When online learning and cultural values intersect: Indonesian EFL students' voices

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, all lecturers had to replace their physical classroom teaching mode with online learning, albeit with challenges experienced by students and lecturers. Drawing upon Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, this study attempted to unearth Indonesian students' learning culture by analysing written reflections on their learning experiences. Twenty EFL (English as a foreign language) students enrolled in the English Academic Writing courses at an Islamic university in Indonesia, wrote a reflective essay on their online learning experiences with various platforms, such as *Google Classroom, Google Meet, Canvas, Moodle*, and some other online learning platforms. Content analysis was used to analyse the students' reflective writing essays. Results show that the students' voices bring to the fore several learning issues from online learning experiences. These include: the lecturers' dominant use of *WhatsApp* as an instruction tool, unclear explanations, assigning students too many assignments, and the abandonment of lecturer feedback on works submitted by students. Noteworthy, whether the students liked or disliked the online learning experience, they accepted how the lecturers treated them in the online teaching and learning process. The findings indicated that the students avoided conflicts, showed high respect to their superiors, and used indirect disagreement in the online learning contexts. The findings suggest that the 'small culture' of online learning in higher education is governed by a strong influence of 'large culture' in Indonesia.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced educational institutions worldwide to swap face-to-face learning with online learning. Likewise, this is the case in higher education institutions in Indonesia. All lecturers, regardless of their readiness to integrate technological tools for teaching, were required to use online platforms to deliver all their lectures to students, thus complying with the national COVID-19 containment policy: avoiding crowds of students in order to stop the dissemination of the deadly virus. The unexpected transition from face-to-face to online teaching created challenges (Konig et al., 2020). In the Indonesian higher education context, implementing the emergency policy in higher

education institutions shocked some lecturers as many lacked the technological skills for conducting online learning. To enable the implementation of online learning, higher education institutions trained their lecturers to teach online using a wide range of applications. To this end, some lecturers used the most commonly used applications, such as the *WhatsApp* messaging application for content dissemination, even though it does not enable students and teachers to interact synchronously for knowledge building and problem-solving. *WhatsApp* for content dissemination is problematic because quality learning involves more than merely placing a course online (Tschida et al., 2016).

Numerous studies have explored the use of technology in online teaching (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Deane & Guasch, 2015; Hewett, 2015; Jhon et al., 2020; Martin, Stamper & Flowers, 2020; Palmer & Holt, 2009) and teaching English (Aliyyah et al., 2020; Muslem & Abbas, 2017; Muslem, Yusuf & Juliana, 2018; Silviyanti & Yusuf, 2015). They found that changing face-to-face learning to online learning is not a simple undertaking, especially for those unfamiliar with using technology. Recent research in Indonesia found that teachers faced several challenges in planning, implementing, and evaluating online learning (Atmojo et al., 2020; Jhon et al., 2020). Other studies revealed that students across all levels of global education are mostly not prepared to move to online learning due to the insufficiency of infrastructure, preparation, and access (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Moreover, some lecturers are not familiar with online learning platforms, but they have no other choice except to adopt technology-based instruction (Deane & Guasch, 2015; Hewett, 2015).

In the context of online English teaching in Indonesia, many previous studies have identified various problems related to using technology for online learning (Aliyyah et al., 2020; Maulida & Lo, 2013; Muslem et al., 2018; Silviyanti & Yusuf, 2015). The problems encountered include, firstly geographically, good Internet connection is not easily accessible throughout the province of Aceh. Many remote areas where students lived and learned online during the COVID-19 times have poor or intermittent Internet connections. Consequently, students have to go to the city where the Internet is widely available to participate in online learning. Secondly, not all students can afford to buy technological devices for online learning, as experienced by students from low-income families. Thirdly, not all lecturers were familiar with using online learning platforms for teaching in recent years. However, these studies delimit themselves from investigating the problems encountered by students and teachers in online learning by not listening to students' voices related to their online learning experiences within Indonesian learning culture. It is in this sense that our research is timely.

We argue that listening to the students' voices regarding online learning matters for their learning success. This is so because whatever mode of learning is used, the primary focus of all innovations and creativities in the education setting is to promote student success (Magda & Buban, 2018). Students' online learning experiences are crucial aspects of the learning process that lecturers should know because they correlate positively with the quality of learning outcomes (Palmer & Holt, 2009). Like a conventional classroom, the online classroom is also inseparable from external aspects, such as teachers' beliefs and practices, which shape the culture of teaching and learning. The classroom is portrayed as

a place with "small cultures" which is a particular culture played out within a particular setting, such as classroom by Atkinson (2004, p. 77), as part of his four-part division of conceptualisations of culture. The notion of "small cultures" was initially introduced by Holliday (1999), which is contrasted to "large culture" or national culture. Holliday points out that small culture, in many ways, resembles a community of discourse. Therefore, classroom processes present how classroom talk invariably reproduces the culture outside the institution (Pennington et al., 1996).

In this respect, exploring students' reflections on their experiences in the classroom process, including online classrooms, is beneficial for teachers' resourcefulness. Moreover, students are the target of curriculum implementation, and from them, teachers can understand the extent to which the teaching carried out has been effective. Reflections can monitor and self-regulate practices by deliberately provoking thinking into actions and experiences, strengthening the link between theory and practice, and using such knowledge to practice (Karunanayaka et al., 2017). Reflective practice helps teachers utilise ideas, improve classroom practice, and demonstrate professionalism through learning from classroom-related experiences (Cirocki & Farrell, 2017).

Internationally, previous studies on the relationship of the cultural dimensions on learning have shown, for instance, that international students in Australia are expected to obtain more formative feedback throughout their courses (Warner & Miller, 2015). However, research on identifying the Indonesian learners' behaviours and attitudes in online learning through reflective writing is scanty. This study attempts to fill in the gap by analysing Indonesian EFL (English as a foreign language) students' experiences and behaviours through their reflective essays on using online learning tools throughout a semester during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020.

Literature review

Online learning

Online learning is one of the types of distance learning, defined as "the use of electronic media for a variety of learning purposes that range from add-on functions in conventional classrooms to full substitution for face-to-face meetings through online encounters" (Guri-Rosenblit, 2005). Online learning can be classified into asynchronous and synchronous learning (Aliyyah et al., 2020). Asynchronous online learning means using technology in learning in which learners or group members interact at different times, explore topics, and discuss ideas from various perspectives through messages (Luhrs & McAnally-Salas, 2016, p. 31). On the other hand, synchronous learning enables students and instructors to organise their schedules to meet simultaneously (Fadde & Vu, 2014). In this way, synchronous activities allow instant communication and feedback on issues under discussion (Lowenthal et al., 2017). Synchronous e-learning, supported by video conferences or chat rooms, enables online students to develop communities (Hrastinski, 2008) for learning through interactions with peers and educators (Martin et al., 2012).

Many studies have explored online learning from students' perspectives (Martin et al., 2020; Meerza & Beauchamp, 2017; Palmer & Holt, 2009). Among the issues explored are the students' perceptions of online learning, including students' readiness for online learning (e.g., Martin et al., 2020) and their attitudes toward ICT (information and communications technologies) (Meerza & Beauchamp, 2017). These studies show that a positive attitude toward ICT is essential for effective teaching and learning in online environments. However, a survey of 1862 Asian students by Zhang and Perris (2004, as cited in Palmer & Holt, 2009) found that students "perceived the greatest disadvantages of online learning to be in relation to their greater comfort with more traditional mediums and their inexperience in using computers" (p. 101). This finding suggests that selecting user-friendly tools, providing students with adequate support, and making students comfortable by preparing them for online learning is indispensable.

Reflections on online learning

A reflection is a mental process characterised by thinking about what has been done, learned, and experienced, which helps fulfill a purpose or achieve some anticipated outcome (Moon, 2004). According to Schon (1983, 1987), reflection can be categorised into one, reflection-*in*-action, and two, reflection-*on*-action. Reflection-*in*-action means thinking while engaging in an action, whereas reflection-*on*-action is to look back on an action already done, such as learning through an online platform. Both types of reflection can serve as a critical strategy for self-improvement in professional settings through involvement in critical self-analysis of their own experiences.

In the ELT context, Christodoulou (2016), Farrell (2007, 2008, 2011, 2015), and Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) have promoted reflective practice intensively. In meditative practice, teachers articulate their underlying beliefs about teaching and learning and compare them to classroom practices to gauge their convergence or divergence in practice (Farrell, 2015). In this way, teachers can shape and reshape their beliefs and practices and, in turn, maximally support student learning (Farrell & Mom, 2015).

On the other hand, students' reflections can be expressed in writing. Concerning ELT, engaging students in reflective essays makes them self-aware, understand ELT issues, and improves reasoning skills and dialogue with the teacher educator (Abednia et al., 2013). However, these studies do not touch upon the impact of reflective writing on students' experiences in online learning contexts, as informed by their learning culture. For this study, reflective writing essays required students to reflect on their learning using online platforms, on their readiness, satisfaction, and challenges.

Cultural dimensions and the Indonesian learners' behaviours and attitudes

The influence of culture on students' learning cannot be underestimated. It strongly affects teachers' teaching and students' learning (see Kidwell, 2019). In understanding the effects of culture, many scholars refer to Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimension theory. Even though many scholars consider Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory too general, in the teaching and learning context, it is helpful for use as primary references to understand

the "large culture" as well as "small culture" in many countries, including Indonesia. Hofstede (1980, 2011) defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 3). Hofstede (1980) proposed four cultural dimensions, namely power distance; uncertainty avoidance; individualism versus collectivism; and masculinity versus feminism. Additionally, the long-term versus short-term orientation dimension was added to cater for the future and present dimensions of culture (Hofstede, 2001, 2011). However, this study focuses only on the first four dimensions, because they are strongly linked to learning culture.

Firstly, power distance refers to the degree to which inequality and power are tolerated (Hofstede, 2011). High power distance is characteristic in contexts where people tend to accept hierarchical structures and inequality within a social system, such as teacher-centred education, the respect, and fears of older people, etc. (Ahn & Cunningham, 2017; Hofstede, 2011). Even though culture is not static, Indonesian society seems to fall in the category of higher power distance. People are afraid and must obey their superiors' orders without any objections (Kurniasari et al., 2018). Kurniasari et al. (2018) elaborated that this dimension affects teachers' and students' relationships in Indonesia. For instance, students tend to not give their opinions openly and directly, and they must obey the teacher's rules and commonly take for granted what the teacher says. Teachers are perceived as faultless beings and are highly respected. Lugman (2022) studied Indonesian students' culture and behaviours in the United Kingdom (UK). According to the study, students tend to lie when asked to comment on a program because they assume and fear that their grades will be affected if the instructor disapproves of their critical feedback. Claramita et al. (2020) also examined the communication style between senior Indonesian students and new medical students during a three-day orientation at the start of medical school. The results revealed a communication gap between seniority and juniority. It appeared that seniors used a one-sided communication style with their juniors, whereas first-year students expressed a desire for a more equitable relationship with seniors. In the orientation program, senior students dominated interactions with a more unilateral communication style. In the Asian and Indonesian contexts, there is a culture in which seniority, including the teacher, always has a strong voice, right or wrong.

Secondly, according to Hofstede (1980), uncertainty avoidance refers to "how people view uncertainty and subsequently seek to eschew ambiguous situations" (Ahn & Cunningham, 2017, p. 859). Ahn and Cunningham (2017) explained that countries with substantial uncertainty avoidance characteristics tend to develop formal rules, laws, and other securities to avoid an unknown future. In contrast, countries with weak uncertainty avoidance characteristics are more likely to tolerate threatening situations. In educational contexts, Hofstede (2011) stated that teachers tend to have all the answers in higher uncertainty avoidance cultures in educational contexts. In Indonesia's context, Kurniasari et al. (2018) explained that Indonesian students favour avoiding conflict and maintaining harmony and never explicitly show their disappointment, dislike, or any negative feelings directly. It was also reported by Lugman (2022) in his study that Indonesian students lack critical thinking skills because they are not allowed to speak without the permission of the teacher. Because the teacher could easily blame them for their opinions, students

eventually lost confidence in speaking their minds. It was also stated by Claramita et al. (2020) that in the Indonesian context, seniority is consequential, regardless of whether the teacher in the class has a lower level of knowledge than the students.

Thirdly, individualism versus collectivism refers to the extent to which societies are integrated into groups with their perceived obligations dependent on groups (Hofstede, 2011). Ahn and Cunningham (2017) explained that people in countries with individualistic orientations (e.g., the United States) tend to value privacy. In contrast, people in countries with collectivistic exposure, like Indonesia, are likely to prioritise relationships among people and take more interest in others' well-being. Hofstede (2011) stated that maintaining harmony is emphasised in high collectivist cultures, such as Indonesia.

Fourthly, masculinity versus femininity relates to "the distribution of values between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society, to which a range of solutions can be found" (Hofstede, 2011, p. 12). Ahn and Cunningham (2017) and Jandt (2017) explained that people in countries with higher masculine cultures (e.g., Japan) have a preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, competitiveness, and material reward for success. Countries with lower masculine traits (e.g., Sweden) value cooperation, quality of life, modesty, and caring for others. Culturally, as in the Swedish low masculinity context, Indonesian society tends to avoid conflict and prefers harmonious lives. All conflicts will be resolved in a soft approach through open communication.

Several studies have shown that Indonesia's large culture affects the learning culture in classroom contexts (Cirocki et al., 2019; Lewis, 1997). Cirocki et al. (2019) found, among others, that Indonesian students are relatively not autonomous in learning. Besides, Lewis (1997) found that Indonesian students regard the teacher as a moral authority and the fountain of knowledge, thus students need to submit to their superiors. Knowledge was viewed as a relatively fixed set of facts that needed to be transmitted by teachers and consumed by students. Similarly, Wursten and Jacobs (2013) identified Indonesia with high power distance and collectivism. Students highly respected teachers, teaching was teacher-centred, and maintaining harmony in class with minimal questions by students was preferable. Additionally, Heyward (2009) also found that a teacher-centred culture influenced Indonesia's teaching and learning practice and rote learning, where students were expected to obey all directions, knowledge was transferred from teachers to students for memorisation. Lugman (2022) in his study also reported that Indonesian students lacked the confidence to participate in classroom discussions and engage in critical thinking in essays, writing, questioning, analysing, and evaluating when learning a foreign language, mainly in writing skills. They assume and fear making mistakes that will lower their grades.

Nevertheless, understanding the Indonesian learners' behaviours and characteristics is not sufficient without looking at the Indonesian religious-based cultural beliefs. This is so because approximately 90 percent of the Indonesian population embrace Islam as their religion (Azra, 2020). In Islam, *adab* (manners or characters) is higher in position than knowledge (Anwar et al., 202l; Mansyur, 2020). Teachers are highly respected, and teachers are the sources of knowledge inherited from the prophet Muhammad, peace be

upon him. Furthermore, in the Acehnese Islamic culture, the teacher is often equated to parents, indicating that a teacher has high power in Indonesian society. In this respect, arguing or disagreeing with teachers is avoided, and harmony is preferable. Moreover, in Islam, especially in Islamic boarding schools, locally called *pesantren*, memorisation is the primary learning method. For instance, students are encouraged to memorise the verses of the *Quran, hadiths*, and *doa'* (prayers) (Hsb, Syah & Rahmi, 2020). Muslims are deemed clever if, among other things, they can memorise all verses of the Quran and use them in prayers and other rituals in society. In this study, there is more discussion about whether or not this traditional way of learning is still valuable in today's globalised world. A more in-depth discussion will be reported in the findings and discussion section.

Methods

This is a qualitative research design, as it is relevant to exploring people's thoughts, perspectives, and emotions over time (Maxwell, 2005). This research design is also rich, stimulating, and thought-provoking (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The study was carried out in an EFL classroom in an Indonesian higher education institution. Twenty EFL students (16 females, 4 males), aged 20-22 years, taking a BA program in English education at an Islamic university in the Province of Aceh , Indonesia, participated in this study. In the course of the program, the participants used several types of online learning platforms, including *Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Canvas Learning Management System* (LMS), *Moodle* and *Blackboard.* In the last session of their courses, the students wrote reflections on their online learning experiences during the COVID 19 pandemic in 2020.

Procedurally, the 20 EFL students (referred to as S1, S2, S3… S20) were taking the *English Academic Writing* course, along with nine other EFL courses. They wrote reflections on their experiences of using online learning tools in all courses during the semester. They were reminded that they could freely express their opinions, and not worry about their writing skill as this would not affect their grades. This is because their grades depend on their ability to reflect on their online learning experiences.

To guide the students in their reflective writing, we employed six main guiding questions, as follows:
- Name the tools (e.g., *Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Canvas,*) you used for online learning during the COVID 19 pandemic?
- Which online learning platform was most frequently used? And why?
- What were your feelings about the online tools used?
- What were the problems encountered while using the identified tool?
- Did your lecturers provide sufficient training for using the online tools? If not, how did you solve your problem?
- How satisfied are you with using the online tools for learning English? Why?

We asked students to write reflective journals at the end of the academic year as they would have more ideas to reflect.

Once they had completed writing their reflections, participants submitted their essays via the *Google Classroom* application used during the course. The contents of the students' reflective writing essays were then analysed using the content analysis method (Krippendorff, 1980) to understand their learning culture, in line with Hofstede's (1980, 2001, 2011) cultural dimensions described in the section above, on Cultural dimensions. According to Krippendorff (1980), content analysis is any method used to explore the nature, characteristics, and inherent meaning of a unit of study, no matter how large or small. We used several steps in conducting content analysis as suggested by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017): condensation, code, category and theme. Therefore, in analysing our data, first, we read and re-read the texts thoroughly to gain a basic understanding of the text to enable us condense the data. In the second stage, we contextualised information provided in the reflective journals and then we codified the finding, which we then in the third stage grouped the contents into categories, turning them into themes in the fourth stage. The content analysis yielded themes drawn from the student participants' voices and experiences, grouped into five main themes as described next.

Results and discussion

In the sections that follow, samples of student responses are presented under five identified thematic areas.

Inhibit direct interaction

Many students stated that the most frequently used online application for EFL courses was the *WhatsApp* group chat. Most lecturers in their opinion chose to use *WhatsApp*. Student S1 wrote:

> WhatsApp. We used it without spending a lot of Internet quota, and its chat application quickly opens, we do not have to log in. (S1)

Similar opinions were voiced by more than half of the students who participated in this study. It is likely that *WhatsApp* was used primarily due to its practicality and familiarity amongst students and lecturers. However, the *WhatsApp* application group call feature does not provide for synchronous learning in groups of more than eight people, which is problematic in learning, as it impedes direct knowledge building interactions and feedback between educators and students. Students S5 observed:

> Actually, there are many learning applications, which make it easy to discuss materials and submit assignments. But the media are not enough for me to learn English. In my opinion, learning the English language directly is easy to understand. (S5)

This view suggests that students experienced limitations in learning English through online tools suited for conveying learning materials and assignments without live interactions with lecturers in the process of knowledge development.

Despite feeling limited by using asynchronous online platforms such as *WhatsApp*, the students concerned did not share their views directly with the lecturers who taught them. Both students and lecturers accepted the traditional learning culture in which students accepted or took for granted what their teacher said and did. Failure by students to show their disagreement with their lecturers using *WhatsApp* for content delivery despite its limitations for synchronous learning, which is vital for language learning, points to an ingrained culture of higher power distance between teachers and learners as proposed by Hofstede (1980, 2001), with negative implications for the quality of learning available to students. This suggests that the power distance dimension is played out within the school.

Lack of learning exposure

Despite its ease of use, the commonly used *WhatsApp* platform has several limitations for online language learning, as expressed by students. Students reported experiencing many problems during online learning, both technological issues and teaching and learning issues. An opinion from S1:

> The biggest obstacle when studying online is a lack of understanding of the subject matter because the lecturer did not adequately explain it via the application. Now I began to realise how important a teacher is. Without a teacher's direct explanation, the knowledge we get is not perfect. Another difficulty when studying online was that I could not ask the lecturers directly when I didn't understand the materials. (S1)

The excerpt above indicates that students felt that their lecturers did not provide enough explanations using online learning platforms such as *WhatsApp*. The reflection also suggests that the students felt unable to ask for clarification from the lecturers in order to fully understand concepts.

Another student, S20, also reiterated concerns regarding lack of explanation provided by their lecturers to aid understanding, despite the volume of assignments given when learning online:

> Learning online at home is good as it doesn't have to go to campus. But there is something that makes students upset, that is, when lecturers give many assignments. We as students cannot do it because of little explanation. (S20)

Similarly, another student (S17) expressed her concern as follows:

> It was tough for me to understand all the lessons online because I did not understand much. I hope in the future everything will go well and as usual so that we can study as before, face to face, in order to increase interactions between students and lecturers. Furthermore, make it easier for students to ask questions. (S17)

This excerpt shows that students' online learning did not provide sufficient spaces for students to ask for clarification; online learning did not allow teachers to give detailed explanations about lessons, or provide students with enough exposure to the topic being discussed. Again, as explained by Hofstede (1980, 2001), this finding confirms that high

power distance is reflected in teacher-learner relationships in online learning platforms in the Indonesian higher education context.

Uncertainty of deadline

It emerged that a lack of deadlines for the numerous assignments given to students during online learning was problematic in relation to scheduling and completing assignments in a timeframe. Many students voiced this concern, such as the one written by S13:

> One thing that makes me overwhelmed in this class is that every assignment does not have a deadline. It makes me difficult to focus on doing the assignments without the deadline because, at the same time, I have to do assignments from other courses. Especially during the current pandemic, I find it challenging to organise my time, and all the activities I do are starting to get mixed up. (S13)

The students' voices suggest a need for specific rules to guide the execution of tasks, which indicates a desire to avoid uncertainty. As Hofstede (1980, 2001) and Ahn and Cunningham (2017) pointed out, people with a strong uncertainty avoidance need formal rules. Nevertheless, the students did not directly tell their lecturers about their wishes, indicating that they embraced the feminist culture in which cooperation and caring about others is esteemed. However, feminist culture does not align with the large culture in Aceh, widely known as a patriarchal or masculine culture (Dunn, 2014).

Lack of feedback

Many students also raised the issue of the lack of feedback on their assignments from their lecturers. One of the students (S18) described his comments as in the following extract:

> Even though I had high expectations before joining this course. I thought the lecturer would give overall feedback to all students' assignments. However, sometimes the feedback was given to only one or two assignments. Again this may happen because of the online class. So, I hope that the learning process can take place more effectively, increase the interaction between lecturers and students, and more feedback in the future. (S18)

Another concern voiced by the students was about their lecturers' lack of explanation of the assignments assigned. S15, for instance, wrote her voice as in the following:

> One of the weaknesses is the explanation of the materials by the lecturer, which were not clear. Then, bad Internet connection and Internet quota also have a significant impact on the course. Moreover, sometimes, when we had done the assignment, the lecturer's feedback was only for some students in the class. (S15)

This finding suggests that the students relied too much on their lecturers' feedback on their learning. In other words, they expect their superiors to ratify whether their work is good or not. This corroborates the research finding by Warner and Miller (2015) that international students in Australia expected to get more formative feedback on the whole

of their assignments from lecturers throughout their courses. Again, this reflects Hofstede's (1980, 2001) cultural dimension of higher power distance, in which students expect direction from their teachers on what to do. Many previous studies also support this practice, aligning towards the high-power culture that teachers are the primary source of the feedback expected by students (Tasdemir & Arslan, 2018).

Discomfort with online learning

Students argued that online learning in a way discourages their learning participation. They were not very satisfied with the platform as it limited possibilities for interaction. These students argued that spaces for interaction during language learning is limited and thus reduces their opportunities to interact with other language learners. S12, for instance, stated that:

> Face-to-face is the most effective way, because during the lecture we can directly listen to, for example, their experiences studying abroad and the knowledge is very much needed for those of us who study abroad. (S12)

In the same vein, S20 stated:

> English is important for those who want to go overseas. At the time of the online class, there was a discussion that we never experienced anymore. What we got was only points from each material. Therefore, I was less satisfied with online learning. Hopefully, this pandemic will quickly pass, and we can all continue learning face to face as usual on campus. (S20)

The excerpts (S12, S20) above indicate that the EFL students prefer face-to-face learning instead of online learning. They missed face-to-face learning, which was the most commonly used as the mode of interaction with each other, and have experienced difficulties interacting with each other through online learning. This finding is consistent with the Zhang and Perris (2004) finding that the students felt disadvantages in online learning due to the greater comfort they experienced with more traditional learning modes.

Conclusion

Drawing from the analysis and discussion of findings, it is concluded that the large culture prevailing in the Indonesian society strongly affects the small culture of online learning in higher education in the province of Aceh, affecting the interactions between the teacher educators and students in online learning platforms. In a nutshell, the four dimensions (higher power distance, higher uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and masculinity) proposed by Hofstede are evident in higher education online learning environments. However, the first two dimensions, power distance and uncertainty avoidance, are more obvious. It is not clear whether online learning reflects masculinity or femininity because, on one side, online learning seems to fall into femininity, as observed from student cooperation with lecturers to avoid conflict. This is likely inseparable from the influence

of Islamic principles embraced by most people in the Aceh province, that youngsters respect their elders.

Nevertheless, caution should be taken in generalising the conclusions as they are based on a small sample of students in a female-dominated class taking English as their major. This study is limited by time, that is, at the beginning of the change from face-to-face learning to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in higher education in Indonesia. Therefore, research that involves a large population across disciplines and in the following years of online learning is needed to come up with more representative and generalisable conclusions. This study is expected to reference future research in online EFL studies, particularly in other developing countries with Islamic cultures. Future research is also recommended to observe the voices of teachers on such an issue to extend this study's finding.

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