from Little Flower School, Rapti Nagar, Gorakhpur, effectively fulfilled all four research objectives and produced statistically strong evidence regarding the psychological transformations experienced by students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective 1 The analysis demonstrates that students exhibited moderate-to-high levels of resilience across all measured dimensions—emotional regulation, adaptability, and stress



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tolerance. Mean scores and p-value-supported comparisons indicate that resilience became a functional coping mechanism during prolonged lockdowns. The statistically significant p-values (<0.05 in key domains) confirm that the majority of students developed adaptive behavioural responses such as routine maintenance, digital learning adjustment, and problem-focused coping. These findings validate that resilience acted as a protective psychological buffer against the uncertainty and disruption created by school closures.

Objective 2-The results provide clear empirical evidence that several character strengths—especially self-discipline, empathy, patience, and responsibility—intensified during the isolation period. Quantitative evaluation shows significant gains in self-control ($p < .05$), emotional stability ($p < .01$), and prosocial awareness ($p < .05$). Students reported better time management, increased sensitivity toward family members, and heightened moral responsibility due to witnessing social vulnerability during the pandemic. Thus, the study confirms that the crisis served as a developmental catalyst that strengthened internal psychological resources.

Objective 3- correlation analysis between resilience and character strengths revealed statistically significant relationships, establishing a strong interdependence between the two constructs. Students with high resilience scores also recorded elevated levels of self-discipline, emotional regulation, and empathy. The presence of statistically significant correlations (r values in moderate-to-strong range; $p < .05$) confirms that resilience acted as an antecedent variable influencing the emergence and consolidation of character strengths. This validates the theoretical assumption that resilience not only protects individuals from stress but also enhances their capacity to develop constructive personality attributes.

Objective 4 -Demographic analysis uncovered meaningful variations. Older students (Classes IX–XII) demonstrated significantly higher resilience and self-regulation ($p < .01$) compared to younger students. Gender-based comparison indicated that girls showed marginally higher empathy and emotional sensitivity, whereas boys reported comparatively higher problem-solving resilience, though these differences were not statistically significant across all dimensions. Class-level differences, however, were significant ($p < .05$), suggesting developmental progression in psychological maturity. These demographic insights highlight that resilience and strengths are shaped not only by crisis exposure but also by age-appropriate cognitive and emotional development. The study confirms that the COVID-19 pandemic functioned as a complex psychological environment that both challenged and strengthened adolescent learners. All objectives were successfully achieved with statistically validated results demonstrating that resilience and character strengths co-evolved during isolation. The findings reinforce the need for educational institutions to create structured resilience training, socio-emotional learning programs, and crisis-adaptive behavioural frameworks to sustain and further develop these strengths in the post-pandemic era.



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Limitations

- ✓ The single-school sample limits generalizability.
- ✓ Self-reported data may include bias.
- ✓ Only five-character strengths included.

Recommendations

- Integrate resilience and emotional skills programs in curriculum.
- Provide gender-tailored socio-emotional support.
- Promote blended learning for strengthening self-regulation.
- Regular psychological assessments for post-pandemic recovery.

Implications of the Study

- ✓ The study emphasizes the need to integrate structured socio-emotional learning and resilience-building programs into school curricula to support students' psychological development.
- ✓ Findings show that resilience significantly enhances character strengths, highlighting the importance of creating supportive environments during crises.
- ✓ The results reveal that prolonged online learning has mixed effects on behaviour, indicating the need for balanced digital-well-being strategies.
- ✓ Demographic differences in resilience call for age-specific and gender-sensitive mental-health policies in educational institutions.

Future Scope of the Study

1. Future research should expand to multiple schools across diverse regions to compare resilience and character strength patterns contextually.
2. Longitudinal and multivariate analyses are necessary to understand how resilience and strengths evolve across developmental stages.
3. Incorporating qualitative methods can provide deeper insights into students' subjective psychological experiences during crises.
4. Intervention-based studies are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of programs such as mindfulness, Heartfulness meditation, and SEL frameworks in strengthening resilience.



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