



Teachers' Perceptions on the Literacy Skills of 5th Grade Primary School Students During Covid-19 Pandemic in Mandailing Natal Regency

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Abstract: This study aims to discover the literacy skills of 5th grade primary school students during Covid-19 outbreak in Mandailing Natal Regency based on teachers' perceptions. Descriptive qualitative approach was applied with a simple quantitative support in form of percentages. The respondents in this study were 23 primary school teachers of fifth year class from 23 different primary schools located in 23 districts in Mandailing Natal Regency. To obtain the data, a semi structured interview was conducted adapted from four literacy skills consisting of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The obtained data subsequently were analyzed by thematic analysis based on specific separated themes. The findings demonstrated four results; (1) in listening skill, dominantly, 11 (48%) teachers thought that students' literacy level is average and for higher level of listening 11 (48%) teachers shared low. (2) in speaking, 11 (48%) teachers stated average and for higher level, 13 (57%) teachers assumed low. (3) in reading, 12 (52%) teachers noted average, and (4) in writing, 11 (48%) teachers perceived average and for higher level, (52%) 12 of teacher-respondents responded that students' literacy skills were average. Based on these results, it is highly expected to be worthwhile for teachers, lecturers, academician, stakeholders and public community to anticipate and to develop the students' literacy development by supporting and facilitating the students' fundamental needs such as children books, complete and comfortable school library, providing reading corner and ensuring teachers' mastery on digital literacy platforms amidst Covid-19 pandemic and in the coming years, as well.

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Introduction

The presence of Covid-19 outbreak gives a great effect for many sectors, including literacy skills of primary school students. Nationwide, students' literacy skill level is in the moderate to low rate. Center of Education Research (Puspendik) in 2016 released a data picturing condition of literacy skill of Indonesian students particularly in reading skill. The data states that 46,83 % of entire Indonesian students are categorized into low skill in reading, 6,06% are categorized into good and 47,11% are moderate or average (Mursyid, 2016). Moreover, the index of reading interest in Indonesia in 2020 is 55,74% and it is categorized into moderate level (Perpusnas, n.d.).

The data above indirectly implies that reading skill of Indonesian students is prominently categorized into moderate level. It is worsened by a data that reveals Indonesia is the 71st rank over 76 countries worldwide in terms of literacy skills. In addition, the literacy index itself refers to the result of scientific study which was participated by 600.000 students of 15 years of age from 72 countries include Indonesia (OECD, n.d.).



Literacy itself is defined as skill of reading, writing, arithmetic (Cappello, 2017). Thereupon, literacy means the ability of an individual (mainly in listening, speaking, reading and writing) to communicate with different ways depending on the goals (Sari & Pujiono, 2017). In effort to elevate Indonesian students' literacy skill, particularly for primary school students' level, teacher together with students' parents can initiate building students' literacy habit such as listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. Implementing literacy habit, for instance by promoting reading habit, it potentially can increase reading culture among students, teachers, parents and public community (Susanto, 2016). It can be started from students' environment for instance schools, family, and community by enhancing reading interest (Antoro, 2017).

Notwithstanding literacy is not defined restrictedly only for reading skill, but it also comprises skills of speaking, writing, listening and thinking. Therefore, Literacy skills must be being habit in school area, public community and family at home (Kusmana, 2017). Moreover, the students' activities should be integrated towards literacy skill building. Since literacy is a skill to understand and is a skill to access a variety of activities requiring individual's intelligence such as reading, writing, speaking and reading (Faizah et al., 2016). During covid-19 pandemic, students' literacy skill is also inevitably affected due to change of learning system where conventional teaching learning system rapidly turns into online learning. Online learning itself is learning process by using certain media by virtual interaction process designed between students and teachers (Daryanto & Karim, 2017).

A number of previous studies demonstrated positive impact of students' literacy development. One of them aimed at investigating the importance of the pattern of school literacy movement in primary school (Suyono et al., 2017). Moreover, building literacy skill by a certain program which targets to elevate students' literacy skills by encouraging and mobilizing students to read textbooks for 15 minutes before the class is started (Hastuti & Lestari, 2018). Furthermore, a predecessor study revealed that literacy skill is widely mobilized by both government and school-teachers by creating literacy culture at school or well known called program of School Literacy Movement (GLS). The program itself emphasizes on reading books movement, stimulates students' mathematical and technological literacy skills consisting of many creative sub-programs such as writing guidance, library visit competition, literacy corners, literacy competition and the like. All those creative programs have goal to welcome the Indonesian golden generation in 2045 (Retnasari et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, students' literacy skills during covid-19 pandemic are critically affected due to the transformation of learning system from face-to-face class into online class setting. This condition unfortunately may cause a myriad of barriers on students' literacy skills development, for example for primary students who have problems in reading and writing where they just begin to develop those two basic literacy skills. It will be challenging for teachers to develop students' literacy skill during online class setting with lack of direct guidance and other potential obstacles for instance bad internet connection, gadget ownership problem and internet data cost. This phenomenon appears as a research gap from previous studies beside the different main topic where this recent study does not only focus on reading skill as previous studies discovered, but this successor study also tries to discover other literacy skills: listening, speaking and writing.

The research objective of this study is to discover literacy skills of primary school students class five based on teachers' perceptions. Teachers of primary schools had experienced in carrying out both offline and online learning amidst covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, they know much about their students' development in literacy whether positively increases or unexpectedly exsiccates. Hence, their perceptions are urgently needed to frame a

comprehensive image of 5th graders primary students' literacy skills during covid-19 outbreak in Mandailing Natal regency. The essential reasons to do so are this kind of study had never been done before in Mandailing Natal regency and generally in Indonesia. Furthermore, this study answers and fills the gap between previous study and this recent one where this recent study comprises four literacy skills and points out teachers' perception. Ultimately, this study hopefully contributes to trigger all parties (stakeholders, governments, schools, community) to support all program that are addressed to improve students' literacy skills.

Research Method

This study employed descriptive design through qualitative approach with the objective to achieve an exhaustive notion on a definite social phenomenon or humans' behavioral phenomena via naturalistic method and contextual investigation (Creswel & Creswell, 2017). In addition, descriptive qualitative encompasses a pure image of a certain study object phenomenon and reported by narrative ways (Emzir, 2015). In addition, simple quantification in percentages was applied to simplify the teachers' perceptions tendency.

This study involved 23 teachers of class 5 elementary schools in Mandailing Natal regency, North Sumatera province, Indonesia. In teacher-respondent selection, purposive sampling method was applied. The selection of teacher-respondents refers to the two criteria; (1) homeroom teacher of 5th grade primary school, (2) regularly teaching 5th class of primary school. To select primary school, the writers randomly picked up 1 primary school to represent one district. Thus, 23 primary schools were selected to represent total 23 districts officially existing in Mandailing Natal regency. In addition, The reasons of choosing 5th grade primary schools students as the main point to be asked to teachers in interview in this study were; (a) the 5th grade primary students were perceived that they had finished learning basic literacy skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing from class 1, 2, 3 and class 4 (b) they had experienced offline and online learning due to covid-19 pandemic.

Data collection was done by giving semi-structured interview. Before being used, the guidance format of semi-structure interview was evaluated, validated and revised based on experts' view, including modification, addition and deletion. This study took 4 months long in duration and it was conducted from July to December 2021. The obtained data subsequently organized and analyzed descriptively-quantitatively into particular separated themes based on aforementioned design stages.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this research are based on the responses to the semi-structured interviews in the field. The findings and discussion are separated into four sections in order easier and simpler to understand.

1) Literacy Skill in Listening

Semi-structured interview results with 23 respondents demonstrated that the literacy skill in listening of 5th grade primary school students was dominated by average level. Most of the respondent teachers spoke students' literacy skill is dominantly average level. Small number of respondents thought good. That reality possibly is affected by many factors. In this context, most students use local language namely Mandailing language. It could possibly contribute to hinder their listening skills when the teacher delivers or explains material in classroom by using Bahasa Indonesia. Many factors greatly affect listening skill such as vocabulary mastery, rhyming sounds, idioms, grammar, pronunciation, local accents, and rhythms (Lynch, 2022). There were 11 (48%) teacher respondents claimed that literacy skill

of 5th primary school students in listening is average. One of them identified as respondent 6 (R.6) described average and the other one (R.7) noted good. Their narratives were recorded as follows:

Students' literacy skill in listening is diverse. Majority of is average. Some of them are in the level of low. But, generally they are in the level average. (The low and average level of literacy skill in listening) caused by much play outside the school. It is effect of three days entering school of each week during covid-19 pandemic era (R.6).

The condition of students skill in listening is 90 percent good and just focusing in listening (R.7).

Eventhough the result revealed various condition of students' literacy skill in listening namely low, good, and average, the number of respondents who rated low also takes a big portion. It is problematic for primary students' literacy skill in listening. By reason of listening skill is foundation to develop children's cognition (Wahyuni et al., 2020). Thus, a much more attention is needed to grow students' literacy skill in listening.

Table 1. Percentage of Literacy Skill in Listening

Level	Total	Percentage
Good	2	9%
Average	11	48%
Low	10	43%

This condition may be affected by the acoustic environment in the classroom. Since kids' listening skill is in the process of development, they need proper and good voice, no noise which leads into problems in speech perception and phonetic recognition (Gheller et al., 2020) and factor of concentration where listening skill needs high concentration (Alzamil, 2021). Moreover, 10 (43%) teacher respondent stated that literacy skill in listening of 5th grade primary school students is low. Below is one of teacher-respondent narratives categorizing students' literacy skill is low:

Student' skill in listening is still deficient. Mostly scant/low. Maybe they are lazy or addicted by long holiday (due to covid-19 pandemic) (R.5).

Furthermore, literacy skill in listening in the higher level encompassing as following skills: (1) skill of understanding, (2) skill of evaluating, (3) skill of drawing conclusion, (4) skill of giving response or feedback to what a teacher says or explains in the classroom. For primary students, the biggest challenge for them is bravery to talk in classroom. Listening skill allows individuals to comprehend spoken language and it matters input and output where listening is input and speaking is output of listening. One of things to concern about listening skill is anxiety (Yavuz & Celik, 2017). In this higher level of listening, 9 (39%) respondents rated average for the 5th grade primary school students' literacy skill in listening, 3 (13%) respondents claimed good. Unfortunately, majority of namely 11 (48%) respondents spoke low.

Table 2. Percentage of Literacy Skill in Listening for Higher Level

Level	Total	Percentage
Good	3	13%
Average	9	39%
Low	11	48%

The higher level of listening skill requires students to receive information and at the same time to give relevant responses as their participation by maximizing four skills in classroom, foremost listening skill. Their four skills are realized by actively taking part in class discussion. In consequence, students' participation in the classroom actually is a

manifestation of predicting how well their performance and achievement (Bekkering, 2021). In interview, the various level of students' skill in listening recorded as (R.1), (R.4), and (R.5) uttering:

Only some students understand and give response to the teacher. Approximately two or three students are active to do so (R.1)

The skill of students in listening is good. Such a student is brave to express question. We estimate their number reaches 75 percent good. Especially smart/clever students. Such a student dares to express questions (R.4).

The skill of students in listening alongwith understanding, evaluating, and giving response is quite difficult (low). Especially during covid-19 pandemic era (R.5)

2) Literacy Skill in Speaking

Results of interview in the field, majority of teacher-respondents spoke that their students' skill in speaking was average. In contrast, only 2 (9%) teachers said good regarding students' skill in speaking. Speaking in public, in this study in the classroom, is intended to present ideas and assignment with the goal to enhance competence (Gallego et al., 2021).

Table 3. Percentage of Literacy Skill in Speaking

Level	Total	Percentage
Good	2	9%
Average	11	48%
Low	10	43%

Teacher-respondents who openly rated high and average on students' literacy skill in speaking underline high frequency of questions dropped by students. Students, as (R.7) and (R.22) reported in interview, diligently deliver question to teacher, have good relationship which it stimulates them to freely deliver question on what they are thinking in relation with school activity. Following are excerpts of teacher-respondent' statements.

Often (speaking and giving question in the classroom). Because the relationship between teacher and students is pretty close (R.7)

Active. High frequency of asking question/ average (literacy skill in speaking) (R.22).

The number of teacher-respondents who perceived low on students' speaking skill also covers big number. Their testimony was based on the directly teaching learning experience with the students they rated. This probably is caused by misleading perception where speaking is not main literacy skill. Speaking skill frequently is ignored in teaching learning process and never be tested officially at the end of semester and it is different from writing, reading and grammar that are regularly administered (Venkateswara & John, 2021). Interviewee, identified (R.6) and (R.11) shared the causes namely the lack of students' self-confidence so they seldom to speak and the low intensity of face to face meeting class due to covid-19 pandemic. The minimum frequency of speaking may be caused by online learning which generates anxiety, boredom, stress, confusion and fear (Tegowati et al., 2022). They narrated as follows:

Still low (literacy of speaking) only two or three students (willing to actively speak and asking question to the teacher). (R.6)

Getting harder (giving question and speaking in the classroom with teacher) because of low intensity of face to face meeting (due to covid-19 pandemic) (R.11)

The interview result also discovered the higher level of literacy skill in speaking. Student higher level comprises (1) the students' skill in expressing idea and feelings, (2)

student's skill to retell ideas or thoughts that is listened, (3) the student's skill to mention ideas or thoughts from a certain textbook. Students' skill in speaking for higher level is still need improvement. It is in aligned with the result where teacher-respondents evaluated their students' speaking skill with low image.

Table 4. Percentage of Literacy Skill in Speaking in the Higher Level

Level	Total	Percentage
Good	2	9%
Average	8	34%
Low	13	57%

During Covid-19 pandemic where going to school is limited due to preventive measures, automatically to increase speaking skill students need direct and face to face meeting to boost their motivation and interest. Hence, motivation and interest are important during online learning (Dirgantoro et al., 2022). Based on result, only 2 (9%) teacher-respondents rated good for the students' skill in speaking in higher level. The positive image by reason of students bravery to speak, gifted students and become habit for some of them. Interviewee identified as (R.4) and (R.7) spoke their students with positive attitude in speaking skill, voicing:

They are getting accustomed and brave. They can. Some are able to express questions (to teachers) mainly dealing with the topic of lesson in classroom. Mostly they are bright in the classroom (R.4).

(Students) are able (to speak) and good (speaking skill). Some still stuck because of stolid (R.7).

Most of teacher-respondents delivered negative attitudes on students' skill in speaking for higher level. They unmasked the reasons such as lack of bravery to talk, use local language more frequently than Bahasa Indonesia so they are not getting accustomed to express their ideas in Bahasa Indonesia. Respondents (R.8) and (R.14) explained:

Low or decifient. Need guidance. Students are not feeling brave (to express questions and understand lesson material (R.8)

Low. Because students' skill in Bahasa Indonesia is still low (R.14).

3) Literacy Skill in Reading

Reading skill of 5th grade primary school students dominated by average and good level. Meanwhile the lowest level only takes little percentage. This implies a positive achievement for students. This result brings positive hope regarding the better reading habit, the better the students' intelligence. Reading along with writing skill, has significant influence for a person which it stimulates analytical thinking, socioeconomic and cultural (Ranieri, 2019) and reading itself is inseparable with writing activity and arithmetic which leads to logical thinking (Cappello, 2017).

Table 5. Percentage of Literacy Skill in Reading

Level	Total	Percentage
Good	7	31%
Average	12	52%
Low	4	17%

Developing reading skill is impossible without turning the environment into reading habit. It needs to promote reading habit among society (Susanto, 2016) and socialized into wider space, which is not only implemented around school, but also in family and community (Antoro, 2017; Kusmana, 2017). Teacher respondents identified as (R.1), (R.4), and (R.21) mentioned that reading skill of 5th year class primary school still needs consistently guidance and encouragement. They narrated:

Average (reading skill of students). They still need guidance and suggestion. (R.1) Predictably they are good. They can. (we) have explained the punctuation like exclamation mark (R.4).

Average. Some are able (to read correctly based on standardized spelling, pronunction and punctuation mark) (R.21).

Meanwhile some teachers rated low for their students in reading. To overcome the problems of literacy, notably for reading, it can be solved by some solutions as discovered by previous studies. The relevant solutions are creating pattern of literacy movement compatible with school necessity (Suyono et al., 2017) boosting students to read any books right before starting the class (Hastuti & Lestari, 2018) strengthening library function and designing rich environment with books (Hastuti & Lestari, 2018) and creative program such as literacy competition, competition of library visit, and fostering students' technological and mathematical literacy skill (Retnasari et al., 2022). In Addition, teachers also noted the barriers the students face in reading such as apprehension to read with correct pronunciation and proper punctuation. In regard with that, two interviewees stating:

(Reading with correct pronunciation) there are also many students can not read correctly. (Read according to the correct punctuation) Some are lacking (R.6).

4) Literacy Skill in Writing

Writing is prominent to become a literate person. However, writing skill needs process since children pre-school until young boy. They can begin writing skill by writing simple thing for instance journey at home (Mackenzie & Petriwskyj, 2017). Based on the results of interview, the condition of literacy skill in writing of 5th grade elementary school students was dominated by average level. Meanwhile a slight similar number of interviewees shared good and low on students' literacy skill in writing.

Table 6. Percentage of Literacy Skill in Writing

Level	Total	Percentage
Good	5	21.73%
Average	11	47.82%
Low	7	30.43%

For a children who are getting accustomed to read and to write since early childhood, they will have no problem dealing with reading and writing (Kharizmi, 2015). This is aligned with the result of interview which shows that most of teacher-respondents narrated that writing skill of 5th grade primary school students was average and good. Even so, punctuation and semicolon are still writing problems for students. Respondents identified as (R.10) and (R.19) confirmed it, saying:

(basic writing literacy) is good, and (dictating) for some students are able (R.5 & R.7) Average (Writing literacy skill). Incorrect in using the semicolon (R.10)

Can. 4,5,6 is decent. Good enough or average (R.19)

(Writing literacy, imitating written and dictating students) 75% is good. It's running well (R.21)

To elevate students' writing skill, chiefly low to average/good, teacher can integrate at home and at school (AHAS) writing curriculum (Dunn & Finley, 2010). Nevertheless, errors are found in writing such as misspelling of using capital and non-capital letters. When children inserted a capital letter a non-initial position of a word, it means that capital letter is familiar with the student for instance the letters is his/her name spelling (Treiman & Kessler, 2004). In interview, teachers stated that students can not differentiate the use of uppercase and lowercase letters. Regarding this, they had narrated clearly as follows:

Low (literacy of writing during covid). Uppercase and lowercase letters are made the same. (R.2)

Based on the results of interviews, writing literacy skills at a higher level, the conditions are different from basic writing and dictation writing literacy that has been elaborated previously. The higher level of writing literacy means writing with (1) the skill to write description based on pictures, (2) the skill to write ideas and main ideas, (3) the skill to write conclusions from the results of reading texts read by a teacher and (4) the skill to rewrite the contents of the stories heard of lesson heard.

Table 7. Percentage of Literacy Skill in Writing For Higher Level

Level	Total	Percentage
Good	1	4%
Average	12	52%
Low	10	44%

Majority of respondents stated that the higher level writing literacy skill of primary school students was average. Only one respondent rated good. Meanwhile, a second great number of respondents thought that students' literacy in writing for higher level is low. This finding is serious problem where they are going to keep on their study to next level (junior high school) and automatically they also need higher level of writing skill. At this point, parents' role is core to ensure their kids have good writing skill. Parents have inevitable role that contribute to child's literacy interest. Accordingly, parent literacy promoting behavior can potentially influence child into positive literacy development (Hume et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that teachers dominantly perceived that students' literacy level in listening is average and for higher level of listening, they narrated low. Moreover, in speaking skill, most of the teachers stated average and for higher level of speaking, majority of them assumed low. Furthermore, in reading skill, most of the teachers perceived average. At the same time, majority teachers perceived average and for higher level, most of them also perceived average. The findings of this study are highly expected to be worthwhile for all teachers, lecturers, academician, stakeholders and public community as the worthy sources to anticipate and to develop the students' literacy skill development amidst Covid-19 pandemic and in the coming years, as well.

The findings of this study have limitations in terms of area coverage, number of respondents and the scope of discussion. Even so, this study hopefully can contribute to provide a comprehensive image of literacy situation, in particular for students of elementary school class 5 amidst Covid-19 outbreak. Perhaps, by involving 23 teacher-respondents of 23 elementary schools from 23 different districts in Mandailing Natal, the description of skill of literacy level for elementary students class 5 can be satisfactorily accepted and useful for all parties.

Recommendation

The findings of this study are designed to achieve a whole picture of primary school students' literacy skill based on teachers' perception, particularly during Covid-19 pandemic era. As a result, recommendation for government, policymakers and teachers is to create an atmosphere of literacy habit around students environment (school, family, community) and to supply the suitable needs of student to shift their literacy skills.

Nevertheless, this study has limitation in terms of sample size coverage and school level diversity. Therefore, next study hopefully conducts the same research with bigger



sampling size representing broader area and involving various respondents of teachers with various background; they are from elementary schools, secondary schools, senior high schools up to university level.

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