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The Malay Translations of Children's Books during The Covid-19 Period: An Overview

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Received: 02 June 2025

Accepted: 14 August 2025

Abstract: In Malaysia, the pandemic catalysed the publication of Malay-translated children's digital books focused on COVID-19. However, the pandemic's influence extended beyond COVID-related themes, affecting overall trends in children's literature translation. Previous studies illustrate how translation activities in Malaysia have historically reflected societal shifts, from colonial influences to post-independence national identity formation. More recently, a previous study revealed a marked decline in the publication of Malay-translated children's books during 2020-2021, correlating with the peak of the pandemic. Therefore, this study is carried out to delve deeper into this finding. This study aims to examine the types of texts, source languages, and publishers that defined the Malaysian children's book translation landscape during this turbulent era. Based on data collected from the National Library's Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), this paper analyses how the pandemic reshaped translation trends in Malay children's literature and discusses broader implications for the publication industry, with a focus on print publications. The study found that there was a sharp drop in the number of publications during the height of the COVID-19 period. Amid this downward trend, however, Chinese has emerged as the number one source language, surpassing English. Comics and picture storybooks were found to be the most popular types of text, signalling the prevalence of visually engaging and entertaining formats in children's literature. Finally, the study also found that independent publishers played a pivotal role in sustaining the translation landscape during the pandemic period.

Keywords: children's literature, genre, Malay translation, COVID-19, publication trends

Introduction

In 2020, more than 50 organisations in the humanitarian sector including the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies collaborated through a project developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings to publish a new storybook that aims to help children understand and come to terms with Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The English storybook, titled "My Hero is You; How Kids Can Fight COVID-19!", was published to provide mental and psychosocial support in emergency settings for children. The storybook was based on survey input from more than 1700 children, parents, caregivers and teachers describing how they coped with the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that the story and its messages resonated with children from different backgrounds and continents (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2020).

The book was initially only translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish. However, as of April 2025, 140 versions are available on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee website, befitting the aim for the book to "reach as many children as possible" (UNICEF, 2020). In short, the scale of this project,

which encompasses comprehensive research involving participants from different countries through a collaboration of various humanitarian agencies worldwide, signifies the importance of literature as a form of support for children as they grow and experience significant events in life. An initial observation has found that the important role of literature as a form of support for children during the pandemic is also recognised in Malaysia, as evident through the publication of children's books specifically on the subject of COVID-19, including through translation. The Malay version of "My Hero is You, How Kids Can Fight COVID-19!", for example, was published in 2020. There was also the Malay version of "Coronavirus: A book for children" published in the same year. Both of these titles are published as e-books.

However, a recent study by Atikah (2025) has indicated that the impact of COVID-19 on the publication of children's book translations manifests in more ways than just the COVID-19-related titles. While the importance of children's literature as part of the support system during the pandemic has been recognised and studied extensively, there is little information on data specifically for translations beyond COVID-related titles, including in Malaysia. As such, this study aims to analyse the trends in the publication of Malay children's book translations in Malaysia during the pandemic era, with a focus on print books.

Literature Review

Previous studies have shown that the translation of children's books in Malaysia constantly reflects the various circumstances and events in the country. For instance, translations by Christian missionaries kick-started the publication of Malay books specifically for children in the 19th century (Md. Sidin, 2005). Later on, as the British rulers began to focus on local school education, the demand for reading materials for school-age children also increased, leading to the translation of more titles for children (Proudfoot, 1993 & Md. Sidin, 2005). Several years post-independence, the translation of children's books in the country went through several ups and downs; there was a gradual increase after the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the momentum of which was arrested in 1972. This was caused in part by the racial riot in 1969, highlighting the various impacts of a national tragedy on a country.

The racial riot, in turn, spurred the government's effort to develop a national identity and spirit, and Malay was declared the medium for teaching and learning at the national schools. This resulted in a sharp increase in demand for Malay reading materials for use in school. The Malaysian Ministry of Education allocated financial aid for libraries to increase their Malay book collections. During this period, literary works for children in Malay were limited, leading to the translation of foreign literary works into Malay to address this gap (Othman Puteh, 1989). This resulted in increased translation activities for children's books between 1974 and 1985. A total of 593 Malay-translated books were published during this peak period (Sharifah Fazliyatun Shaik Ismail, 2007). In the mid-1980s, translation activities began to decline due to the rise in original Malay writings (Md. Sidin 2005). In September 1993, the Malaysian National Institute of Translation (ITNM) was established to facilitate translation, interpreting, and information transfer at national and international levels (Lettress de Malaisie, 2013). This government-linked company (GLC) was rebranded in 2011 as the Malaysian Institute of Translation and Books (ITBM). The establishment of this institution has fostered a renewed interest in translating children's literature in the country.

Despite its important role in the Malaysian children's book industry as discussed earlier in this section, there is still limited data on the translation of children's literature in Malaysia, especially in the past ten years or so. A study by Atikah and Haslina (2020), for instance, analysed the publication trend for a ten-year period between 2008 and 2017. A follow-up study by Atikah (2025) reviewed the publication trend of Malay-translated children's literature until 2024. Another study by Nor Idatul and Haslina (2025) examined translated children's books published between 1993 and 2018 as part of their research on the role of ITBM as the patron in translating children's literature in Malaysia. Other studies on the translation of children's literature mainly focused on specific textual elements and translation strategies or procedures. While all these studies have provided insightful and necessary information regarding the translation of children's literature in the country in the past decade, there have been no studies that focus on children's book translations in relation to a specific period or events, including the recent pandemic. Taking into account that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a major disruption and shift in various facets of life worldwide, this highlights a significant gap in knowledge

concerning how the pandemic has affected children's book publications in Malaysia, particularly translation. As pointed out by Pym (1998), it is important that factors such as text selection, time and location are analysed through archaeological translation studies to determine their influence on the product and the translation industry as a whole.

An initial overview from a previous study by Atikah (2025) reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has indeed caused adverse effects on children's book translations in Malaysia. The study has found more than 1800 titles published over the last 20 years, with over 1000 titles published between 2005 and 2014, and about 800 titles published between 2015 and 2024. While these numbers are still higher compared to the total titles published during the 10-year boom period between 1974 and 1985, there has been a decrease of more than 200 titles (19.8%) between 2015 and 2024 compared to the previous 10-year period. Upon further analysis, it has been found that this decrease can be attributed mainly to the sharp drop in the number of publications in 2020 and 2021 (Atikah Zabir, 2025). This drop coincides with the COVID-19 pandemic, the peak of which occurred between 2020 and 2021 (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). As such, this study aims to analyse the translation of children's books in Malaysia during the pandemic. This is because the pandemic, as will be discussed in the following section, has affected the publishing industry worldwide.

1. COVID-19: Impacts on The Publication Industry

The outbreak of COVID-19 in late 2019 triggered a global health crisis that rapidly escalated into a pandemic, placing extraordinary strain on healthcare systems worldwide. Governments responded with strict measures such as travel restrictions, social distancing rules, and lockdowns. While these strategies initially curtailed the virus's spread, they also disrupted economies and daily life (Norliza et al., 2023; Mohd Noor Azam et al., 2023; Hale et al., 2021). Among the industries profoundly affected by the pandemic was global publishing, including children's literature. This section explores how publishers navigated challenges and opportunities during this period.

In Western countries, the publishing industry experienced considerable disruptions due to supply chain breakdowns, the closure of brick-and-mortar bookstores, and shifting consumer preferences toward digital formats. In the United States of America, bookstore sales declined 28.8% in October 2020 vs. 2019 (Guren, 2021). Nevertheless, the book publishing industry showed great resilience and proceeded to demonstrate an even greater growth compared to the pre-COVID era. In the largest sector, trade publishing (including children's and young adult books), sales are up by 7.5% to October 31, after a mere 0.4% increase in 2019 (and 1.5% in 2018) (Guren, 2021). Children's non-fiction titles increased by 66% in 2020 (Charlton, 2020). In the UK, an even greater growth was recorded. Children's educational titles went up by 234%. To surmise, despite the challenges faced by traditional retail stores due to the lockdown measures, book sales in the West saw a boom as parents and teachers turned to books and reading to entertain and educate children, helping them to cope with the changes and overcome the difficulties they experienced during the pandemic era.

Similarly, the publishing industries in Asia went through changes caused by the pandemic. According to Ren and Kang (2021), China's book industry experienced its first negative growth in 20 years in the year 2020. Trade publishing, which refers to publishing related to the general public's daily life, leisure and entertainment, and cultural experience, has been adversely affected. The effect is especially severe on non-state-owned publishing companies (Ren & Kang, 2021). Nevertheless, they reported that despite the decline in the overall book market, children's books still maintained a slight positive growth in China, with a year-on-year growth rate of 1.96%. The number of books in print sold was 300,000, a slight increase from 2019 with publishers focusing on online sales. In India, publishers also went through trying times as both online and offline sales were initially cut off, and events like book fairs were cancelled. Furthermore, printing activities were halted (Kirpal, 2020).

Malaysian neighbouring countries, such as Indonesia and Singapore, reported more severe disruptions in their book publishing industries due to the pandemic (Anderson, 2020). In Indonesia, a survey by Ikatan Penerbit Indonesia (IKAPI) highlighted the severity of the crisis: 58.2% of publishers experienced sales drops exceeding 50%, while an additional 29.6% reported declines between 31% and 50%. These substantial losses were largely attributed to a heavy reliance on physical bookstores, which suffered greatly under lockdowns

and movement restrictions (Ayu Dwi Utami et al., 2020). Similarly, despite a 225% increase in physical book loans at Singapore's National Library on the weekend preceding the country's lockdown, the subsequent restrictions resulted in a sharp decline in foot traffic for independent bookstores, many of which were already struggling due to high operational costs and rising competition from online platforms. Bookstores across the country were hit with steep declines in brick-and-mortar sales, with some reporting drops of up to 90%. City Book Room, for instance, estimated a 50% decrease in sales, leading them to strengthen virtual engagement with their readers (China Global Television Network, 2020). Although online sales surged during this time, for most bookstores, this is not enough to make up for lost footfall. For example, book retailer Closetful of Books saw sales at its webstore go up by 50 per cent, but though it has no physical storefront to worry about, much of its business still depends on school book fairs (Ho, 2020).

In conclusion, the impact of COVID-19 on children's book publishing varied significantly across regions, underscoring differences in technological readiness, governmental support, and adaptability. The publishers in the West showed great resilience despite initial setbacks, proving their adaptability and readiness in the face of crisis. While publishers faced challenges with traditional sales outlets, they embraced virtual events and online platforms to mitigate losses. This may also be attributed to the availability of systematic online platforms that many other countries, including Malaysia, may lack. Consumer behaviour is also another probable factor driving the difference between Malaysia and the UK and the US. Nevertheless, the pandemic proved to be an undeniably challenging and disruptive force for the publishing industry worldwide. ASEAN countries reported more severe impacts on their publishing industry from the pandemic. One contributing factor is likely their much smaller market size compared to the West. As such, it was no surprise that Malaysia saw a pronounced decline in children's book translations into Malay, reflecting wider challenges in the local publishing sector during the pandemic. The next section delves deeper into these trends, examining the types of texts, source languages, and publishers that defined the Malaysian children's book translation landscape during this turbulent era.

Methodology

This study focuses on analysing the trends and characteristics of Malay-translated children's literature in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic era. To achieve this, the Library Catalogue Analysis (LCA) is employed as a tool in this study, as proposed by Torres-Salinas and Moed (2009). Data was extracted from the National Library's Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), a comprehensive repository of bibliographic records for books published within Malaysia. The National Library's OPAC was chosen as the primary source of data for several compelling reasons. Firstly, since 1982, the Malaysian National Library has served as the National Centre for International Standard Book Number (ISBN), making it a reliable and authoritative institution for collecting publication data. Secondly, the Deposit of Library Material Act 1986 mandates publishers in Malaysia to deposit five copies of printed materials and two copies of non-printed materials with the National Library. This legal requirement ensures that the OPAC database is robust, inclusive, and representative of the publishing activities in the country.

The study specifically investigates a range of attributes, including the types of texts being translated, the source languages of these works, and the publishers responsible for bringing them into the Malay language. These aspects were analysed to provide insights into how the children's literature translation landscape evolved during the pandemic period. This study adapted the following classification of children's literature genres by Russell (2018):

Table 1. Classification of children's literature

No.	Types	Description
1.	Early books for children	First books for infant and toddlers, up until four years old. This genre consists of nursery rhymes, wordless picture books, toy books, and books introducing alphabets, numbers and concepts.
2.	Picture storybooks	Picture storybooks are books that tell stories using both words and illustrations. Usually, picture storybooks are targeted towards 5-year-olds and older children. The content of the stories may vary, such as retelling of folklore, original fantasy, as well as realistic fictions.

3. Folklore	Folklores can be divided into several types such as myths, animal stories, fairy tales and other stories that have been told through many generations.
4. Modern fantasy	Modern fantasy stories consist of impossible stories like adventures in fantasy worlds, time travel, supernatural world, and so on. Modern fantasies are told by individual authors instead of being told through many generations orally like folklore.
5. Realistic fiction	Realistic fictions are stories that represent the real world. Realistic fictions can be divided into two: contemporary realistic fictions and historical realistic fictions.
6. Biography	Biographies tell the life story of a person or an individual. Biographies can be fictional and non-fictional.
7. Educational books	Educational books are books that contain facts and information. Russell (2018) divided educational books into four categories: 1) history and culture, 2) science and environment, 3) humanities, arts and society, and 4) human and behavioural development.
8. Poetry	Poetry or verse are forms of writing different from prose. Malay poetry includes <i>sajak</i> , <i>syair</i> , and <i>pantun</i> .
9. Religious stories	Stories taken from the Quran and hadith, or other religious books like the Bible.
10. Comics	Stories or narratives told through words and illustrations. However, comics are different from picture storybooks because the illustrations in comics are displayed through series of panels following the acts or scenes, and text in comics are placed in the speech bubbles.

Although the present study only focuses on the publishing trend during the pandemic period, the study reviewed the catalogue over the last 10 years to allow for comparisons between the pre- and post-pandemic years. The data was collected by examining books under ‘*Pinjaman Kanak-Kanak*’ (Children’s Loan) category, for the period between 2015 and 2024. The search on the catalogue is narrowed down using the year and language filters available on the website. In total, 4935 titles of Malay children’s books were reviewed. The final sample collected for the study consists of all Malay titles indicated as translations in the catalogue, as exemplified in Figure 1. Books that are published exclusively in digital form are excluded from the study, as the data were not available in the catalogue. The bibliographic records were manually reviewed and classified according to Russell’s category. The classification was made based on the information available in the catalogue, as the National Library’s website typically specifies the genres of the titles, such as comics, illustrated books, biographies, etc. In cases where this data is not immediately available on the catalogue, cross-checks are made across the publishers’ websites and online bookstores. Data was compiled in a spreadsheet for systematic management, which also enables the application of automated frequency distribution analyses. Figure 1 below illustrates an example of an OPAC bibliographic record used in this analysis.



Figure 1. Sample display from the Malaysian National Library’s online public access catalogue
Source: The National Library’s Online Public Access Catalogue (2025)

2. Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to translations of children's literature into Malay. Furthermore, the data collected in the study is limited to the current entries in the Malaysian National Library's Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), which is subject to delays and other probable limitations in registration.

The Findings

The findings section presents a detailed exploration of the trends and outcomes related to the translation of children's literature into Malay during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using bibliographic records from the National Library's Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), the research captures fluctuations in the publishing industry over a nine-year period from 2015 to 2024. The analysis reveals significant impacts of the pandemic on publication numbers, particularly during its peak years in 2020 and 2021, where the sector experienced sharp declines. However, the data also highlights the industry's resilience and recovery in subsequent years, demonstrating adaptability in the face of global disruptions. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, this section uncovers underlying patterns, offering insights into the challenges and adaptations within Malaysia's children's publishing landscape. The findings provide a foundation for understanding broader implications for the local publishing sector and its ability to navigate crises.

1. The Number of Publications during COVID-19

The study first explored the annual trends in the number of publications between 2015 and 2024 to identify any significant shifts during the COVID-19 period. This data provided critical insights into how the pandemic influenced the publishing industry, particularly the translation of children's literature into Malay. The findings, summarised in Table 2 and Figure 2, revealed notable fluctuations in the publication of Malay-translated children's literature over the years.

Before the pandemic, the year 2019 stood out with the highest number of translated children's books recorded within a five-year period, amounting to 117 titles. However, as the pandemic took hold in 2020, the total number of publications dropped sharply to 63 titles a decline of 46% compared to the previous year. This sharp decrease reflects the immediate impact of global disruptions caused by the pandemic. The situation worsened in 2021, with the number of published titles plummeting further to 24—a staggering 62% drop from 2020 and an 80% drop compared to the peak year of 2019. This decline highlights the severe and prolonged challenges faced by the publishing sector during the height of the pandemic.

Interestingly, as the pandemic began to subside, a recovery trend emerged. In 2022, the number of titles surged to 112, suggesting that publishers were beginning to regain their footing. The upward trajectory continued into 2023, with the publication count reaching a 10-year peak of 127 titles. Although 2024 recorded only 12 titles, this may be attributed to delays in the registration of new books within the catalogue rather than a definitive downturn in publishing activities. These trends underscore the resilience and adaptability of the publishing industry in Malaysia, reflecting its ability to rebound from crises and respond to changing external circumstances.

Table 2. Number of publications from 2015 to 2024

No.	Year	Total number of publications
1.	2015	93
2.	2016	93
3.	2017	66
4.	2018	111
5.	2019	117
6.	2020	63
7.	2021	24
8.	2022	112
9.	2023	127
10.	2024	12
Total		818

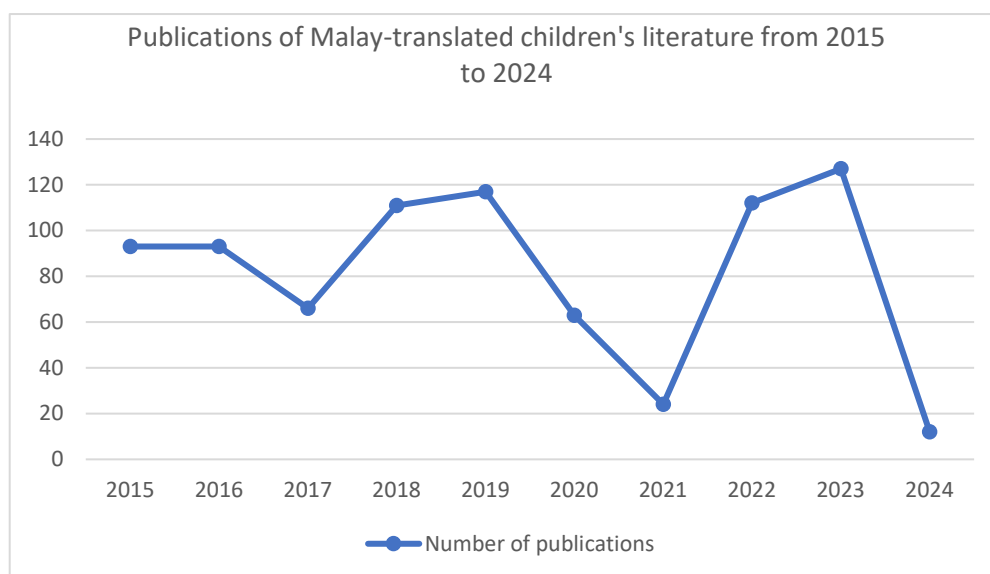


Figure 2. Number of publications from 2015 to 2024

2. Source Languages

The study also analysed the source languages for Malay translations of children's books published in 2020 and 2021. As shown in Table 2, the findings from the study revealed that 58 of 87 titles (67%) during this period were derived from Chinese as the source language. This marked a significant dominance, far outpacing English, which came in second at 11 titles (13%). This finding is particularly noteworthy as English has traditionally been the primary source language for translations of children's books into Malay, a trend that has persisted for decades. However, a recent study by Atikah Zabir (2025) discovered a gradual decline in English's dominance over the past decade, paving the way for other source languages to gain prominence.

The shift towards Chinese aligns with broader global trends where China has become a cultural and economic powerhouse, influencing various industries, including publishing. It also reflects regional dynamics in Southeast Asia, where Chinese-language content has increasingly shaped the literary landscape. Additionally, other Asian languages such as Thai (7%), Korean (6%), and Indonesian (3%) were identified as notable contributors to Malay translations. The presence of these languages underscores the growing interconnectivity of Asian countries in cultural exchange. Interestingly, the source language(s) for four titles could not be identified, leaving a small gap in the dataset but not detracting from the overall observation.

The analysis of source languages for Malay translations between 2020 and 2021 highlights a noteworthy shift in linguistic preferences. Chinese has emerged as the dominant source language, reflecting its increasing cultural influence and regional importance. While further analysis is required to distinguish between Chinese children's literature originating from Malaysia and that from China, the significant rise of Chinese as the source language correlates with the popularity of comics, as the next part of the finding will demonstrate. This finding also aligns with the recent surge in popularity of Chinese animation, allowing it to be an effective means for showcasing Chinese culture to the world and thus proving the effectiveness of market-driven cultural diplomacy as opposed to government direction (Sun, 2025). Meanwhile, although English remains a significant source language for translation into Malay, the decline in its dominance signals a diversification of source languages in the translation landscape. Contributions from other Asian languages further emphasise the expanding cultural exchanges within the region. This evolving trend not only broadens the literary repertoire available to Malay readers but also underscores the dynamic interplay of global and regional forces shaping translation practices today.

Table 3. Source languages for translations between 2020 and 2021

No.	Source language	Number of titles
1.	Chinese	58
2.	English	11
3.	Thai	6
4.	Korean	5
5.	Indonesian	3
6.	N/A	4
Total		87

3. Types of Translations

Table 3 highlights the types of children's books translated into Malay between 2020 and 2021, showcasing a clear preference for comics, which accounted for 63 titles and represented 72% of the total translations. Picture storybooks followed, with 20 titles making up 23%, and educational books contributed a smaller fraction with just four titles (5%), including one biography. This distribution underlines a strong inclination towards entertaining and visually engaging formats in the translation landscape.

Comics dominated the market due to their widespread appeal across age groups, combining visual storytelling with accessible language to captivate young readers. Among the translated comics, many titles carried an educational flavour. For instance, *Komik Pendidikan Britannica: Tubuh Badan Manusia*, translated from English, provides an engaging exploration of human anatomy, while *Bagaimanakah Fosil Terbentuk?* translated from Chinese, introduces children to paleontology. Additionally, *Aku Tidak Memukul*, a comic translated from Indonesian, aims to instil values such as empathy and non-violence.

Picture storybooks also played an important role, blending narrative and illustrations to educate children on social and environmental topics. Titles like *Satu Hari di Pusat Pemulihan Orang Utan Sepilok* and *Oh, Baru Saya Faham: Susahnya Kalau Ayah Dibuang Kerja* are prime examples. The former promotes awareness of wildlife conservation, while the latter tackles the challenges of unemployment and family responsibility, making these translations not only entertaining but also impactful.

Educational books, though fewer, serve as critical resources for deeper learning. The sole biography (*3-Minit Fakta: Ikon Budaya: Seniman • Ahli Falsafah • Ahli Fikir • Penulis yang Mengubah Dunia*) among the translations introduces young readers to inspirational figures, reflecting an effort to balance entertainment with substantive content.

Together, these translations reveal a thoughtful approach to addressing diverse interests and needs in children's literature. In particular, the dominance of comics in translation into Malay corroborates a global trend and interest in this genre. In Britain, for example, sales of children's comics and graphic novels have reached an all-time peak of almost £20m (Thorpe, 2025). Over 40% children and young people aged 8-18 read comics because they were accessible and engaging, supported their wellbeing, and provided opportunities to learn about different cultures (Clark et. al. 2023). A similar trend is also reported in the US. In a survey conducted by the School Library Journal in 2023, the popularity of graphic novels has shot up at over 90 per cent of school libraries (Cockcroft, 2023). In the survey, it is reported that for many children, graphic novels start their love of reading, because words are broken down into smaller spaces with lots of pictures. Therefore, educators are leveraging this enthusiasm to instil students' interest in books and learning.

Table 4. Types of translations between 2020 and 2021

No.	Types	Number of titles
1.	Comics	63
2.	Picture storybooks	20
3.	Educational	4
Total		87

4. Publishers

Table 4 provides detailed insights into the publishers of children's book translations into Malay during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021. A total of 10 publishers contributed to this effort, with Kadokawa Gempak

Starz Sdn. Bhd. emerging as the most prolific publisher. With 50 titles accounting for 58% of all publications during this period, Kadokawa Gempak Starz dominated the market. Specialising in comics, this publisher significantly influenced the high volume of comic translations, particularly those sourced from Chinese. However, Kadokawa Gempak Starz was not the sole contributor to this trend. Other publishers, such as G.Apple Studio Sdn. Bhd., Exact Publisher Sdn. Bhd., and Penerbitan Pelangi Sdn. Bhd., also played roles in translating comics into Malay.

Coming in second place, PTS Publishing House Sdn. Bhd. published eight titles of picture storybooks, primarily translated from English. Al-Ameen Serve Holdings, another significant contributor, published at least three picture storybooks from Indonesian while four titles had an unidentified source language. This publisher's focus on Indonesian translations adds another dimension to the offerings in the Malay children's book market.

Government-related publishers also made contributions to the translation efforts. The Malaysian Institute of Translation and Books (ITBM) published a single title, *100 Perkara Kamu Patut Tahu Tentang Terumbu Karang*, an educational book translated from English. Similarly, UUM Press, associated with a public university, published *Sang Penyu Penyelamat!*, a picture storybook also translated from English. Although the contributions from government publishers were limited, their focus on educational and picture storybooks underscores their commitment to enriching the children's literature landscape.

Finally, two other independent publishers - Diyana Halik Management and Integra Creative Media Sdn. Bhd. each contributed one publication of picture storybooks from English and Chinese, respectively. In conclusion, the study reveals that during the COVID-19 period, independent publishers were significantly more active in translating children's books into Malay compared to government-related publishers. This trend highlights the pivotal role of private entities in ensuring the availability of diverse and culturally relevant children's literature despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Table 5. Publishers of children's books into Malay between 2020 and 2021

No.	Year	Total number of publications
1.	Kadokawa Gempak Starz Sdn. Bhd.	50
2.	PTS Publishing House Sdn. Bhd.	8
3.	Al-Ameen Serve Holdings	7
4.	G.Apple Studio Sdn. Bhd.	7
5.	Penerbitan Pelangi Sdn. Bhd.	6
6.	Exact Publisher Sdn. Bhd.	5
7.	Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia	1
8.	UUM Press	1
9.	Diyana Halik Management	1
10.	Integra Creative Media Sdn. Bhd.	1
Total		87

Discussion

This section synthesises the main findings, exploring their significance for the Malaysian publishing industry and drawing on relevant theoretical frameworks to interpret emerging trends. The onset of the pandemic in 2020 brought about a dramatic reduction in published translations. The industry experienced a substantial 46% decrease in publications between 2019 and 2020, compounded by another 62% drop in 2021. This steep decline mirrored challenges seen globally, as publishers grappled with supply chain disruptions, declining consumer demand, and limited access to distribution channels. The creative sector, heavily reliant on physical products and in-person events, was particularly vulnerable during this period. However, a notable recovery began in 2022, with the number of translated children's books rebounding to pre-pandemic levels and even surpassing them by 2023. This resurgence highlights the resilience and adaptability of Malaysian publishers, who increasingly embraced innovation and digital solutions to meet changing market demands.

A key observation was the major shift in the source languages of translated works. During the pandemic, Chinese supplanted English as the leading source language for translations into Malay, accounting

for 67% of all translated titles. This shift reflects both the growing cultural influence of China in the region and evolving consumer preferences among Malaysian readers. While English has long been dominant in the translation of children's literature, the rise of Chinese alongside other Asian languages such as Thai, Korean, and Indonesian signals a broader regionalisation of the Malaysian book market. On the one hand, this trend enhances the cultural relevance of translated content, allowing children to engage with stories and worldviews that resonate with their own experiences. On the other hand, it raises questions about balancing exposure to local and regional narratives with continued access to globally influential languages like English, which remain essential for international communication and education.

Another significant finding pertains to the predominance of visually engaging formats, particularly comics and picture storybooks. Comics alone represented 72% of translated children's titles throughout the pandemic period. This preference for visual storytelling reflects changing consumer behaviour, with digital media and graphic narratives becoming increasingly popular among young readers. Picture storybooks, though fewer in number, complemented comics by providing educational and socially relevant content. The popularity of these formats underscores the central role of accessibility and entertainment in children's literature, especially during times of crisis when families turned to books as sources of solace and learning.

Independent publishers emerged as vital players in sustaining the availability of translated children's literature during the pandemic. Kadokawa Gempak Starz Sdn. Bhd. led this movement, contributing 58% of all translated publications and specialising in comics sourced primarily from Chinese. Other notable publishers, such as PTS Publishing House and Al-Ameen Serve Holdings, diversified the market with translations from a variety of languages and genres. The dynamism and flexibility of these private entities were critical to the industry's ability to navigate pandemic-induced uncertainties. Their innovation, particularly in adopting digital platforms and hybrid distribution models, was instrumental in supporting the sector's recovery. As a result, closer collaboration between public institutions and private publishers is recommended to strengthen the industry's resilience and promote further growth.

The interpretation of these findings is enriched by theoretical perspectives on cultural capital by Bourdieu (1986) and soft power by Nye (1990). The prevalence of Chinese-sourced content and visually oriented media can be seen as a transfer of cultural capital, where new stories and values expand the symbolic resources available to Malaysian children. This exposure nurtures multicultural appreciation and equips young readers with social and linguistic tools for an interconnected world. In parallel, the increasing dominance of Chinese translations may also be viewed through the lens of soft power, reflecting China's capacity to influence regional identities and aspirations through cultural products.

Looking ahead, these trends have important implications for language education, policy, and identity formation in Malaysia. The rise in translations from Asian languages could foster greater multilingualism and cross-cultural awareness among Malaysian children, while still necessitating a focus on English for global competitiveness. The continued popularity of comics and picture storybooks presents opportunities to engage reluctant readers and promote literacy through entertaining, accessible content. Policymakers and educators must balance the goals of nurturing regional linguistic diversity and maintaining international language proficiency, ensuring that the literature available to children reflects both local realities and global connections.

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic acted as both a disruptor and a catalyst for change in the Malaysian children's book translation sector. The challenges faced stimulated innovation, diversification, and new patterns of collaboration. Moving forward, the industry is well-positioned to build on these lessons, seizing opportunities for further development while responding to the evolving needs and aspirations of Malaysia's young readers.

Conclusion

The pandemic-induced disruptions led to a significant decline in publications, revealing vulnerabilities within the Malaysian publishing industry. However, the resilience and adaptability demonstrated by independent publishers, particularly through innovation and digital tools, underscore the sector's capacity for recovery and growth. The shift in source languages, with Chinese emerging as a dominant contributor, highlights evolving

regional dynamics and the growing demand for culturally resonant content. Furthermore, the preference for visually engaging formats like comics and picture storybooks reflects changing consumer behaviour and the enduring importance of accessibility in literature.

In light of these developments, there are important implications for education policy, translation funding, and multilingual literacy initiatives in Malaysia. Policymakers should consider increasing targeted funding for the translation of children's literature, particularly from diverse linguistic backgrounds, to enrich classroom resources and foster a love of reading. Integrating translated works into the national curriculum can promote multilingual literacy and cross-cultural understanding among students. Furthermore, supporting teacher training on incorporating translated materials could enhance educational outcomes and cultivate more inclusive environments. These measures together would equip Malaysian children with the linguistic agility and cultural awareness needed in an increasingly interconnected world.

Acknowledgement: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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