

## DISRUPTIONS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ENGLISH LITERACY

Ina Suryani<sup>1</sup>, Nazifah<sup>2</sup>, Nor Hanim Awang @ Mohd Noor<sup>3</sup>, Noazli Abu Bakar<sup>4</sup>, Mariam Idris<sup>5</sup>, and  
Nor Khairi Ahmad<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Centre of Excellence for Unmanned Aerial System, Universiti Malaysia Perlis,

<sup>1,2,5</sup> Department of Languages & General Studies, Faculty of Business & Communication, Universiti  
Malaysia Perlis

<sup>3</sup>Social Work Programme, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

<sup>4</sup>Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Perlis

<sup>5</sup>Faculty of Innovative Design and Technology, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin

<sup>6</sup>Universiti Kuala Lumpur Business School

### ABSTRACT

Illiteracy, which is the inability to read and write, can limit individuals' opportunities, reduce their quality of life, societies, and economies. Given the recent pandemic, movement control order was enforced at various phases due to COVID-19 and impacted learning due to school closures. This study aims to identify the impact of COVID-19 on English Literacy Among Primary School Students. A total of 800 students from 46 primary schools participated in this study. The students were selected based on the teachers' class observation and reading evaluation. A literacy test consisting of six literacy skill was conducted individually by language teachers. Findings on literacy skills one to level six revealed that literacy skill two to six are alarming, suggesting illiteracy is rising. In conclusion, intervention is direly needed to uphold the good literacy record. The implication of the study is to warn on the rising of illiteracy at alarming rate due to Covid-19 quarantine. Further research is recommended to other population in describing how the pandemic has affected English literacy in different regions and countries.

**Keywords:** Literacy, Teaching English, Post- Pandemic, Primary Schools.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Illiteracy is the inability to read and write, and at personal level, illiteracy results in limited access to information as illiterate individuals may be unable to read signs, instructions, or labels (Zhou, 2000). This can be dangerous in many situations, like medical emergencies or navigating public spaces. In the long run, illiteracy may lead to negative health outcomes as the individual's ability to access health information and understand health-related instructions. Illiteracy also limits job opportunities as most jobs require reading and writing skills, as such may lead to poverty and social exclusion (Downes & Brosseuk, 2022; Morais, 2018). At community level, illiteracy limited participation in civic life as illiterate individuals may be unable to read ballots or participate in civic life, limiting their ability to engage in democratic processes (Tamboer et. al., 2022). Most of all, illiteracy limited ability to learn and succeed in school as the child suffers limited learning ability that can lead to poor academic performance, reduced educational attainment, and limited future opportunities (Alsubaie, 2022; Downes & Brosseuk, 2022). Overall, illiteracy can limit individuals' opportunities, reduce their quality of life, and have negative impacts on societies and economies (Ismail et.al, 2021a, 2021b, 2023a, 2023b). It is therefore important to prioritize efforts to promote literacy and provide access to education for all individuals.

The government of Malaysia places a high emphasis on education, and has set a goal of achieving a 100% literacy rate by 2025, and the state of Perlis is no exception (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). The impact of COVID-19 quarantine on the literacy of primary school children has been a topic of concern for many education experts and parents. While the pandemic has caused disruptions to education globally, the extent of the impact on literacy may vary depending on various factors, including access to technology, the availability of educational resources, and the quality of remote learning. The COVID quarantine has had a negative impact on literacy development for some primary school children (Alsubaie, 2022), particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with limited access to educational resources (Georgiou & Parrila, 2022). In Malaysia, multiple movement control orders have been implemented to control the spread of COVID-19, and schools were closed during these periods. The duration of school closures varied depending on the specific movement control orders and government directives. The pandemic has impacted literacy as it causes disruptions to in-person learning, reduce motivation, increased stress, and anxiety. Therefore, the study aims to identify the illiteracy skills of COVID-19 on English Literacy Among Primary School Students in Perlis.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The pandemic results in disruptions to in-person learning. Many schools have been closed or have switched to remote learning due to COVID-19, which has disrupted in-person instruction and may have limited children's access to resources like books, educational materials, and support from teachers and classmates. Reports on reduced motivation and engagement has highlighted that children may be feeling disengaged or demotivated as a result of the pandemic (Alsubaie, 2022). particularly if they are not able to attend school in person or are experiencing disruptions to their normal routines. This impacted their willingness to engage with literacy-related activities.

In many regions, unequal access to technology results in more complex disruptions. Remote learning requires access to technology like computers and internet, which may not be available to all families, especially in low-income communities (Suryani et.al; 2010, 2014). This lack of access can widen the existing achievement gap between students who have access to technology and those who do not (Ahmad et. al. 2021, 2023, Zubir et.al, 2018). On top of these issues, Covid-19 decreased social interaction. Children learn language and literacy skills through social interaction, which has been severely limited due to quarantine measures. This could lead to a delay in language development for some children.

Overall, the quarantine measures and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have presented significant challenges to primary school children's literacy development. However, it is important to note that many schools and educational institutions are working to mitigate these challenges by providing online resources and support to students and families, and offering alternative forms of instruction to ensure that students continue to make progress in their literacy development. This study is one of the measures taken by the state to remedy the problem.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the current study is to identify the impact of COVID-19 on English Literacy Among Primary School Students in Perlis. This study employed a mixed-method methodology. For quantitative approach, the pre-test was distributed to the primary schoolers. Meanwhile, for qualitative research, the reflections note was prepared by the researchers to validate the research procedures. Reflexivity, invoked in almost every qualitative research work, is conceived of as a practice that a researcher should carry out to make the politics of research transparent (Mortari 2015). The researchers used the pragmatist approach to be employed in the research. The pragmatist approach to reflection conceives it as an experience for increasing the action's effectiveness ((Mortari 2015). The researchers held 4 meeting sessions with the JPN officers and teachers from Department of Education, Perlis. Upon the discussion, the reflections note was generated.

The study was conducted using framework sampling at the primary schools in Perlis which comprised 800 students from lower primary level to gauge their reading ability. Their age range is from 8 to 10 years old. The students are chosen based on poor literacy level observed by their respective teachers.

### **4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The students studied in this Literacy Skill assessment involve profiles such as gender, school name and school year of the student. While the information in Literacy Skill will be evaluated based on the five indicators that have been determined in Literacy 1 to Literacy 6. The study found that in the context of the gender profile of students, the majority of students who were assessed based on the five Literacy Skills consisted of male students. This shows that there are only a small number of female students involved in this study. In the school context, the majority of students selected are from SK Oran, SK Pauh and SK Paya while there is a fraction of the number of students from 43 other schools. In addition, for the student's school year profile, it was found that the majority of students were in Year Two compared to students in Year Three and Year Four.

Based on the findings of the study, there are five indicators used to evaluate students based on Literacy Skill 1 to Literacy Skill 6. The indicators are recognizing letters, read one syllable words, blend letters, read phrases and read sentence. In Literacy Skill 1, the majority of students successfully mastered the read sentence skill compared to other skills. While in the context of Literacy Skill 2, Literacy Skill 3, Literacy Skill 4, Literacy Skill 5 and Literacy Skill 6 the majority of students are able to master the skills of recognizing letters compared to read one syllable words, blend letters, read phrases and read sentence.

Table 1 summarizes the number and distribution of school students by gender. Male students outnumbered female students by 504 with a percentage of 63.0 percent. While there are only 296 female students (37.0 percent). The high number of male students compared to female students can be attributed to statistics released by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021). In the first quarter of 2021, the male population (16.83 million) exceeded the female population (15.92 million). The overall population gender ratio is 106 males for every 100 females.

**Table 1:** Distribution of the Number and Percentage of Students by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	504	63.0
Female	296	37.0
Total	800	100.0

There are 45 primary schools throughout the state of Perlis that have been selected to obtain information. Both among male and female school students are taken into this study. The schools are SK Sri Tunjong, SK Jln Raja Sayed Alwi, SK Seri Perlis, SK Pauh, SK Ujung Batu, SK Guar Gentik, SK Jejawi, SK Stella Maris, SK Felda Rimba Mas, SK Padang Besar Utara, SK Jelempok, SK Rendah Islam 1, SK Behor Empiang, SK Oran, SK Santan, SK Batu Bertangkup, SJKC Kong Hwa, SJKC Simpang Empat, SK Putra, SJKC Khoon Aik, SK Dato Kayaman, SK Titi Tinggi, SJKC Choon Siew, SK Sena, SK Seri Indera, SK Pindah, SK Rendah Islam III, SK Bukit Keteri, SK LKTP Chuping, SJKC Khay Beng, SJKC Padang Besar Utara, SK Padang Besar Selatan, SK Guar Nangka, SK Padang Kota, SK Kuala Perlis, SK Sungai Berembang, SK Titi Tok Bandar, SK Padang Keria, SJKC Chin Hun, SK Sanglang, SK Kg Salang, SK Paya, SK Padang Melangit, SK Beseri and SK Dato Ahmad Musa.

Of all the schools, it was found that the number of students from SK Oran recorded the highest number of students which was 66 people (8.3 percent). While the students of SK Seri Perlis, SK Rendah Islam 1, SK Seri Indera and SK Rendah Islam III each showed the lowest number of students with a total of two students.

Students from Year 2 has the highest number of 376 people with a percentage of 47.0 percent. This is followed by students who are in Year 3 which is 305 people (38.1 percent). A total of 119 primary school students are in year 4 which is the lowest number of students with a percentage of 14.9 percent.

#### 4.1 Literacy Skill

The discussion in this section involves the assessment of Literacy Skill 1 to Literacy Skill 3 on students using five indicators namely recognize letters, read one syllable words, blend letters, read phrases and read sentence.

Table 2 shows the frequency, average and percentage distribution of Literacy Skills 1 based on recognize letters score obtained by students. The evaluation of the skills of recognizing letters is made based on the scores obtained by students from the calculation of scores from 1 to 5. The number of students who got the highest score was at a score of 5 totalling 338 people with a percentage of 51.1 percent. Meanwhile, the lowest score obtained by students is a score of 1, which is a total of 173 students (21.7 percent). The average shown in the context of recognizing letters is 3.5. A total of 53 other students who did not get any marks in the evaluation done on them with a percentage of 6.5 percent.

**Table 2:** Distribution of the Frequency, Average and Percentage of Literacy Skills 1 Recognize Letters Score

Recognize Letters Score	Frequency	Percentage	Average
0	53	6.5	0
1	173	21.7	173
2	0	0	0

3	58	7.3	174
4	92	11.5	368
5	338	51.1	2120
Total	800	100.0	3.5

Distribution of the frequency, average and percentage of Literacy Skills 2 read one syllable words score is shown in Table 3. The evaluation of the skills of recognizing letters is made based on the scores obtained by students from the calculation of scores from 1 to 5. The number of students who got the highest score was at a score of 5 totalling 99 people with a percentage of 12.4 percent while the lowest score obtained by students is a score of 1, which is a total of 237 students (29.6 percent). The average shown in the context of read one syllable words is 1.6. A total of 182 other students who did not get any marks in the evaluation done on them with a percentage of 22.8 percent.

**Table 3:** Distribution of the Frequency, Average and Percentage of Literacy Skills 2 Read One Syllable Words Score

Read One Syllable Words Score	Frequency	Percentage	Average
0	182	22.8	0
1	237	29.6	237
2	119	14.9	238
3	99	12.4	297
4	64	8.0	256
5	99	12.4	297
Total	800	100.0	1.6

Table 4 shows the frequency, average and percentage distribution of Literacy Skills 3 based on blend letters score obtained by students. The evaluation of the skills of blend letters is made based on the scores obtained by students from the calculation of scores from 1 to 5. A total of 54 students (6.8 percent) got the highest score compared to 273 students (34.1 percent) who only scored 1 mark in Literacy Skills Blend Letters. While a total of 224 other students who did not get any marks in the evaluation done on them with a percentage of 28.0 percent and the average shown in the context of blend letters is 1.5.

**Table 4:** Distribution of the Frequency, Average and Percentage of Literacy Skills 3 Blend Letters Score

Blend Letters Scores	Frequency	Percentage	Average
0	224	28.0	0
1	273	34.1	273
2	126	15.8	252
3	63	7.9	189
4	60	7.5	240
5	54	6.8	270
Total	800	100.0	1.5

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

This study is motivated to add to the identify the impact of COVID quarantine on children's education, specifically, English literacy among primary schoolers in Perlis. By studying literacy

index in relation to COVID quarantine, researchers can better understand how the pandemic has affected children's education, particularly in terms of their literacy development. This information can inform educational policies and interventions to support children's learning during and after the pandemic. Collection of data made on all primary schools in Perlis is also an effort to identifying the vulnerable groups who may be particularly at risk of falling behind in their literacy development due to the pandemic. This information can inform targeted interventions to support these children and mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on their education

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank Research Management Centre, Universiti Malaysia Perlis for the Collaborative 1+3 Research Grant CRG 9023-00024, that made the publication of this work possible.

## REFERENCES

- Ahmad, N., Ab Rahim, I. S., & Ahmad, S. (2021). Challenges in implementing online language assessment-A critical reflection of issues faced amidst Covid-19 pandemic. In *Proceeding for Knowledge Management International Conference (KMICE 2021)*.
- Ahmad, B. H., Ismail, S., Ab Rahim, I. S., & bin Ahmad, N. (2023). A preliminary study on new undergraduates' experience of undertaking online assessments for English post covid-19 pandemic. *Journal Of Digital Education, Communication, And Arts (DECA)*, 6(02), 99-106
- Alsubaie, M. A. (2022). Distance education and the social literacy of elementary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Heliyon*, 8(7), e09811.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021, [https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeByCat&cat=155&bul\\_id=a1VhcVRaZzNweVpYdUFRM3Nqdlc5Zz09&menu\\_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09](https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemeByCat&cat=155&bul_id=a1VhcVRaZzNweVpYdUFRM3Nqdlc5Zz09&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TlhUUT09).
- Downes, L., & Brosseuk, D. (2022). The sophisticated literacy practitioner and the global pandemic. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 49(2), 347-365.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-021-00450-y>.
- Georgiou, G. K., & Parrila, R. (2022). Covid-19 and literacy: An Introduction to The Special Issue. *Reading and Writing*, 1-3.
- Ismail, N., Aziz, M. K. N. A., & Ridzuan, A. H. (2023a). President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration and the Indonesia-Malaysia confrontation, 1963-1966: A review of the foreign relations of the United States document. In *AIP Conference Proceedings* (Vol. 2544, No. 1). AIP Publishing
- Ismail, N., Aziz, M. K. N. A., & Ridzuan, A. H. (2023b). The John F. Kennedy administration and the formation of the federation of Malaysia 1961-1963: A review of foreign relations of the United States (FRUS). In *AIP Conference Proceedings* (Vol. 2544, No. 1). AIP Publishing.
- Ismail, N., Abd Aziz, M. K. N., & Arsani, Z. (2021). Idea Pembentukan Pemerintahan Ibn Khaldun dan Asas Pembinaan Kesultanan Melaka dari Kurun Ke-15 hingga 16: The Idea of Ibn Khaldun's Governance, and the Base for the Construction of the Sultanate of Melaka from the 15th to 16th Centuries. *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, 16(2), 31-47.
- Ismail, N., Aziz, M.K.N.A. (2021). Ahmad Bin Ya'qub Al-Johori and the Idea of Girl's Education in the Johor Government: Ahmad Bin Ya'qub Al-Johori dan Idea Pendidikan Perempuan Dalam Kerajaan Johor. *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah*, 11(2), 73-85.
- Jabatan Statistik Malaysia. (2021). Kenyataan media bagi Laporan Perangkaan Demografi Malaysia, Suku Tahun Pertama 2021. Putrajaya, 27 May 2021.

- Lemay, D. J., Bazelais, P., & Doleck, T. (2021). Transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 4, 100130.
- Ministry of Education Malaysia, (2015), <https://www.moe.gov.my/en/>.
- Morais, J. (2018). Literacy and democracy. *Language, Cognition and Neuroscience*, 33(3), 351–372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23273798.2017.1305116>.
- Orlov, G., McKee, D., Berry, J., Boyle, A., DiCiccio, T., Ransom, T., ... & Stoye, J. (2021). Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: It is not who you teach, but how you teach. *Economics Letters*, 202, 109812.
- Perlis State Government, (n.d.) <http://www.perlis.gov.my/ms/pelawat/pusat-pendidikan>.
- Purnama, S., Ulfah, M., Machali, I., Wibowo, A., & Narmaditya, B. S. (2021). Does digital literacy influence students' online risk? Evidence from Covid-19. *Heliyon*, 7(6), e07406.
- Rao, N., & Fisher, P. A. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on child and adolescent development around the world. *Child development*, 92(5), e738.
- Suryani, I., Desa, H., & Yaacob, A. (2010). Malaysia-Thailand Crossborder Communication: The Potential of Business English as Lingua Franca. *Journal of Human Capital Development (JHCD)*, 3(2), 91-104.
- Suryani, I., Aizan, Y., Noor, H., Jasin, A., Hassan, T., & Hazry, D. (2014). Promotional strategy in computer science research article. *Proceedings of SILK*, 114-119.
- Tamboer, S. L., Kleemans, M., & Daalmans, S. (2022). 'We are a neeeew generation': Early adolescents' views on news and news literacy. *Journalism*, 23(4), 806–822. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920924527>
- Zhou, M. (2000). Language policy and illiteracy in ethnic minority communities in China. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 21(2), 129–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630008666398>.
- Zubir, F., Suryani, I., & Ghazali, N. (2018). Integration of Augmented Reality into College Yearbook. In MATEC Web of Conferences (Vol. 150). EDP Sciences.