

Investigating the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on School Student's Motivation and Psychological Well-Being: A Descriptive Analysis

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Abstract

Examining the well-being and motivation level of schoolchildren during the COVID-19 pandemic might provide valuable insights for the effective allocation of resources and the development of informed policies aimed at supporting this demographic. The study aims to investigate the reported changes in children's psychological well-being and motivational level as reported by their parents during the implementation of stay-at-home orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A snowball sampling was employed to families of school students attending public and private schools within Klang Valley in Malaysia (N = 1014). They were given access to an anonymous survey through an online platform (via link and email) between October 2022 to February 2023. The present study sought to investigate how exposure to COVID-19 and the implementation of preventive measures such as physical distancing affected children's mental health. The study also sought to gather insights from parents about their observations and concerns regarding their children's well-being and academic performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, parents reported that their children lacked motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic as compared before the pandemic. The study findings revealed that parents, utilising a retrospective pre-post design, identified a total of seven mental health issues and five positive adjustment features as the outcomes. COVID-19 exposure and family stressors were also reported by parents. During the pandemic, children's psychological well-being declined noticeably, with increased feelings of distress, self-harm, agitation, loneliness, anxiety, stress, and depression. Specifically, before the pandemic, only 156 students, constituting about 7.67%, reported severe psychological stress reactions. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, this figure sharply rose by more than 36% to 806 students. Prior to the pandemic, academic achieve-

ment was notably higher for the majority of children compared to during the COVID-19 period. Academic achievement was reported to be higher for most children prior to the pandemic. Many children experienced internet outages while learning online, but they were still able to access course materials and interact with teachers and peers. Overall, the study demonstrates the pandemic's significant impact on children's well-being and academic performance.

Keywords

Psychological Well-Being, Motivational Level, COVID-19, Schoolchildren

1. Introduction

Student well-being encompasses various aspects, including a feeling of positivity or happiness, absence of negative emotions, interpersonal connections or social bonds, active involvement or participation, sense of achievement or fulfilment, sense of meaning or importance in a school setting, factors within oneself or personal characteristics, and factors in the environment or external influences (Hossain et al., 2023). It is closely tied to life satisfaction and enjoyment, reflecting a student's overall outlook on life and themselves. Recognizing the significance of student well-being is paramount, as it is intricately linked to academic excellence. Thus, schools must go beyond imparting instruction and prioritise the well-being of their students. Creating an environment that fosters well-being involves engaging students in meaningful activities, promoting emotional stability, providing encouragement for success, and offering positive experiences. By nurturing these factors, schools can enhance students' motivation and psychology, facilitating their overall well-being and academic achievements. Emphasising student well-being alongside academic learning is essential for promoting holistic development and fostering successful educational outcomes.

The pandemic of COVID-19 has had a profoundly detrimental effect on school students' motivation and well-being. Education, considered the foundation of great health and well-being, plays a crucial role in promoting a healthy lifestyle and providing essential information on disease prevention. However, the pandemic has disrupted the learning environment, forcing students to rapidly adapt to online learning, return home without adequate preparation, and face uncertainties and fears surrounding the pandemic. As a result, students have been burdened with increased workloads and have struggled to maintain concentration and emotional stability. Research by Zaki & Syafika (2021) revealed alarming psychological consequences among secondary school students, with 91.24% experiencing anxiety, low concentration in daily tasks, and emotional exhaustion. Stressors identified in this study include non-conducive learning environments, limited internet connectivity for remote learning, family-related issues, and financial challenges. The adverse effects are further exacerbated in Malaysia, where school students are disproportionately affected due to the costs associated

with their studies.

The shift to online learning has given rise to concerns about social isolation, reduced sense of belonging, and uncertainties about the future among students (Alyssa et al., 2020). Additionally, access issues, hindering academic performance and well-being, have been observed. This abrupt transition away from traditional classrooms has prompted speculation about the sustainability of online learning beyond the pandemic and its potential impact on the global education industry. While some parents may have positive perceptions of online learning, it is noteworthy that others argue for face-to-face learning due to inadequate internet networks and lower motivation levels (Ling & Letter, 2021; Azhari & Kurniawati, 2021). The pandemic's stressors have significantly impacted children's behaviour and psychological well-being (Fong et al., 2021; Bera et al., 2022), posing considerable challenges to their overall development and mental health. The shift to online learning, coupled with various stressors, has created a challenging and uncertain educational landscape for students. Understanding these negative impacts is crucial for implementing targeted interventions and support systems to mitigate the effects on students' mental health and academic performance during and beyond the pandemic.

The purpose of this research is to study the perceptions of parents of primary and secondary students in Klang Valley, Malaysia, regarding the impact of COVID-19 on children's psychological well-being and motivational levels. Additionally, it seeks to uncover insights into the implementation of home-based learning from the viewpoints of the students' parents. Data were collected from all parents with school students (N = 1014) during the first semester of the 2021-2022 academic year through the development and validation of a study instrument (questionnaire). By addressing one of the vital current issues in Malaysian education, this study aims to provide scientific information to academic decision-makers and policymakers. Understanding parents' perceptions of this new learning experience during the pandemic may present opportunities to enhance the implementation of the *Program Pembelajaran JarakJauh* (PdPR) by accentuating its strengths and addressing any shortcomings. Finally, the survey's findings would provide valuable insights into understanding the impact of the pandemic on the emotional well-being of youngsters and learning experiences, helping educators, policymakers, and parents develop strategies to support children's wellbeing and motivation during challenging times.

2. Literature Survey

The COVID-19 epidemic had a major impact on more than 1.6 billion students' educational experiences and lives at its peak (UNESCO, 2021). Like many other nations, Malaysia implemented a lockdown procedure that will begin in the middle of March 2020. Consequently, schools swiftly adopted remote learning through video conferencing techniques. This lockdown has resulted in various challenges for teachers, students, and their families, including increased stress,

anxiety, and difficulties caused by strict social isolation policies, further exacerbated by high mortality rates (almost two million fatalities worldwide) and lack of immunisations. Previous studies (Dale et al., 2022; Fong et al., 2021; Essadek & Rabeyron, 2020; Garcia et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020; Zhuang et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2021; Bera et al., 2022) have also reported on the declining psychological wellbeing of children during pandemics.

Research conducted on 1041 parents in India by Matthew (2021) indicated that children were much less motivated to learn during the pandemic than before the outbreak. A number of aspects, such as household income, parents' work position, the child's academic performance, and the parents' satisfaction with homeschooling, affected the motivation of the child to learn at home. Similarly, Hornsta et al. (2022) found that due to a decline in need contentment, students' motivation and well-being, as reported by parents, deteriorated throughout the lockdown. Interestingly, the negative effects of the lockdown were less pronounced for children with SEN (special educational needs), especially gifted and children with behavioural disabilities, compared to children without SEN. There was a substantial association between students' age and changes in motivation, whereby older students exhibited a comparatively lesser decline. There were no statistically significant connections observed between students' gender or parents' education (Zaccoletti et al., 2020).

Studies focusing on child psychological wellbeing revealed small deteriorations in mental health for girls at the commencement of schools opening in the second semester (t2) in comparison to one semester after distant learning (t1). Additionally, boys showed an increase in suicidal thoughts during this period. The results highlight the need for increased psychological support, both professional and informal, for young people. The prevalence of mental health concerns among teenagers continues to be significant even 18 months into the ongoing epidemic, underscoring the criticality of providing prompt psychological assistance (Dale et al., 2022). Conversely, Essadek & Rabeyron (2020) found that students suffered from high levels of anxiety, depression, and distress, suggesting a significant need for psychological support as a result of an increase in post-traumatic stress symptoms throughout the pandemic. Similarly, a study in Germany by Christner et al. (2021) stated that both parents and children have encountered stress as a result of the lockdown measures. Older children displayed greater emotional symptoms and fewer behavioural issues and restlessness compared to younger children.

Numerous academic inquiries have been conducted with the aim of acquiring a deeper understanding of the disparate effects of the lockout on distinct cohorts of children. These investigations have focused on student attributes, including those pertaining to children with special educational needs such as SEN students (Hornsta et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022), student levels (Yim et al., 2022; König & Frey, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020), and race-based differences (Rao & Rao, 2021). The outcome of these studies reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in substantial rates of psychological repercussions. It is worth noting that there

was a comparable occurrence of depression and trauma-related distress symptoms among junior high and high school students. However, high school students exhibited a greater prevalence of anxiety and stress symptoms in comparison to their junior high school counterparts. Positive coping strategies led to enhanced mental and psychological health situation in students, while negative adaptation was found as a risk contributing factor to mental and psychological health difficulties (Zhang et al., 2020). Furthermore, the studies revealed that the impact of lockdown measures on younger students in educational institutions was found to be more pronounced in comparison to their older peers. However, it was observed that the magnitude of this negative effect decreased with the implementation of consecutive lockdowns in the autumn and winter of 2020/2021. (König & Frey, 2022). Moreover, a positive correlation was observed between online learning preparedness, emotional competence, and online academic achievement among high school students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, it is notable that among college students, the sole factor that exhibited a noteworthy positive correlation with online academic performance during the pandemic was online learning readiness. The findings of this study indicate that adequate preparedness for online learning and a strong emotional competence can significantly bolster the resilience of teenagers when confronted with problems linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, as these factors contribute to the facilitation of more efficient and productive online learning experiences (Wang et al., 2022).

The study's findings in "Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown in Malaysia: An Examination of the Psychological Well-Being of Parent-Child Dyads and Child Behaviour in Families with Children on the Autism Spectrum" (Fong et al., 2021) presents primary findings that suggest adverse consequences of the Malaysian lockdown on children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), normally developing (TD) children, and their parents. The majority of high school students fall within the suitable age bracket and are predominantly female, often originate from households with a combined monthly income that is categorised as either poor or low-income. The results suggest that the mental well-being of students is typically positive, although they do encounter intermittent episodes of anxiety and stress. Notably, there was a substantial negative correlation between their overall well-being and levels of anxiety and tension. In summary, the present state of students' mental health has some positive aspects, but with room for growth, as evidenced by the use of effective coping techniques. Therefore, it is advisable for parents and educators to monitor their overall welfare and implement the suggested mental health initiative (Garcia et al., 2022).

A study by Williams et al. (2021) addressed stress in high school students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the onset of the pandemic, an estimated 21% of children and adolescents residing in the United States had received a diagnosis of a mental health issue. Considering the significant correlations between long-term chronic stress and mental health disorders, it is advisable to implement early interventions aimed at elementary and middle school-aged

students. These interventions, which include mindfulness, emotional hygiene, and resiliency building, can effectively alleviate acute stressors experienced in schools. Moreover, incorporating mental health education into high school educational programmes can equip students with effective coping strategies to manage stress, thereby fostering the adoption of sustainable stress reduction practises. Interestingly, online learning has the greatest impact on the decline of mental well-being, with certain race-based disparities noted. However, exercise time was found to help reduce mental health degradation. Several additional variables, including gender, duration of homework, duration of school attendance, pre-existing mental health conditions, and engagement in therapy, were found to have no substantial impact on the deterioration of mental health. The examination of unstructured feedback revealed the presence of three consistent patterns: increased levels of stress resulting from academic assignments (13.2%), feelings of social isolation or limited social engagement (8.5%), and insufficient assistance for maintaining mental health (12.3%) (Rao & Rao, 2021).

The discussion on psychological wellbeing during the outbreak primarily focused on the child's feelings. A current study included a vast sample of 89,588 college students, where 36,865 students (41.1%) reported anxiety symptoms during the Covid-19 epidemic (Fu et al., 2021). Another study investigated a clear distinction between two modes of learning: in-person and blended learning. Students who participated in in-person learning sessions exhibited more enthusiasm, engagement, and activity throughout the process of teaching and learning activities. In contrast, students engaged in remote learning exhibited a more subdued demeanour and demonstrated reduced levels of motivation throughout the blended learning sessions. Nevertheless, students have interpreted blended learning as a mechanism to augment their desire for the purpose of learning. The participants demonstrated heightened levels of engagement with the topic at hand and reported enhanced ease in utilising digital resources. Furthermore, a range of instructional strategies, group and pairing exercises, sharing knowledge, and personal development can all be used to boost students' involvement and enthusiasm in verbal communication exercise. Teachers should include both extrinsic and intrinsic student characteristics as learning drivers, especially in post-pandemic English learning (Abdillah & Sueb, 2022). Azhari & Kurniawati (2021) corroborated these findings, noting that online learning was less preferable compared to face-to-face learning due to inadequate internet access and reduced motivation.

A more comprehensive study explored the correlation between factors affecting children's psychological wellbeing. Stress indicators were found to be positively and highly related to self-reported behavioural challenges such as conduct issues, deprived influence, and cognitive/inattention, according to multivariate analysis. Sleep disorders and hypervigilance are symptoms of stress arousal, significantly contributed to behavioural concerns (Schwartz et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 outbreak, the prevalence of behavioural problems among school-aged children varied from 4.7% to 10.3% during home quarantine. Engaging in physical

exercise proved to be an effective measure in reducing behavioural problems for children in home confinement (Liu et al., 2021). Regarding stress levels, over half of the students reported moderate stress (55%), while 30.2% experienced high levels of stress. Notably, female students showed a higher prevalence of stress during COVID-19 compared to male students (AlAteeq et al., 2020). Additionally, there was a strong relationship correlated between the locality of students and their level of depression, showing higher percentage of rural students experiencing greater levels of depression. The location of schools and students' residential areas significantly impacted their mental health, with post hoc analysis revealing higher depressive levels among final year students within secondary classes (Yim et al., 2022). In a study involving medical students, depression was found to be positively correlated with perceived stress, while insomnia was also positively correlated with perceived stress. The relationship between depression and perceived stress may be mediated by insomnia (Zhuang et al., 2021).

3. Methodology

3.1. Participant

The study used snowball sampling (chain-referral sampling) to recruit participants. The research team's primary contacts sent the questionnaire to potential respondents through emails, popular social media network (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp), and other communication platforms to reach a wider audience. After obtaining their consent, participants completed an online survey. The majority of the respondents (45.5%) were aged over 45 years. Parents in the age ranges of 35 - 39 accounted for 19.1%, while the rest fell into the age groups of 40 - 44 (23.5%), 30 - 34 (8.6%), and only 3.4% were young parents who agreed to participate in the study. Almost all the respondents were married (92.8%), with some being single parents.

In the study sample, parents were asked to report on one of their children, either boys (33.6%) or girls (66.4%), and whether their respective child was in primary or secondary school. Out of the 1014 respondents, 39.8% reported that their school children were in the first cycle of basic education (grades 1 to 6), while 60.2% were in the second cycle of basic education (Form 1 to Form 6). In terms of education levels, 43.1% of the respondents were degree holders, while the rest held diplomas (17.7%), postgraduate degrees (14.7%), or were school leavers (24.6%). As expected, more than half of the respondents belonged to the B40 (household income of MYR 4850 and below) low-income family category, with an average annual household income below RM 60,000. Middle-income families contributed to 10.9%, while the T20 group accounted for 11.3% of the total respondents. During the COVID-19 movement control orders, there was a significant increase in internet usage (Hakim et al., 2021). Concerning the choice of electronic device used during the period of enforced lockdown, a majority of the students (56.6%) used smartphones for their online classes, while others used laptops (30.5%), desktop computers (7.3%), and tablets (5.6%). The most pre-

ferred online connectivity was Wi-Fi (wireless internet connection) (62.5%), followed by mobile data (25%). A small percentage used other connections such as broadband (4%), LAN (1.1%), and hotspots (7.3%). As for the online platform used for learning, Telegram was the most preferred (38.4%), followed by Google Meet (32.8%) and WhatsApp groups (18.7%).

3.2. Measures/Instrument

The research tool was a questionnaire with Sociodemographic section, COVID-19 Exposure and Family Impact Scales (CEFIS), Child's psychological well-being—mental health, and child's motivational level before and after COVID-19. The study extracted five COVID-19 Exposure and Family Impact Scales (CEFIS) items (Yes/No responses) which is relevant to the sample being investigated that gauge on how much “exposure” the participants had to COVID-19 and associated events.

The questionnaires also measure the child's psychological behaviour before and during the pandemic period. The subscale scores can be chosen from multiple options: feeling agitated, lonely, anxious, depressed, self-harm, relaxed, interacts positively with sibling and family members, has positive social relationships, talks about plans for the near future and feeling of hopeful.

1) Student's Psychological Well-Being

The parents were requested to complete a questionnaire in which they provided their impressions regarding the psychological well-being and academic motivation of their children. This was carried out both before the COVID-19 pandemic (pre-COVID-19) and during the period of lockdown imposed due to COVID-19. The survey comprises a total of five (5) items pertaining to the psychological well-being of children; (1) To what degree did you adhere to physical separation measures within the last month; (2) In the preceding month, what was the frequency at which you adhered to a 2-meter distance when encountering individuals who were not part of your household? (3) During the preceding month, what was the frequency of your in-person social interactions with others outside of your immediate family or inside your permissible social circle; (4) Indicate which of the provided options best characterise your child's typical behaviour PRIOR to the onset of the Covid-19 epidemic; (5) as well as DURING its occurrence. The respondents were required to provide their answers using a five-point Likert scale, with options ranging from (1) indicating “not well at all” to (5) indicating “very well”.

2) Academic Motivational Level

On the academic motivational level of children before and during Covid-19 period consisted of 10 questions reflective of (1) Did you experience internet disturbances during learning; (2) Do course materials are readily available for students to access; (3) Do students are given instructions clearly before and/or after online sessions; (4) Does your child frequently interact with her/his teachers; (5) Does your child frequently discussed with other students regarding the topics learned online; (6) Does your child completed her/his homework within

the time allocated?; (7) Does your child give full attention to during online classes; (8) Does your child seldom get distracted during online classes; (9) Child/School student's Academic Achievement BEFORE Covid-19? And (10) Child/School student's Academic Achievement DURING Covid-19? The respondents were required to provide their answers using a five-point Likert scale, with options ranging from (1) indicating "not applicable" to (5) indicating "totally applicable".

4. Results

The demographic profile for this research is shown in **Table 1**. It consists of: (1) parents age, (2) parent's marital status, (3) race, (4) religion, (5) parent's education, (6) annual household income, (7) child's gender, (8) child's current school level (primary/secondary), and (9) type of school. **Table 2** however represents the type of connection used during lockdown, namely: (1) devices used during online learning; (2) type of internet connection; and (3) online platform used.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (n = 1014).

		Frequency	Percentage
Guardian or parent's age	25 - 29	34	3.4
	30 - 34	87	8.6
	35 - 39	194	19.1
	40 - 44	238	23.5
	45 Above	461	45.5
Guardian or parent's marital status	Married	941	92.8
	Single parent	73	7.2
Race	Malay	940	92.7
	Chinese	28	2.8
	Indian	16	1.6
	Others	30	3.0
Religion	Islam	968	95.5
	Christian	16	1.6
	Buddha	17	1.7
	Hindu	11	1.1
	Others	2	0.2
Parent's education	School leaver	249	24.6
	Diploma	179	17.7
	Degree	437	43.1
	Postgraduate	149	14.7

Continued

Annual household income	Below RM 5000	320	31.6
	RM 5000 - 19,999	373	36.8
	RM 20,000 - 34,999	55	5.4
	RM 35,000 - 49,999	40	3.9
	RM 50,000 - 74,999	49	4.8
	RM 75,000 - 99,999	62	6.1
	Above 100,000	115	11.3
Children gender	Male	341	33.6
	Female	673	66.4
Level of school	Primary	404	39.8
	Secondary	610	60.2
School type	Government	922	90.9
	Private	90	8.9
	Home schooling	2	0.2

Table 2. Type of internet connection used during lockdown.

		Frequency	Percentage
Online class devices	Laptop	309	30.5
	Desktop	74	7.3
	Tablet	57	5.6
	Smart Phone	574	56.6
Type of internet connection	Wi-Fi	634	62.5
	Broadband	41	4.0
	Local area network (LAN)	11	1.1
	Mobile data	254	25.0
	Hotspot	74	7.3
Online platform	Zoom	71	7.0
	Google Meet	333	32.8
	WhatsApp	190	18.7
	Telegram	389	38.4
	Skype	19	1.9
	Other	12	1.2

1) Child's Psychological Well-Being

Regarding the exposure to COVID-19 as displayed in **Table 3**, respondents were asked whether their children had been in contact with someone with

COVID-19. The responses showed that approximately half of the children (46.9%) reported being exposed to someone with COVID-19, while 52.5% had been directly exposed to the virus. Fortunately, almost all of the respondents' children had never been admitted to a hospital or an intensive care unit due to COVID-19, nor had any family members died from the virus. In addition, respondents were asked about their children's engagement in physical distancing, presented in **Table 4**. The answers varied as follows: 22.9% reported practicing

Table 3. Exposure to COVID-19.

		Frequency	Percentage
Being exposed to someone with COVID-19	Yes	476	46.9
	No	538	53.1
Was exposed to COVID-19	Yes	532	52.5
	No	482	47.5
Admitted to the hospital	Yes	48	4.7
	No	966	95.3
Being admitted to ICU	Yes	13	1.3
	No	1001	98.7
Family members died of COVID-19	Yes	68	6.7
	No	946	93.3

Table 4. Social relationship during COVID-19.

Does your child engage in physical distancing?		
	Frequency	Percentage
All the time	232	22.9
Most of the time	488	48.1
Some of the time	241	23.8
Rarely	53	5.2
Total	1014	100.0
How frequently did your child interact in person during the pandemic with others outside of your close family or permitted social circle?		
	Frequency	Percentage
A great deal	31	3.1
A lot	125	12.3
Somewhat	219	21.6
A little	418	41.2
Not at all	221	21.8
Total	1014	100.0

physical distancing all the time, 48.1% most of the time, 23.8% some of the time, and only 5.2% rarely engaged in physical distancing.

On the other hand, most parents reported that nearly half of their children (41.2%) engaged in a little of social interaction with people outside of their house. Therefore, 3.1% still continued to socialize extensively despite the ongoing pandemic.

Parents reported a deterioration in their children's psychological wellbeing (feeling relaxed) from 51.7% before the pandemic to 43% during the outbreak, as depicted in **Table 5**. Furthermore, there was also a decrease in the child's social relationships, accounting for 59.4% before the pandemic and 48% during the pandemic. Specifically, the number of children reported negative feelings are 19 of agitation, 36 of loneliness, 35 of anxiety, 33 of stress, and 21 of depression before the COVID-19 outbreak, which increased significantly to 89 of agitation, 164 of loneliness, 200 of anxiety, 199 of stress, and 136 of depression during the pandemic. In contrast, the feeling of positivity and optimism dropped significantly.

2) Child's Motivational Level

Table 6 shows that most of the children (71.2%) have sometimes experienced internet disturbances during their learning sessions, and approximately one-tenth are always facing internet disruptions. The majority of children (84.3%) can access the course materials during online learning, and they have received clear instructions (87.5%) both before and after online sessions. As for interactions with teachers and fellow students, parents reported that 71.1% of the children can frequently interact with their teachers, and 55.8% have frequent discussions with their friends. Consequently, 78.4% of the children can complete their homework within the allocated time. In addition, 59.4% of the children are able to give full attention during online classes, and 55.9% reported seldom getting distracted

Table 5. Child psychological behaviour before and during COVID-19 pandemic.

	Before COVID-19		During COVID-19		Percentage Difference	Increase/decrease
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage		
Agitated	19	1.9	89	8.8	6.9	Increase
Lonely	36	3.6	164	16.2	12.6	Increase
Anxious	35	3.5	200	19.7	16.2	Increase
Stressed	33	3.3	199	19.6	16.3	Increase
Depressed	21	2.1	136	13.4	11.3	Increase
Self-harm	12	1.2	18	1.8	0.6	Increase
Relaxed	524	51.7	436	43.0	8.1	Decrease
Positive social relationships	602	59.4	487	48.0	11.4	Decrease
Plan for future	329	32.4	217	21.4	11	Decrease
Hopeful	422	41.6	275	27.1	14.5	Decrease

Table 6. Child experience during online learning.

		Frequency	Percent
Internet disturbances experiences	Never	179	17.7
	Sometimes	722	71.2
	Always	113	11.1
Availability of course material	Yes	855	84.3
	No	159	15.7
Clear instruction before and/or after	Yes	887	87.5
	No	127	12.5
Frequent response to teachers	Yes	721	71.1
	No	293	28.9
Frequent discussion with other students	Yes	566	55.8
	No	448	44.2
Homework completed within timeframe	Yes	795	78.4
	No	219	21.6
Given full attention during online class	Yes	602	59.4
	No	412	40.6
Seldom get distracted during online class	Yes	567	55.9
	No	447	44.1

while using the online platform.

According to parents, their children's academic achievement was significantly better (164 mentions) or slightly better (457 mentions) before the pandemic than during the outbreak. This means that 61% reported higher academic achievement prior to the closure. While some parents stated that their children's academic achievement remained very similar both before COVID-19 (271 mentions) and during the lockdown (347 mentions), the latter contributed 34.2% of the total. During school closure, there was a slight decrease (38.5%) in child academic achievement and a significant decrease (90 mentions) in academics.

5. Discussions

The current study sought to learn more about the circumstances of children and their families prior to and during COVID-19's most restrictive lockdown. Parents completed an online questionnaire on their own and their children's demographics, psychological well-being, and motivational level. The largest percentage of responses were over the age of 40 (almost 70%), indicating that older parents participated in the study, potentially because of their greater concern for their children's well-being during the pandemic. The demographic profile indicates a predominantly married participant base, which aligns with the traditional family structure observed in many societies. Notably, the sample includes par-

ents from diverse educational backgrounds, with a significant proportion (more than half) possessing a degree or higher certification, indicating a varied perspective on the impact of the pandemic on their children's education. The impact of COVID-19 on household incomes in Malaysia, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of respondents were from the B40 category, is indeed significant. The pandemic has led to widespread economic disruption globally, with Malaysia being no exception. Lockdowns, business closures, and mobility restrictions have resulted in employment losses, reduced working hours, and income insecurity for many individuals and families (Malay Mail, 2021).

Regarding the child's characteristics and educational context, the study sample includes children from primary and secondary school levels, indicating the broad age range considered in the research. The gender distribution of children in the sample mirrors the general population, with a slightly higher representation of females, which may influence the study's findings regarding gender-specific experiences during the pandemic. Most children attended government schools, demonstrating a preference for public education among the examined population, which may have implications for resource allocation and access to educational support services. The study found a considerable increase in internet usage and online learning experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown, which is consistent with global trends of increased digital dependency in the face of physical activity constraints (Drouin et al., 2020). Smartphones have emerged as the primary device for online learning, demonstrating its accessibility and convenience, especially in households with limited resources. While Wi-Fi was the preferred internet connection, the prevalence of mobile data usage suggests that families can use several connectivity choices to enhance online education (UNICEF, 2020). Telegram and Google Meet emerged as popular online platforms for learning, highlighting the diverse range of digital tools utilized by educators and students to manage remote education.

As presented in **Table 5**, the findings indicate a decline in children's psychological well-being during the pandemic, characterized by increased feelings of agitation, loneliness, anxiety, and depression, consistent with previous research on the mental health impact of COVID-19 (Bera et al., 2022). This survey also revealed a significant increase in psychological distress, rising from 2.1% before the pandemic to 13.4% during the outbreak. This study also supported by Hornstra (2022), discovered a significant total effect, indicating that parents reported that their children were in better health before the lockdown than they were during it. Shockingly, the number of children reporting self-harm during the outbreak amounted to 18, which is both disturbing and unsettling. Children's anxiety and negative impressions have increased dramatically (UNICEF, 2020).

Parents reported challenges in maintaining positive social relationships and future-oriented thinking among their children, emphasizing the importance of focused interventions to overcome emotional and motivational barriers in learning. Despite facing internet disruptions and distractions during online

Table 7. Child's academic achievement before and during COVID-19.

	BEFORE		DURING	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Much better	164	16.2	43	4.2
Better than	457	45.1	115	11.3
Very similar	271	26.7	347	34.2
Slightly below	67	6.6	390	38.5
Significantly below	16	1.6	90	8.9
Not sure	39	3.8	29	2.9

classes, a substantial proportion of children demonstrated resilience by completing homework on time and engaging actively with course materials and teachers, highlighting their adaptive capacity in the face of educational challenges, in contrast to a report by Xia et al. (2022), which found that traditional learning was not as effective. As presented in Table 7, parents perceived a decline in their children's academic achievement during the pandemic, with a significant proportion reporting lower performance compared to pre-pandemic levels, consistent with global concerns about the impact of school closures on learning outcomes (Hornsta et al., 2022). While some children maintained similar academic standards, the general trend implies an increasing disparity in educational performance, particularly among disadvantaged students, emphasising the importance of tailored interventions to reduce learning loss and promote educational fairness.

6. Conclusion

The study employed a snowball sampling technique to gather data from participants, who were mostly enlisted through email and social media. The majority of responders were parents over aged 40, whose kids attended government secondary schools in the Klang Valley, the most developed region in Malaysia. Children's psychological health clearly suffered during the epidemic, with elevated levels of worry and anxiety that rank highest. Depression and loneliness came next. This impact is not healthy because it involves mental health, so raising awareness about how to treat it should be done promptly. The generation of secondary school teenagers is most influenced by negativity, which may have an impact on their physical well-being in the near future. According to the findings, the majority of the children were either directly exposed to the virus or were affected by its threat. As a result, they feel frightened and less optimistic about their future. However, their academic achievement was observed to be similar or slightly worse in most children prior to the epidemic, implying that the pandemic has less substantial impact on the children's education, but rather on their inner health. This study serves as a model for how the community may manage the physiological effects on teens, particularly so that the young generation can

live a healthy life and contribute positively to the country in the near future after the pandemic occurs. Parents should be aware of this impact and encourage their children, schools should raise awareness, and the government as a whole must take steps to guarantee that their generation is motivated mentally and physically well.

7. Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered. Snowball sampling can result in sampling bias because participants are recruited through referrals from existing contacts, who may not be representative of the entire population. This could have an effect on the findings' generalizability. Furthermore, data collected via online surveys is based on participant self-reporting, which may introduce response bias. Participants may unintentionally provide socially desirable answers or misrepresent their experiences.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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