

Differences in Academic Performance Among Low-Grade Primary School Students Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia: A Literature Review

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Abstract

The World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a global pandemic, triggering significant changes across various sectors of global society. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the realms of education and the economy worldwide. In Indonesia, Circular Letter Number 3 of 2020 for Educational Units and Number 36962/MPK.A/HK/2020 regarding the Implementation of Education during the COVID-19 Emergency period stipulated the adoption of online learning for all formal education levels in the country. The effects of offline and online learning on the academic performance of primary school students, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, have been significant. Offline learning, which involves face-to-face interaction between students and instructors, allows for Q&A sessions with teachers without being hindered by internet connectivity issues. However, it has drawbacks such as the lack of adherence to pre-established schedules and transportation costs. On the other hand, online learning, implemented as a preventive measure during the pandemic, has been challenging for students. It has led to stress, decreased motivation, and a decline in academic performance. It was revealed that a large part of students encountered multiple issues during online learning, and there were cases of students failing to meet the Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM) set by the school. Additionally, the shift to online learning has affected the education sector in Indonesia, with students facing difficulties in accessing materials and experiencing reduced motivation, leading to decreased performance. These challenges highlight the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic performance of primary school students and the need to address the issues associated with both offline and online learning systems.

Keywords: academic performance; COVID-19; Indonesia; primary school

1. Introduction

At the end of 2019, the world was shaken by the outbreak of a new virus, namely the novel Coronavirus 2019 (2019-nCoV), later officially renamed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Originating from Wuhan, by January 31, 2020, the epidemic had spread to 19 countries, with 11,791 confirmed cases, including 213 deaths (WHO, 2020). According to data from the Indonesian Pediatrician Association (IDAI), as of July 16, 2021, the distribution of COVID-19 cases among school-aged children accounted for 12.83% of all

confirmed positive cases in Indonesia. The age group of 7 to 12 years had the highest number of cases at 101,049, followed by the age group of 16 to 18 years with 87,385, the age group of 13 to 15 years with 68,370, and the age group of 3 to 6 years with 50,449 (IDAI, 2021). Due to COVID-19, learning and activities at schools became restricted, shifting from offline to online learning. The Minister of Education and Culture issued Circular Letter No. 3 of 2020 for Educational Units and No. 36962/MPK.A/HK/2020 on the Implementation of Education in the COVID-19 Emergency, serving as the basis for the implementation of online learning to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Kemdikbud, 2020).

The learning system was adapted to assign tasks and engage in home-based learning, requiring students to continue their studies. However, educators needed to monitor and ensure that students could contribute and concentrate on learning to achieve academic success, even during the COVID-19 pandemic (Riinawati, 2021). Students experienced several impacts on the learning process at home, such as learning online without proper facilities, struggling to adapt to online learning culture, becoming less motivated, and experiencing a lack of focus (Ananda et al., 2021; Mastura and Santaria, 2020; Mitro et al., 2022). In the context of education, academic performance is considered as observed and measured behavior in specific situations. This can be assessed through tests organized by teachers, such as mid-term exams, final exams, and others. The academic performance assessment system sets standards to measure students' abilities in each assessed field of study (Saa, 2019).

Academic performance is an individual's ability to learn and communicate knowledge, both orally and in written form. It is influenced by students' knowledge and their ability to apply and demonstrate acquired information (Saa, 2019). The academic performance of elementary school students has a significant impact on their learning enthusiasm, triggering their resilience as students to achieve good grades and accomplishments. Typically, elementary school students lack developed technological skills to cope with the challenges of online learning. This is also influenced by the fact that elementary school students generally rely more on the presence of parents or guardians for support and guidance during the learning process. Character formation and limited social interaction for elementary school students can potentially affect their cognitive development in absorbing classroom learning (Novia and Wasehudin, 2021; Jayadi, 2021; Mar'ah and Rusilowati, 2020).

Various efforts by the government in Indonesia, transitioning from online to offline learning, can be evaluated based on the readiness of children to attend school (Aldiyah, 2021). The term "school readiness" is used to describe the condition of children in fulfilling school tasks at the elementary school level. Consistent with Snow (2010), school readiness is the state of a student's competence upon entering school, crucial for later success. School readiness tends to focus on social and academic competencies considered necessary for a child to be prepared for learning at school (Mashburn, Pianta, Mashburn, & Pianta, 2016). It can be concluded that school readiness is essential for entering elementary school, referring to the required competencies as support for students' success in learning at school (Damayanti et al., 2022). Signs that a child has reached school readiness include the ability to emotionally detach from the mother, willingness to interact with new teachers or friends, understanding and following learning instructions well, sufficient behavior control, social awareness (sharing, taking turns using learning tools, etc.), and showing consistent cooperative behavior (Hendriani, 2020).

2. Academic Performance

2.1. Definition

Academic performance refers to an individual's ability to learn and communicate their knowledge, both orally and in written form. Academic performance is influenced by students' knowledge and their ability to apply and demonstrate acquired information (Saa, 2019). Several methods can be used to measure academic

performance in elementary school students, including assessments based on written exams, practical exams, final project presentations, and others. Overall, academic performance at the elementary school level is represented in the form of report card grades or end-of-semester student reports (Rimadhani and Abduh, 2022; Asniarny, 2019).

Academic performance is crucial to support a child's progression to the next level of schooling, encompassing the competencies needed when entering school that can contribute to a child's success in school. Students' academic performance has a significant impact on a child's motivation to learn, as it can stimulate their determination as students to achieve good grades and accomplishments.

2.2 Success Factors in Academic Performance Assessment

Success factors in the assessment of academic performance can be viewed from various developmental aspects, including physical and health development, social and emotional development, learning approaches, cognition, and general knowledge, as well as language and early literacy. These developmental aspects can be supported by educators, families, schools, communities, and learning systems. The following are some success factors in academic performance:

1. Physical health and well-being: This involves considering the physical readiness of children to enter school, gross and fine motor skills, readiness to participate in all learning activities at school, and physical independence.
2. Social competence: This includes competence and collaboration with others, the ability to follow rules, curiosity, learning approaches, and problem-solving skills.
3. Emotional maturity: This encompasses prosocial behavior, aggression, behavior, lack of attention, hyperactivity, and anxiety.
4. Language and cognitive development: Refers to a child's ability to use language correctly, cognitive aspects of language, numeracy, reading and numeracy skills, and the presence of strong interests and memory.
5. Clear communication skills: The ability to express needs and thoughts clearly in a way understandable by adults and other children, as well as the ability to understand others and general knowledge aspects (Janus and Offord in Rahmawati, Tairas, & Nawangsari, 2018).

3. Offline and Online Learning Systems

3.1 Learning System Definition

The learning system is a process of interaction between students and educators to develop creative thinking in the absorption of knowledge to achieve a desired goal. A learning system requires elements such as content, facilities, equipment, and specific methods that can be optimized in its implementation to create a well-functioning system (Warsita, 2013).

The manifestation of student success is evident through tests organized by teachers, such as mid-term exams, end-of-semester exams, etc.. The academic performance assessment system has standards to measure the students' abilities in each assessed subject (Saa, 2019). Factors that can influence the success of both online and offline learning systems applied at the elementary school level include teacher factors, student factors, available facilities, tools and media, as well as environmental factors (Eko Nugroho, 2019).

1. Teacher Factor:

Teachers not only serve as role models for the students they teach but also as learning facilitators. The quality and effectiveness of learning depend on the qualifications and abilities of teachers to lead a classroom.

2. Student Factor:

Students who engage in education wholeheartedly provide commitment and full attention to create a conducive learning environment. Differences in socioeconomic backgrounds and intellectual abilities among students necessitate well-adjusted learning systems to ensure their success.

3. Facilities and Infrastructure Factor:

Facilities are everything that directly supports the smooth learning process, such as teaching aids, learning tools, and equipment available in schools. Meanwhile, infrastructure includes everything indirectly supporting the success of the learning process, such as the route to school, lighting and ventilation in classrooms, restrooms, and more.

4. Environmental Factor:

Based on the environmental dimension, there are two environmental factors that can influence the learning process: class organization aspects and socio-psychological climate. The number of students in a class is an important aspect that can affect the learning process. When there is an excessively large study group, the effectiveness of the learning system will significantly decrease.

3.2 Types of Learning Systems

Several types of learning can be employed in the learning activities according to Saskatchewan (Nurtanto, 2021). Various types of learning include offline learning, online learning (in-network), interactive learning, experimental learning, and self-directed learning.

3.3 Offline Learning System

Offline learning is a teaching and learning process conducted face-to-face between students and instructors. Learning always involves direct interaction between students and teachers. The engagement of both students and teachers in the learning process is crucial so that students can master the content of the lessons from school to achieve specific objectives, including psychomotor aspects. The target can be measured through the teaching and learning process and the academic performance of students facilitated by adequate learning resources such as clean and comfortable classrooms and comprehensive sources of knowledge (Sari, 2021).

3.4 Online Learning System

Online learning is the implementation of distance learning. The government has taken preventive measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 in the field of education by transforming the learning system into online (in-network) learning. The most significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which affected the education sector in Indonesia is the policy shift from normal face-to-face learning to online learning. This policy has been issued in a letter from the Minister of Education and Culture, Number 3 of 2020, regarding the prevention of COVID-19 in educational units and Letter Number 4 of 2020 concerning education policies during the emergency period of COVID-19 spread. During the pandemic, online learning has been implemented worldwide. All teaching and learning activities at various levels are conducted online using online meeting platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, or WhatsApp (Lestari, 2020).

4. Primary School Learning

4.1 Definition of Primary Schools and Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

In terminological terms, Primary schools (Sekolah Dasar or SD) is defined in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 17, as follows (Department of National Education, 2003):

1. Basic education is an educational level that underlies secondary education.
2. Basic education takes the form of Primary Schools (SD) and Islamic Elementary Schools (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah or MI) or equivalent forms.

According to Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 6 of 2019 (BPK RI, 2019), basic education is defined as "...an educational level in the formal education path that underlies secondary education, conducted in educational units in the form of primary schools and Islamic elementary schools or equivalent forms, and becomes a unified continuation of education in educational units in the form of junior high schools and madrasah tsanawiyah or equivalent forms."

Based on its terminology, the term "Madrasah Ibtidaiyah" is derived from the word "madrasah," which is a noun derived from the root word "darasa-yadrusu-darsan wa durusan wa dirasatan." This root carries meanings such as erasing, removing traces, making obsolete, training, and learning. Thus, a madrasah is defined as a place to educate students, eliminate their ignorance, eradicate their lack of knowledge, and train their skills according to their interests, talents, and abilities. Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) is a formal educational unit that provides general education with the Islamic religious characteristic, consisting of 6 levels at the primary education level (Arifin, 2012; Rouf, 2016).

4.2 Grade Levels in Primary School

The grade levels in primary school can be divided into two, namely lower grades and upper grades. The lower grades consist of grades one, two, and three, while the upper grades consist of grades four, five, and six (Zulvira et al., 2021). In Indonesia, the age range of primary school students is between 6 to 12 years old. Students in the lower grade group are typically 6 to 9 years old and fall within the early childhood age range. This early childhood period is short but crucial for an individual's life. Therefore, during this period, all the potential a child possesses needs to be nurtured to enable optimal development (Kawuryan, 2011; Agustina, 2017; Sinta et al., 2022).

This early childhood period is considered short but very important, and a child's potential needs to be fostered for optimal development. In this context, the developmental tasks of school students involve the development of essential concepts for daily life, the formation of moral values and value scales, achieving personal freedom, and developing attitudes toward social groups and institutions (Zulvira et al., 2021).

Furthermore, during late childhood with an age range of 6-13 years, children will develop specific skills such as social-help skills and play skills. Social-help skills involve the ability to assist others in various contexts, such as cleaning the yard and organizing desks and chairs, which can enhance self-esteem and cooperative skills. Meanwhile, play skills are related to motor skills, such as throwing, catching, running, and balancing. Children with these skills can make better adjustments in school and society, such as jumping with alternating feet, riding a two-wheeled bicycle, catching a ball, and developing hand-eye coordination for holding pencils and scissors (Arfiani et al., 2023).

In the context of the physical development of lower-grade children, they typically have reached maturity with the ability to control their bodies and balance. Emotionally, children aged 6-8 years can express reactions

to others, control their emotions, separate from parents, and begin learning about right and wrong. Intellectual development is demonstrated through the ability to serialize, group objects, interest in numbers and writing, an increased vocabulary, a tendency to speak, understanding cause and effect, and understanding space and time (Fuadia, 2022).

4.3 Student and Learning Characteristics in Lower-Grade Primary School Students

The characteristics of learning in lower-grade primary school students involve physical, emotional, and intellectual development. Physically, they have reached maturity and can control their bodies and balance. Emotionally, they can express reactions, regulate emotions, and begin learning about right and wrong. Intellectually, they can classify objects, show interest in numbers and writing, expand their vocabulary, understand cause and effect, and develop scientific attitudes and creativity.

The learning process for these students is marked by concrete, integrative, and hierarchical tendencies, with an emphasis on learning from concrete experiences, understanding concepts holistically, and progressing from simplicity to complexity. The teacher's role is crucial in creating a stimulating and effective learning process that aligns with the students' developmental stages. Learning activities for lower-grade students involve role-playing in family structures, practicing etiquettes, utilizing geographical vocabulary, storytelling, expressing ideas, and performing basic mathematical operations (Zulvira et al., 2022).

5. Offline and Online Learning Effects on The Academic Performance of Primary School Students

The advantage of offline learning is that students can engage in Q&A sessions with teachers without being hindered by internet connectivity issues. However, the drawback of offline learning is the lack of adherence to pre-established schedules. This can be attributed to various factors, such as instructors having other commitments besides teaching. Face-to-face learning also incurs transportation costs. The instructional method often involves instructors explaining while students listen. Consequently, many students find offline learning more comfortable and prefer it, mainly due to the substantial costs associated with online learning, which requires purchasing internet data to participate. Several students encounter difficulties in accessing presented materials, leading to reduced motivation and, subsequently, a decline in academic performance (Fauzia et al., 2023).

The numerous challenges for students during online learning, may potentially cause students to experience stress (Andiarna & Kusumawati, 2020). Stress is characterized as an individual feeling excessive demands on their cognitive resources (The American Institute of Stress, 2020). Excessive stress can impact mental health and disrupt an individual's cognitive functioning.

Online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was found to be very challenging for students. A survey conducted by Saiful Munjani Research and Consulting revealed that 92% of students encountered multiple issues during online learning (Putra, 2020). A specific case in Nganjuk district highlighted that a high school implementing online learning observed students failing to meet the Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM) set by the school, leading to additional assignments and remedial measures to achieve the required standards. A decline in student motivation was identified as one of the contributors to decreased performance during online learning, as indicated in the study by Cahyani et al. (2020).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature review underscores the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the academic performance of low-grade elementary school students and the challenges posed by the shift from

offline to online learning. It highlights the importance of addressing these challenges and providing support to ensure the continued academic success of primary school students. Overall, the article provides a comprehensive overview of academic performance, success factors, learning systems, and the effects of offline and online learning on the academic performance of primary school students, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledged the contribution of Sri Umijati and Mira Irmawati in providing informal review, proofreading, and appropriate suggestions in ensuring the article quality.

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