

“We Can Cope with the Pandemic”: Children’s Literature During Covid-19

Wa Ode Zulhidjah Awalyah¹, Muthiah Hidayatun², Sitti Nurfaidah³

{Zul.awalyah03@gmail.com¹, snownana00@gmail.com², sittinurfaidah@iainkendari.ac.id³}

Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia¹, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kendari, Indonesia²

Abstract. During the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, many collections of children's literature with various subjects and genres were produced. This literary study aims to map the children’s literature published during the pandemic. This literary study aims to map the children’s literature published during the pandemic to inform the readers that various lists of children's literature can be freely accessed online according to their theme and genre without any boundary. The data was gathered by scrutinizing online collections of children's literature published in 2020 and 2021. Twenty-five pieces of children's literature were discovered. Using content analysis, this study revealed that the published literature fell into two categories, fiction, and nonfiction. The themes emerging in both categories include social community, family, heroes, health and science, and everyday life. In nonfiction, the most common themes are health and science, whereas, in fiction, the most common theme is family.

Keywords: children’s literature; literary study; online collections; pandemic

1 Introduction

Children's literature has a significant influence on children’s future life. Since prehistoric times, children’s literature has been growing and developing (Huda Tufail, 2021)¹. Despite the pandemic, children’s literature publications went on. In the last two years many, countries have witnessed the vast impact of Covid-19 (Justyna Śniadach, 2021)² on all sectors, including education (Fatma A, 2020)³. Schools and the learning process were halted. Consequently, children might feel lonely due to isolation and inability to socialize with their mates, which may affect their mental illness (Jonathan D, 2020)⁴. Although children in every country had hardships while under lockdown, they were absent from school, cut off from friends and teachers, and had no access to classroom libraries, which caused them to lag intellectually and read less (Junko, 2020)⁵. As a result, several countries, like Japan, China, and Turkey, are working to guarantee that their students continue to obtain a good education, notably through book reading. Children’s books may play an important part in emotionally supporting these children and informing them about the epidemic in a fun way (Tufail)⁶. To address this, several authors of children's books

wrote Covid-19-related readings so children are not left behind and can learn to cope with this pandemic situation as morally sent in the books.

Since the Covid-19 virus emerged in early 2020, it has caused significant changes that shocked the global population of all ages, including children. On August 2, 2020, the data showed that there had been an increasing amount in the spread of the Covid-19 virus among children drastically (Maharani & Esthi, 2020). To be adaptive in this situation, parents' and teachers' engagement is vital in supervising the children due to their limited understanding of Covid-19 (Fortunata, 2021)⁷. Children are required to recognize the characteristic of Covid-19 and to be accustomed to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Several learning media are learned by children, one of them through literature, which can make the children easily understand, responding and it is generally sourced from concrete facts (Burhan, 2018)⁸ as well in (Asteria, 2020)⁹, also stated that children's story books are beneficial for improving student literacy. It can train children's creativity through children's imagination of the story components contained in them. Despite the plethora of studies concerning children's literature published, very limited studies have attempted to map the children's literature published online. Therefore, mapping children's literature is necessary so that the findings of this study serve as a model of research that provides various lists of children's literature published online which could be accessed freely according to its categories and themes.

2 Methodology

The data were obtained by reviewing online collections of children's books published in 2020 and 2021. A literature review was employed in this study to examine the content of the twenty-five works of children's literature that were identified. We read, analyzed, and sorted the children's literature to identify the essential characteristics of materials that the researchers required. We gathered the data from numerous resources located on the website. We took several steps to collect the data. First, we searched various types of published children's literature on online websites. We then gathered as many published online children's books as the previous categories using keywords such as "pandemic book for children" and "pandemic literature for children". Based on the keywords, we discovered many different types of books, but only a few were relevant to this study's goal. Moreover, we analyzed the type of book based on the theme. Even though the book was written in another country, if it is available in Indonesia, we consider it as data for our study. The data was evaluated by classifying the book according to its genre. Following that, we separated each genre into multiple themes.

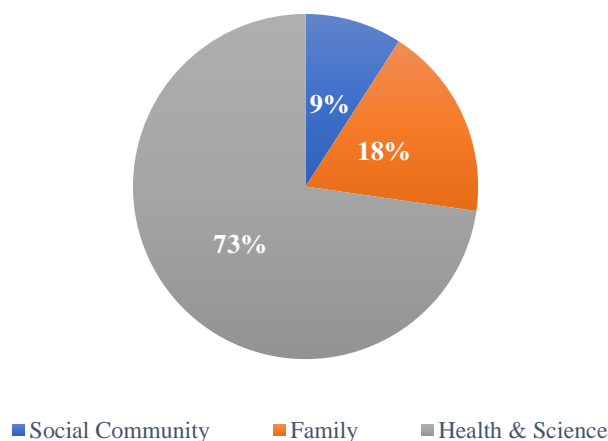
3 Findings

This chapter presents the content analysis findings of children's reading materials given at covid-19. This study discovered twenty-five sources of children's literature on the online website. These books are categorized into two, i.e., nonfiction and fiction, which further sought some emerging sub-themes.

3.1 Non-Fiction

This study discovered 25 children’s books on the online website, and 11 are categorized as non-fiction. These books come with various sub-themes. There are social community, family, health, and science themes.

Figure. 1. Major themes in the children’s non-fiction literature during the pandemic

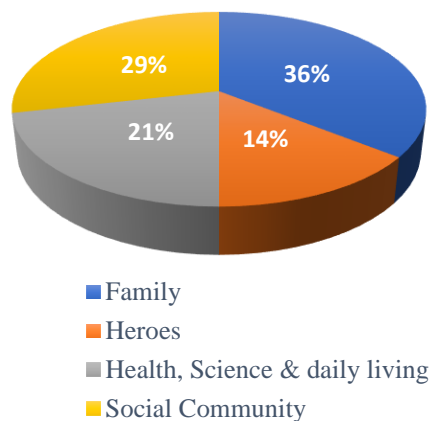


As shown in Fig. 1, health and science themes occupy 73% of the most emerging themes in the non-fiction genre during the pandemic. The topic raised in the literature can lead the children to learn and adapt to the pandemic situation such as Covid-19 and health with all the facts that provided in the book. One of the title books published within this theme is “The Covid-19” written by Beth Bence and Reinke (2021). Another sub-theme contains the family story, which reaches about 21%. This theme is targeted to all families who struggle and try to cope with the pandemic, as written in “My Hero is You” by interagency standing committee in 2020. Meanwhile, the last sub-theme covers social community as identified in 9% of the non-fiction genre. The emerging themes shared insight to the children concerning the essential workers who still worked during the pandemic to keep the world going.

3.2 Fiction

This study found that fourteen children’s books out of the twenty-five are fiction. They are categorized into several emerging sub-themes. Four emerging sub-themes are found in the fiction category, i.e., family, heroes, health, science and daily living, and social community.

Figure 2. Major themes in the children's fiction literature during the pandemic



As shown in Fig. 2, "Family" is the commonly emerging theme in children's literature during the pandemic conditions. The overall findings of children's literature on the family are 36%. One of the title's books from family themes is "Together Living Life During Covid-19" written by Kevin Poplawski in 2020. This book describes how a family can survive the Covid-19 pandemic. The book addresses how to have a pleasant and harmonious family life so that children do not feel lonely even if they do not attend school since their relatives help and teach them. Despite that, the social-community theme was as popular as the family concept. The data reveals that 29% covers this theme. "Outside Inside" by Leuven Pham, released in 2021, is one of the titles in the social-community theme.

The next emerging themes are health, science, and daily living, covering 21%, and heroes covering 14%. It does not mean that the topic has not been widely publicized. Only the researchers sorted through the various books produced throughout the Covid-19 to determine which literature were published in Indonesia. "And Then Came Hope," authored by Stephen Savage and released in 2021, is a book on the theme of health, science, and daily living. Meanwhile, "The Princess in Black and the Case of the Coronavirus," written by Dean and Shannon Hale in 2020, is one of the titles under the heroes theme.

4 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that in children's literature collection during the pandemic, health and science become the most common theme in the non-fiction category. This theme contains the answers to kids' questions concerning some diseases; one of them is Covid-19. These books help the children recognize the disease and guide them in maintaining health during a pandemic. This finding confirms (Elrazek's)¹⁰ statement about children's health promotion during the Covid-19 spread and the topic raised by (Surya, 2020)¹ on forming children's health behavior during the Covid-19 pandemic. The following theme comes with family stories who are trying to cope with the pandemic. Interestingly, this kind of story not only suits the children

but also helps the family to guide the children in facing Covid-19, as supported by (Figueiredo et al., 2021)¹². The last emerging theme involved social community stories, such as the essential worker who struggled to keep the cities going during the pandemic. It is closely linked to (Adams and Milstein, 2021)¹³ concerning the general public, including public health officials, frontline workers, policymakers, and essential workers.

Throughout Covid-19, family themes became the most published in the fiction category. In this situation, many writers are interested in writing and publishing a book to help students, particularly youngsters, learn more about how families may help their children confront various problems and risks in the pandemic. It is in line with Evans et al.'s (Subhadra, 2020)¹⁴ idea that parents and children living with Covid-19 encounter several problems that, when combined, offer a constellation of dangers. "Together Enjoying Life During Covid-19" is one of the book titles that explains it. The book discusses how parents teach their children about the pandemic condition to their children. How do their children comprehend what Covid-19 is, what they should do in this condition, and how they may enjoy life while the epidemic is ongoing? In this regard, the book entitled "Lucy's Mask" tells how parents may assist make mask-wearing more understandable and less intimidating to their children. Furthermore, this book explains how youngsters may grasp the social isolation that children should avoid. This argument is in line with (Figueiredo et al.)¹⁵, who said that educational material consists of directions and exercises to be carried out by parents and their children in the setting of social isolation caused by the pandemic.

As this study found, the second largest fiction book release is social communities. This genre is also frequently developed by writers who provide reading material for children's literature dealing with societal issues. When a pandemic strikes, children cannot communicate or associate with their friends, as portrayed in the book about the loneliness of a child who can only spend his time at home by not connecting with others. This book explains how children may cope with the pandemic through social distancing. This argument deals with (Sethi, 2021)¹⁶, who argues that one of the biggest problems during Covid-19 is social distancing, people should have stay-at-home orders to limit the spread of the virus, and most of us miss face-to-face contact with neighbors, families, and friends. (Okuyama et al., 2020)¹⁷ mention that to promote adherence to social distancing measures and limit the spread of the virus, most schools were shuttered, courses were canceled, and learning became home-based or online. In view of the topic of health, science, and daily living was published. Compared to non-fiction, the health subject is the most prevalent, although it is uncommon in fiction. It is critical to introduce to children the themes of health, science, and daily living.

The last topic concerns heroes. During the pandemic, lockdowns and social distancing caused alterations in people's lives. According to an analytical study conducted by academics, this topic is not extensively reported. These are just a few examples. However, the heroes theme is also highly appealing since it takes various characters from famous cartoons or animations and packages them into a reading book that entices youngsters to read them.

5 Conclusion

This literary study has revealed the map in the children's literature published during the pandemic. Out of the analyzed books, as categorized into fiction and non-fiction, health and

science, are the most emerging theme in non-fiction, and family is the most emerging theme in fiction. This study implies that families and teachers could make use of the children's literature published during the pandemic as a source of knowledge and values for the children to grasp.

References

- [1] Adams, Barbara, and Denise Milstein. "Improvisation, Design, and Sociality during the Pandemic: A Conversation with Denise Milstein from the New York City Covid-19 Oral History, Narrative and Memory Archive." *Design and Culture* 13, no. 1 (2021): 43–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2020.1871557>.
- [2] Asteria, P. V., B. Yulianto, Suyatno, S. Sodiq, and B. Yohanes. "The Establishment of Perceptions and Healthy Living Attitudes for Children through Modern Fairytale Based on Covid-19." In *The International Joint Conference on Arts and Humanities (IJCAH 2020)*, 491:1310–1316, 2020.
- [3] Elrazek, Fatma A. Abd. "Children Health Promotion during Covid-19 Spread." *Menoufia Nursing Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020): 75–79.
- [4] Evans, Subhadra, Antonina Mikocka-Walus, Anna Klas, Lisa Olive, Emma Sciberras, Gery Karantzas, and Elizabeth M. Westrupp. "From 'It Has Stopped Our Lives' to 'Spending More Time Together Has Strengthened Bonds': The Varied Experiences of Australian Families during Covid-19." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020): 1–14.
- [5] Figueiredo, Mirela de Oliveira, Ana Luiza Alegretti, and Lilian Magalhães. "Covid-19 and Child Development: Educational Material for Family Members." *Revista Brasileira de Saude Materno Infantil* 21 (2021): 501–508.
- [6] Klein, Jonathan D., Berthold Koletzko, Mortada H. El-Shabrawi, Adamos Hadjipanayis, Naveen Thacker, and Zulfiqar Bhutta. "Promoting and Supporting Children's Health and Healthcare during Covid-19-International Paediatric Association Position Statement." *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 105 (2020): 620–624.
- [7] Nurgiyantoro, Burhan. *Sastra Anak Pengantar Pemahaman Dunia Anak*. Yogyakarta, Gadjah Mada University Press, 2018.
- [8] Okuyama, Junko, Shuji Seto, Yu Fukuda, Shunichi Funakoshi, Shintaro Amai, Jun Onobe, Shinichi Izumi, Kiuoshi Ito, and Fumihiko Imamura. "Mental Health in Children and Adolescents during Covid-19 Pandemic." *School Restrictions and Youth's Mental and Physical Health* 253 (2020): 203–215.
- [9] Oliveira, Júlia Meller Dias de, Luciana Butini, Patrícia Pauletto, Karyn Munyk Lehmkuhl, Cristine Miron Stefani, Michele Bolan, Eliete Guerra, Bruce Dick, Graziela De Luca Canto, and Carla Massignan. "Mental Health Effects Prevalence in Children and Adolescents during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review." *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing* 19 (2022): 130–137.
- [10] Sethi, Bharati. "Will Someone Knock on My Door? COVID-19 and Social Work Education." *Qualitative Social Work* 20, no. 1–2 (2021): 116–122.
- [11] Śniadach, Justyna, Sylwia Szymkowiak, Przemysław Osip, and Napoleon Waszkiewicz. "Increased Depression and Anxiety Disorders during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Children and Adolescents: A Literature Review." *Life* 11, no. 1188 (2021): 1–13.
- [12] Surya, Dedy. "To Form Children's Health Behaviour during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Teacher's Strategy and Obstacle." *Atfāluna: Journal of Islamic Early Childhood Education* 3, no. 2 (2020): 105–112.
- [13] Tufail, Huda. "Visual Representation of Covid-19 in Children's Literature: A Semiotic Analysis." *Sir Syed Journal of Education & Social Research* 4, no. 2 (2021): 423–430.
- [14] Tyasrinestu, Fortunata. "Adapting to the New Normal during the Covid-19 Pandemic through Creating a Children's Song with a Health Theme." In *International Conference on Art, Design, Education and Cultural Studies (ICADECS)*, 303–308, 2021.

- ¹ Huda Tufail, "Visual Representation of Covid-19 in Children's Literature: A Semiotic Analysis," *Sir Syed Journal of Education & Social Research* 4, no. 2 (2021): 423–430.
- ² Justyna Śniadach et al., "Increased Depression and Anxiety Disorders during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Children and Adolescents: A Literature Review," *Life* 11, no. 1188 (2021): 1–13.
- ³ Fatma A. Abd Elrazek, "Children Health Promotion during Covid-19 Spread," *Menoufia Nursing Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020): 75–79.
- ⁴ Jonathan D. Klein et al., "Promoting and Supporting Children's Health and Healthcare during Covid-19-International Paediatric Association Position Statement," *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 105 (2020): 620–624.
- ⁵ Junko Okuyama et al., "Mental Health in Children and Adolescents during Covid-19 Pandemic," *School Restrictions and Youth's Mental and Physical Health* 253 (2020): 203–215.
- ⁶ Tufail, "Visual Representation of Covid-19 in Children's Literature: A Semiotic Analysis."
- ⁷ Fortunata Tyasrinestu, "Adapting to the New Normal during the Covid-19 Pandemic through Creating a Children's Song with a Health Theme," in *International Conference on Art, Design, Education and Cultural Studies (ICADECS)*, 2021, 303–308.
- ⁸ Burhan Nurgiyantoro, *Sastra Anak Pengantar Pemahaman Dunia Anak*, Yogyakarta, Gajah Mada University Press, 2018.
- ⁹ P. V. Asteria et al., "The Establishment of Perceptions and Healthy Living Attitudes for Children through Modern Fairytale Based on Covid-19," in *The International Joint Conference on Arts and Humanities (IJCAH 2020)*, vol. 491, 2020, 1310–1316.
- ¹⁰ Elrazek, "Children Health Promotion during Covid-19 Spread."
- ¹¹ Dedy Surya, "To Form Children Health Behaviour during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Teacher's Strategy and Obstacle," *Aṭfāluna: Journal of Islamic Early Childhood Education* 3, no. 2 (2020): 105–112.
- ¹² Mirela de Oliveira Figueiredo, Ana Luiza Alegretti, and Lilian Magalhães, "Covid-19 and Child Development: Educational Material for Family Members," *Revista Brasileira de Saude Materno Infantil* 21 (2021): 501–508.
- ¹³ Barbara Adams and Denise Milstein, "Improvisation, Design, and Sociality during the Pandemic: A Conversation with Denise Milstein from the New York City Covid-19 Oral History, Narrative and Memory Archive," *Design and Culture* 13, no. 1 (2021): 43–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2020.1871557>.
- ¹⁴ Subhadra Evans et al., "From 'It Has Stopped Our Lives' to 'Spending More Time Together Has Strengthened Bonds': The Varied Experiences of Australian Families during Covid-19," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020): 1–14.
- ¹⁵ Figueiredo, Alegretti, and Magalhães, "Covid-19 and Child Development: Educational Material for Family Members."
- ¹⁶ Bharati Sethi, "Will Someone Knock on My Door? COVID-19 and Social Work Education," *Qualitative Social Work* 20, no. 1–2 (2021): 116–122.
- ¹⁷ Okuyama et al., (2020)