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Emotional geographies of teaching online classes during COVID-19 pandemic: a case study of Indonesian first-grade elementary school teachers

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ABSTRACT

This case study examines Indonesian first-grade teachers' emotions when teaching online during the pandemic. This study identifies teachers' emotions towards certain challenges in relation with parents, students, colleagues and school principals. The current study presents the challenges that teachers met and discusses it with emotional geographies theoretical framework. The findings indicate that teachers feel negative emotions and lead them to have emotional distances when encountering issues such as uncooperative parents, excessive working hours, limited resources, teacher–students alienation, learning loss, school-rule demands and colleagues disagreement. On the other hand, the teachers admitted that having cooperative parents and supportive school principals help them to feel positive. A collaborative support from schools, parents and governments is essentially needed to prevent a greater quality loss because of online learning in elementary schools, especially for first-grade students.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced countries worldwide to adapt to the current state of affairs in a variety of areas, including health, economics, social welfare and education. Since the pandemic began in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, it has spread to over 220 countries and territories, and countries have taken steps to prevent and control the spread of this contagious viral disease. Examining education in greater detail, a pandemic inevitably forces nations to close schools in order to prevent the virus from spreading, regardless of their education system's capacity. Moving the class from the physical classroom to a screen is unlikely to be a significant issue in developed countries with adequate educational facilities and systems. However, for developing countries where educational facilities and systems are insufficient to meet the entire population's needs, the decision to close schools and transition to e-learning may create significant difficulties for teachers, students and parents, lowering the overall quality of education. Indonesia has recognised the critical nature of containing the spread by closing the areas with the highest risk of infection – schools – on 15 March 2020. This school activity poses a risk of spreading the virus because the virus is spread via droplets, and there is a requirement to maintain a certain distance, which is somewhat unlikely in Indonesia, where each class has a large number of students. As a result, the government closed all schools from kindergarten to higher education and substituted online classes for face-to-face interaction.

The implementation of offline classes to online classes during COVID-19 pandemics has been the concern of many researchers worldwide that most of them focused on online learning in higher education (Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020; Dost et al. 2020; Dong 2020; Cutri, Mena, and Whiting 2020; Rashid et al. 2020), a survey on all levels of education (Sangeeta and Tandon 2020; van der Spoel et al. 2020) and some are in elementary teachers (Fauzi and Sastra Khusuma 2020; Rasmitadila et al. 2020). Although there have been researches on elementary schools' teacher for implementing online learning (Fauzi and Sastra Khusuma 2020; Rasmitadila et al. 2020), these studies were conducted during the first three months of online education implementation in Indonesia; therefore, the subsequent feelings of elementary teachers have not been thoroughly investigated. Additionally, the current research narrows the scope of the study to specific grade teachers, the first-grade teachers, who are assumed to be the most affected and encounter more complex problems than teachers in other grades. To recognise that there is occasionally a disconnect between public and private schools in managing the teaching process and satisfying students and parents. The current research revealed a distinction between public and private school perspectives. The current research does not merely discuss the initial impressions of online teaching during the pandemic; instead, it serves as an evaluation of what occurred and was experienced by teachers during a one-year implementation of online teaching. Then, through the use of emotional geographies, it is possible to delve deeper into their emotions and provide more detailed information about what occurred during that time period and serve as a reflection and evaluation of the teaching–learning process itself.

The abrupt transition from offline to online classes elicits a range of responses depending on the level of education. However, for higher education, in recent years, some universities in Indonesia have attempted to accommodate the diverse need in learning and decrease the time spent (Ayu 2020). Therefore, online teaching has been familiar for the university faculty members. However, secondary and primary school teachers are unprepared for online teaching (Atmojo and Nugroho 2020), as online learning itself is not even mentioned in the teachers' education curriculum and it is not part of Indonesian education life (Putri et al. 2020). Therefore, online learning presents a new set of challenges for Indonesian elementary teachers, as not all teachers and students have access to reliable Internet connections, and some lack any device capable of supporting the online learning process (Rasmitadila et al. 2020; Atmojo and Nugroho 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020). The Indonesian Ministry of Education has anticipated this situation by providing Internet access to teachers and students (Rasmitadila et al. 2020). However, it does not resolve all issues because the issues extend beyond a lack of Internet connectivity.

As previously stated, online education affects schools at all levels, from elementary to higher education. However, elementary school teachers and students, particularly those in first grade, are the most affected. Elementary school teachers are critical during the transitional phases of students from kindergarten to elementary school. In the Indonesian context, elementary school teachers are expected to supervise their students but also to assist them in all subjects taught and learned. For example, they typically teach students to read, write and even how to use the restroom. First-grade teachers' roles become increasingly important as they prepare for face-to-face teaching and learning. As a result, moving an offline class to an online class is not easy for first-grade teachers and it is unlikely to be done satisfactorily. Switching from an offline to an online classroom will be a significant threat and challenge for first-grade teachers. Apart from Internet connectivity, teachers face difficulties in delivering materials. Elementary teachers responsible for first-graders are expected to assist students in writing, reading and acquiring knowledge in all subjects. These tasks are possible in a normal situation, but in online learning, their responsibilities are streamlined and shared with parents. Parents, who vary in terms of educational background, social status and occupation, may feel the weight of this sudden authority and obligation and contradict the teachers' intent or purpose. The relationship between these two parties was occasionally tense. The teacher – with their objectives of completing the materials – and the parents – with their own responsibilities at home and work—sometimes encountered difficulties with online learning. This difficulty may

elicit specific emotions in teachers, which may affect the teaching and learning process. As a result, teachers are unable to exert control over or accomplish their educational objectives.

The threat and challenges associated with the abrupt transition from offline to online classes may elicit a range of emotions in first-grade teachers. Teachers' emotions are critical but are frequently overlooked due to a lack of awareness of how emotions affect the teacher's teaching activities. Understanding their emotions is one way to gain a broader perspective on this issue. The study is expected to provide both a broad overview and a more detailed look at how teachers felt about online learning during the pandemic through emotional geographies. The term emotional geography is used to categorise the various emotions experienced by teachers. According to Hargreaves (2001a), the teacher's emotions are at the heart of education, as their emotions influence the classroom environment and the way learning activities are conducted. Hargreaves introduces emotional geographies by referring to them as spatial and experiential closeness/distance patterns in human relationships that shape, configure and colour our feelings about ourselves, our world and one another (Hargreaves 2001a). Emotional geography in this research describes how first-grade teacher's emotion in relation with parents and students when they are doing their duties in teaching the students. Then, Hargreaves (2001a) introduced emotional geographies which covered five dimensions: moral, sociocultural, professional, physical and political. *Sociocultural geography* to the ways in which sociocultural factors such as race, culture, gender and the way people express and experience emotions can distance or unite people. *Moral geography* is concerned with the condition of involved parties to either pursue common goals and feel a sense of accomplishment collectively or to become defensive about their own goals and disagree with those of others. *Professional geography* occurs when the parties' definitions and standards of professionalism either divide them or allow them to collaborate on professional issues. *Physical geography* is concerned with time and space and how they can bring and keep people together, or how they can reduce these relationships to a string of episodic interactions. *Political geography* is concerned with power and status disparities that can either distort interpersonal communication or serve to protect and empower others (Hargreaves 2001a, 2001b).

Recent research indicates that teachers occasionally encounter emotional geography in their interactions with parents (Chen and Wang 2011), colleagues (Hargreaves 2001b), students (Hargreaves 2000), principals (Lassila et al. 2017) and even during the teaching process itself (Hargreaves 1998; Hargreaves and Tucker 1991). In recent years, emotional geographies have been used to shed light on larger issues such as policy formulation and family engagement (Evans 2011), exclusiveness in history education (Pyndiah 2018) and in the context of online learning during the COVID 19 outbreak (Susanto, Suparmi, and Rahayu 2020). Nonetheless, research on emotional geographies in education is viewed as sufficient and consistent; consequently, few researchers focus on the subject. However, the phenomenon of online teaching during pandemic COVID 19 highlights the importance of determining how first-grade teachers' emotions are expressed and illustrating their broader implications using emotional geographies. One year has passed since the first implementation of online learning during the pandemic. In Indonesia, online education will be expanded due to its current situation, which is still recovering from the second wave of the COVID 19 virus, whilst other countries have already dealt with it. This article remains relevant due to the extended implementation, as it demonstrates how first-grade elementary school teachers in Indonesia struggle with online teaching. As a result, the current study attempts to revisit the use of the emotional geography framework to decipher a series of emotions experienced by teachers and their responses to them. Additionally, emotional geography is used to explore the feelings of first-grade teachers regarding their experience whilst teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

Considering that the main focus of this research is to understand how the primary teachers perceive their interconnection with their students and the parents during the surge of the pandemic, a case

study is selected as the appropriate research design. A case study analyses a single unit of analysis – a single person, a single group, a single event or a single organisation, for example. The genre provides a manageable comprehensive project for qualitative research beginners to master the fundamental methodologies of fieldwork, data collecting and analysis (Saldaña 2011).

There is a major prerequisite in the process of selecting the participants – the participants should be first-grade elementary school teachers who teach in Samarinda and are responsible for teaching during the pandemic outbreak. In the present case, the participating teachers work in two different kinds of schools; some work in private schools, whilst the other work in public schools. Furthermore, given the condition that they are primary teachers who have to conduct their teaching and learning online because of the pandemic, hence we want to investigate how the pandemic may affect their relationship with the students, parents, colleagues and school principals. In this instance, the eight participating teachers were recruited through purposeful sampling to learn or understand the central phenomenon. In order to know the participants' perspectives and experiences, a questionnaire was distributed and an individual semi-structured interview was conducted.

All the interviews were conducted online where all the participants were phoned in one-on-one interviews that lasted around 1 hour and conducted entirely in Indonesian to make the participants express their experiences in the most comfortable manner. The interview recording was then transcribed and translated into English by the researchers (Table 1).

Finding and discussions

Hargreaves' emotional geographies framework explains that throughout the teaching–learning process, teachers meet a variety of scenarios that cause them to experience both positive and negative emotions regarding their relationships with students, parents, colleagues and the school principal (Liu 2016; Chen and Wang 2011; Hargreaves and Lasky 2004; Hargreaves 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Lassila et al. 2017). The researchers discovered that teachers' interactions with parents are the most influential in instilling both negative and positive emotions in teachers during online classes. The present researchers then organised their findings according to the kind of issues that elicit negative or positive emotions in them. Teachers elicit negative emotions when encountering issues such as uncooperative parents, excessive working hours, limited resources, teacher–students alienation, learning loss, school-rules demand and colleagues disagreement. Whilst positive emotions are elicited from cooperative parents and supportive school principals.

Uncooperative parents

Teachers have long been reported to feel negative emotions by uncooperative parents (Hargreaves 2001a; Chen and Wang 2011; Atmojo and Nugroho 2020). According to Hargreaves (2001a), teachers frequently experience anger, frustration, annoyance and upset as a result of parents' critics, lack of

Table 1. Participating teachers.

Name (pseudonym)	Years as a teacher (at the time of interview)	Private/public school	Sex	Subject
Ara	18 years in the school, 2 years at first grade	Public school	Female	All subjects
Restu	8 years	Public school	Female	All subjects
Tita	16 years in the school, 4 years at first grade	Public school	Female	All subjects
Yusri	6 years since 2015	Private school	Female	All subjects
Nuri	Almost 5 years	Private school	Female	All subjects
Yuna	Almost 4 years	Private school	Female	Social studies
Syira	8 years	Public school	Female	All subjects
Uni	4 years	Private school	Female	All subjects

Note: Students in grade one elementary schools are between 6 and 7 years old based on the Regulation of Minister of Education and Culture (MoEC) no. 01 year 2021.

care and refusal to support teachers' decisions. According to this study, teachers have negative feelings towards parents for the following reasons.

The first reason is that parents are too preoccupied with their careers to pay attention to their children's education. This is the most frequently cited reason by our participants. During this pandemic's online learning phase, private school teachers shared their responsibilities with parents, with teachers preparing the lesson and delivering it to students and parents assisting their children with the assignment. In the case of public school teachers, they distributed assignments and provided brief instructions on how to complete them, whilst parents explained, taught and assisted their children. This education was putting a strain on their parents, even more so if the parents were also working. Dividing their time between work and their children's education can become a challenge, resulting in conflict with the teacher.

Teachers expect parents to take a more active role in their children's education by ensuring that their children complete all assigned work. On the other hand, parents with jobs and other responsibilities believe that teachers' responsibilities are not theirs. The issue was becoming more prevalent amongst first-grade students, the majority of whom were unable to read or write. Teachers, with all of their limitations, are unable to teach their students to read and write and rely on the assistance of parents to do so. However, as previously stated, parents are often too preoccupied with their jobs to devote time to teaching their children from the basics. Even if they were not employed, low-educated parents discovered that it is difficult to do. Teachers then experience a sociocultural distance in which they are irritated, unhappy and angry with parents. As our participant stated:

> Well, in this private school, the parents are busy working, and they really don't care of their child, so the student never join zoom meeting. They seem don't care if their child doesn't study for one semester, he never join zoom, never do assignments. So, as a teacher, I have to be like chasing after the parents. When I asked the mother, "Mom, what's the problem why your child didn't join Zoom?" then she said "oh I'm busy." Then there are also those children with special needs, their parents prefer to be busy with work, they just want to throw their children to school, don't care … .The social and educational background is really affecting. So, parents whose children never do the assignments for months are indeed not finished their study, or not having a bachelor degree. (Nuri)

Teachers' differing ideas on the importance of parents as partners in teaching students and parents' perspectives on how difficult it is for them to balance these responsibilities lead teachers to believe that parents do not care about their children. This issue is consistent with prior research, which indicates that working parents are a source of difficulty for teachers when implementing online programmes, as some working parents demonstrate a lack of concern for their children's education (Atmojo and Nugroho 2020; Chen and Wang 2011; Hargreaves 2001a). Additionally, working parents lack the time to manage their time at work and assist their children. The difficulties are quite substantial for first-grade parents, since they are required to teach students basic skills such as writing and reading but lack of time. Consider the issue from two distinct perspectives: teachers' and parents' perspectives are critical for resolving issues and developing a win–win solution for them, so teachers do not assume that parents do not care about their children and parents understand that teachers require their cooperation to get through it.

The second reason is that parents do their children's homework. Certain parents were raised in an environment where their children's grades were paramount, motivating them to go above and beyond by completing their children's assignments. As our interviewees confessed:

> Yes, it's sad, there was no honesty from the start. For example, there are some of my students, maybe six people who cannot even spell the words. But I teach them intensely, I made a video call, I gave reading assignments for up to 6 months. Alhamdulillah, everything worked, all students can read and write except these two students, because the parents were not honest. At that time, I was very sad, why, because they were embarrassed. They feel ashamed to express the honesty. (Syira)

Another participant added:

> The funny thing is that school assignments are for children. But there are parents who did the assignments, it's really obvious that the parents write it for their children, I'm as a teacher know the difference. I still think it's weird to do the children's school assignments. (Nuri)

According to teachers, parents are embarrassed if their children are unable to read or write or are falling behind their peers. In public schools, teachers primarily used Whatsapp groups to communicate with parents and collect assignments (Atmojo and Nugroho 2020). Parents documented their children's activities and uploaded them to the Whatsapp group. It allowed for an unmistakable comparison of one child's accomplishments to those of another and made some parents feel threatened. On the other hand, some parents may feel exhausted from their first attempts at teaching their children. Certain teachers recommend that parents hire a private tutor to teach their children to read and write. With disparate economic backgrounds, it must be difficult for low-income parents to enrol their children in additional private classes during a time of crisis. Financial concerns have been raised as a barrier to the viability of online education, but only in terms of supplying an adequate data package (Atmojo and Nugroho 2020). In our study, the issue is much larger, since both parents and teachers lack the skills and opportunity to teach pupils to read and write, necessitating the appointment of a private tutor. Therefore, completing their children's assignments may have been their way of preserving their face/image despite the difficulties they encountered. However, teachers' assumptions were that it was simply a matter of preserving their image in front of teachers and other parents, when the reality may be more complex.

Thirdly, parents criticise teachers' way of teaching. This phenomenon explained how teachers dealt with moral and professional distance from parents in an environment where teachers felt threatened by parents' critics. Parents' criticism can jeopardise teachers' objectives, resulting in moral distance between teachers and parents (Chen and Wang 2011). The issue frequently arises in private schools, where parents demand perfect service from teachers in exchange for paying more for their children's education. This issue leads to professional distance experienced by the teacher since her concept of teacher professionalism was so precarious in the face of parental pressures that she considered redefining her professional identity (Chen and Wang 2011). As one of our participants once stated:

> I often get complaints from parents, "why the email can't be opened, why the task is like this, why do you have to use this application. My children are bored because you only give them videos." What should I do, if I ask the students to play the game (to refresh the students' mood), their parents will say "Why do you keep playing this game? Why do you keep dancing, why is it like this, then when my children will study?" I often got complaint like that. (Yuna)

The professional and moral distance have resulted in a political distance in which teachers feel powerless in the face of parent critics. Teachers perceived that they were being observed and monitored by parents, which created a sense of lack of authority and limited their ability to create a positive atmosphere with the students. A similar issue appears to have gone unreported by public school teachers. The reason could be that because public school is free, parents believe that criticising their children is a shameless act.

The fourth reason is that parents misunderstand the instructions of their children's teachers. As one of our participants stated:

> Sometimes, we (the teacher and the parents) have different idea. I asked them to do this, yet they do another. They don't understand my instructions and it's a bit frustrating. (Tita)

Misunderstanding teachers' instruction has also been reported in English as a foreign Language online learning, but the issue arises between teachers and students (Atmojo and Nugroho 2020). However, in this present study, the problem is rising between teachers and parents. Parents need to explain the instructions to their children because of their children inability of reading. Another study reported that teachers immediately experience moral geography with parents who have

different academic and social intentions (Dotger et al. 2011). Parents misunderstanding teachers' instructions depict the sociocultural difference between parents and teachers, such as educational background, degree of literacy and moral purpose.

Excessive working hours: 'I sacrifice my children for my students'

Excessive working hours were another frequently cited reason for teachers to experience negative emotions in our study. Typically, teachers prepare materials the night before and conduct all explanations and evaluations at school. However, during the pandemic, evaluation processes took an entire day. Teachers who compromised with the parents' condition typically allowed parents to send their children's assignments via Whatsapp Group or Google Classroom for one day. Teachers in public schools typically allowed parents until 8–10 pm to turn in their assignments. However, teachers discovered numerous instances where parents sent assignments around midnight. Additionally, some parents contacted teachers late at night to inquire about instructions or materials they did not understand.

On the other hand, teachers should prepare their own upcoming materials, which may include creating instructional videos. This teaching method is acknowledged to be time-consuming (Putri et al. 2020). Teachers who have children stated that they were unable to assist their children due to their work, as stated by the following participant:

> Online teaching is new for us too, so the system changed many times, we have trial and error at the beginning. Luckily I was able to make videos and teach them fully prepared, I already have materials, all kinds of power points, so I just need to make videos. But we've never been taught how to make videos every day. Therefore, our time management is so chaotic. We usually teach at school from 7 a.m to 3 p.m before pandemic. In the current pandemic, I can work until midnight and still handle my own children. And there's still parents who chatted me 11 or 12 pm, it's really messed up anyway. (Nuri)

Another participant added:

> So it seems like there's more work at school, the teacher has to prepare more materials, more preparation, we are demanded to use power point, provide learning videos, so we ended up making the teaching materials longer than usual. Actually, it's really annoying, because in the end you need to stay up late almost everyday to do it. (Uni)

According to teachers, this teaching process required them to stay up late every night in order to be available to parents whenever they called. It resulted in the teachers' perception of political distance because they felt powerless and unable to defend their own lives from parental disturbance because they believed that parents were the ones who did their jobs, and thus believed that it was their responsibility to be available for the parents.

In sum, excessive working hours are a result of teachers' responsibilities to generate instructional materials and grade students' collected assignments. Developing online teaching resources is distinct from developing materials for offline classes, as developing online materials requires more time, work and focus than preparing materials for face-to-face lessons (Atmojo and Nugroho 2020; Rasmitadila et al. 2020). Not only does the preparation process takes longer than a face-to-face session, but also the assessment procedure takes longer. In a face-to-face class, teachers typically complete grading students' work whilst teaching. In online classes, when parents submit assignments at their own pace, the teacher gained experience grading assignments all day. Additionally, teachers must review uploaded work and provide feedback one by one, which exhausts them because the teaching–learning process takes the entire day and is extremely time-consuming (Putri et al. 2020).

Limited resources: 'His parents do not even have a smartphone'

As previously stated as the reason for conducting this study, teachers faced significant resource constraints due to two primary factors: limited parental resources and poor Internet connections.

Parents' limited resources were the primary issue for public school teachers, preventing them from utilising advanced technology or applications in the same way that private school teachers do. It was impossible for public teachers to host a zoom meeting because many parents only had one smartphone that was shared by multiple children (Rasmitadila et al. 2020; Atmojo and Nugroho 2020). Our participant alluded to the extreme case.

> The obstacle I experienced was related to parents who do not have a data package. Also, the parents who own one smartphone but have two or more children who needed to study online as well so they need to manage the time well. Even, there are parents who do not have an Android cellphone. (Tita)

Imagining that parents do not have smartphones is probably the furthest thing from the truth. It does, however, exist. Teachers admitted that they could do nothing about the parents' limited resources. Rather than that, they used WhatsApp Groups, which were more familiar and cost effective for all the parents. Additionally, Whatsapp Group consumed less data than Zoom, Google Meet and other interactive meeting applications. This issue then resulted in a perceived professional distance between teachers and the decision, which may violate their professional values. All public school teachers admitted in our study that they desired more decent teaching activities but were powerless due to limited resources.

The second reason was terrible Internet connections. Unlike public school teachers, who were limited in their teaching applications, private school teachers with parental privilege, who were predominantly from affluent backgrounds, could provide students with a variety of teaching applications to support their teaching activities. They used Google Classroom and Zoom as the bare minimum applications and some teachers also used Youtube, Edmodo, Quizzes and email to provide instructional activities (Atmojo and Nugroho 2020). However, this did not mean they were problem free. As stated by our respondents:

> yes, sometimes the network is also in trouble, sometimes when there's a black out, we are helpless. (Uni)

She mentioned that even if they had done everything perfectly, it would be in vain if she encountered a bad connection. The issue of terrible Internet connections has been reported by previous studies that prove that most teachers experienced the issue regardless of their teaching level or places where they lived (Rasmitadila et al. 2020; Atmojo and Nugroho 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020). Getting through the problem led them to feel a political distance where they feel powerless over the condition.

Teachers–students alienation: 'My students are alien and so am I'

All of the teachers interviewed expressed sadness at the inability to meet their students in person. In a typical situation, first-grade teachers are extremely close to their students because they assist them with reading and writing, as well as calm them when they are crying. Teachers felt that they should meet their students in person to get to know them better after such an experience (Rasmitadila et al. 2020; Putri et al. 2020; Atmojo and Nugroho 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020; van der Spoel et al. 2020). Meeting students face to face enables the teacher to determine the most effective teaching method for each student (Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison 2020). They were unable to do so, however, due to the pandemic. This then caused them to feel a sense of physical distance from the students. As one of the participants put it:

> Yes, I'm not satisfied with the condition. Apart from not being able to meet the students themselves. It's nice when we meet with the students in person. We usually can joke, we can talk, but in this kind of condition it's hard to do. (Tita)

Face-to-face interaction appeared to be a necessary component of the teaching and learning process for first-grade teachers and students. In a traditional classroom setting, students were typically reliant on their teachers. As their relationship developed, first-grade teachers typically left a lasting impression on their students, who continued to respect, appreciate and love their teachers long after they

completed first grade. This change created a sense of alienation between teachers and students, particularly for public school teachers who rarely have the opportunity to meet students in person or through virtual meetings. As a result, teachers and students are alien to each other.

Learning loss: 'I feel like I didn't teach'

It was admitted that online education during pandemics resulted in learning loss (van der Spoel et al. 2020; Rasmitadila et al. 2020). It became an issue for our participants, who were first-grade teachers. Our participants expressed the following:

> It's unsatisfactory. I cannot be maximal in teaching students. Moreover, I teach first grade, so we don't know if they understand or not. That's why the lesson objectives are not all achieved. (Tita)

> Parents did more then what I did for sure, we can't help anything. Even in zoom meeting, if the students show up, I feel very grateful. So I lowered our standard in achieving the lesson objectives. I also lowered my expectation. So, during the pandemic, the learning quality really decreased. So sad. In fact, we really feel like we're doing nothing. (Nuri)

According to her confession, most teachers did not believe that parents could take on their roles and perform their responsibilities. They expressed concerns about how their parents taught their children or how their parents were exhausted and chose to complete the assignments themselves rather than allowing their children to do so. Teachers' experiences demonstrated their professional and political distance with parents. Their professional values, which guided them in teaching their students – by no means – must be bent, and thus, they should delegate authority to parents regardless of their readiness. Whilst they delegated authority to parents, they recognised their own powerlessness over the learning process. Due to a lack of authority and oversight of students' learning processes, teachers began to doubt students' actual abilities and accomplishments.

It is contradictory with what Yulia (2020) has found that online learning can enhance students' achievement. The disparity could be explained by the unprepared transition from face-to-face to online classes and the level of students in this study. Yulia's (2020) study involved college students who are normally self-sufficient in their learning, whereas the current study had youngsters who are around 6–7 years old and require assistance from both parents and teachers. When teachers and parents are unable to fully fulfil the assistant, it can result in a decline in educational quality.

School-rules demands: 'I feel powerless'

Frequently, school rules became one of the reasons teachers felt powerless. They face political distance as a result of being classified – in management systems – —as 'labours' who are obligated to follow school rules without the option to opt out. Numerous schools apply for Work From Home (WFH) positions for their teachers during the pandemic. However, private school teachers who took part in our study acknowledged that they were required to work from the office as usual. As stated by our participant,

> I'm worried, yes.. the main thing is because of the virus, because the situation is really scary at school, like us, for example, someone is infected, we have to be tested, then all are tested. Then everyone panicked, heard that someone was infected, and we also had to go to school, no WFH and yeah we had to go to school and meet many people (the teacher's colleagues). (Nuri)

Other participants who taught in private schools confirmed that they were required to attend school as usual. WFO for private school teachers appears to be a responsibility of the school to the parents, ensuring that their teachers are monitored and available to serve their students, even when they are teaching online.

Colleagues disagreement: 'My colleague against me'

The majority of teachers who participated in our study admitted that they collaborated with their colleagues on the objectives, materials and evaluations of their teaching. It frequently occurred between lower-grade teachers and upper-grade teachers, who typically taught students with varying characteristics. As our participant mentioned, the issue arose when teachers from the upper grades taught lower-grade students without first-hand knowledge of how first-grade students behaved. It caused them to set unrealistic expectations for their teaching objectives, which were unlikely to be met in the case of low-grade teachers.

> For example, like teachers in high grades, they usually don't immediately accept what their friends are planning, they protest almost everything. (Ara)

Another participant added:

> So in this year, the teachers for low grade students (first–third grade teachers) are new. They have never been teaching in low grade students, they usually teach at fifth grade in which the students are totally different with the first grade ones. They are different psychologically where fifth grade students usually are already independent while first grade students are not. And they don't know that first grade students cannot read or write. So, when designing the materials, it's a bit difficult to have an agreement. During a pandemic, we understand that this child can't read and write, so the task shouldn't be that much. Even if they read it, they still struggle to think about the answer. Moreover, my friends, who are usually in the upper class, don't understand at that point, you know, so it's a bit difficult. Now in the middle of the lesson, then they finally understand that oh these children can't do anything, the objective cannot be that high. (Nuri)

Intellectual disagreement and debate are, of course, a central value of academic existence. However, much, if not the majority, of legitimate professional work in school teaching involves planning, constructing, implementing and developing classroom instruction, curricular materials and professional development workshops (Hargreaves 2001b; Rasmitadila et al. 2020). The participants in our study frequently have disagreements with their colleagues in this relationship. When teachers disagree with colleagues, they develop a professional distance because they believe their colleagues set unrealistic expectations for children. Whilst arguing with colleagues can make teachers feel uneasy, some of them are adamant about their position for the sake of the students, believing that they have greater expertise in dealing with lower-grade students. The existence of school principals to bring teachers together in the face of conflict may be a solution for the teachers.

Cooperative parents: 'I feel happy when they praise me'

Online education requires collaboration between teachers and parents. Cooperative parents significantly assist teachers in achieving their learning objectives; thus, having cooperative parents in their class is acknowledged as a vital success factor for online education. This type of engagement then induces favourable emotions in the teachers, such as contentment and fulfilment. Our participants stated that they felt a sense of physical closeness when interacting with cooperative parents. Concerning cooperative parents, our participants describe two instances of cooperative parenting.

The first interaction occurs when parents commend teachers for their attentive behaviour. Parents appreciating teachers frequently become the reason teachers have great feelings about their relationship with their parents (Hargreaves 2001a; Chen and Wang 2011; Dotger et al. 2011). When parents express their appreciation for teachers, it demonstrates that they view teachers as helpful, attentive, caring and professional. Teachers interpret this as a sign of parental appreciation and contentment. According to one of our participants:

> Alhamdulillah, the rests are cooperative. Even sometimes, there are compliments to me. Some say that they like me because I teach their children very attentively. They compliment me for not being angry easily. Some parents say that, I'm happy when hearing that kind of compliment. (Ara)

In this situation, the teacher is overjoyed to receive praise from the parents. It means a great deal to teachers and helps them cope with the demands and uncertainties inherent in online teaching. This compliment motivates the teacher to do a better job of assisting parents and students in achieving their learning objectives.

Another type of interaction occurs when parents place their children's education in the hands of teachers. Even if teacher–student engagement is limited during a pandemic, teachers' presence in the teaching–learning process is irreplaceable. As evidenced by the fact that students are more sub-missive to their teacher than to their parents. As a result, parents rely on teachers to motivate their children. According to one of our participants:

> Yes, there are some experiences when the parents couldn't encourage their children to do their assignments. The children sometimes cry and are stubborn to their parents, so some parents call me and ask me to motivate their children to do their assignments. I usually calm the parents first and ask them to give their children time. I ask them to let their children have their breakfast first, or play first so they will feel happy to do the assignment. And it worked most of the time, so the parents become more dependent to me. I feel happy that it means that they believe in me. (Syira)

In this instance, parents view teachers as saviours capable of assisting them in managing their children by motivating them to complete assigned assignments. Parents believe that teachers' position is still significant in their children's eyes, and as a result, they will contact the teacher when they are at a loss for ways to encourage their children. This type of interaction is possible only when the teacher is compassionate and helpful; as a result, parents and students feel comfortable discussing their concerns with the teacher.

Cooperative and supportive school principals: 'School principal helps us a lot'

Apart from cooperative parents, another factor contributing to the teacher's positive emotions is the supportive and cooperative school principal. Teachers experience uncertainty about their roles, teaching materials, teaching gadget and other associated facilities during the pandemic. Having a supportive and cooperative school principal will reassure them as they navigate through challenges associated with online teaching. Several of the participants' school principals take an active role in resolving teachers' issues, such as providing internet access, motivating teachers and advising teachers as they develop materials (Lassila et al. 2017; Rasmitadila et al. 2020). According to one of our participants:

> Yes, honestly, at my current school, it's very good, yes, very good. The principal and the teacher work together for teaching preparations. Every time there is a change in regulations, learning methods are discussed through meetings. (Yusri)

The participant's school principal is actively involved in teacher preparation by ensuring that teachers are prepared for changes in regulations, instructional techniques and instructional materials. This type of connection fosters a sense of political and physical closeness between teachers and principals, allowing principals to position themselves as members of the faculty, not only as their supervisor. Having a tight relationship with the principals makes teachers feel supported and motivated; as a result, they are more comfortable voicing their concerns during online teaching, knowing that the principal will assist them.

Conclusions

This study attempts to depict first-grade teachers emotions when handling challenges in teaching online during the pandemic COVID 19. First-grade teachers are believed to be the most affected party from the implementation of online teaching in Indonesia but have not been investigated thoroughly. Applying a semi-structured interview discussing teachers' emotions encountering the challenges, this study reveals that teachers mostly feel negative feelings during online teaching associated with issues such as uncooperative parents, excessive working hours, limited resources,

teacher–students alienation, learning loss, school-rule demands and colleagues disagreement. These issues lead them to feel all emotional distances such as sociocultural, moral, physical, professional and political. Discussing the issue one by one, enable the researchers to see how each issue connects to others in the same line how one emotional distance can lead to another kind of emotional distance. This relationship between issues and emotional distance proves that first-grade teachers' challenges are needed to see as a whole. Therefore, the collaboration between every party such as schools, parents and also government are essentially needed to prevent a greater learning loss as the cause of online teaching. On the other hand, teachers also encounter factors that can make them feel positive they are having cooperative parents and supportive school principals. These factors are admitted to be reasons for the teachers to stay motivated and positive in handling challenges in their online teaching.

Notwithstanding the contributions, the limitations of this study should be addressed. Like other case studies, this study is also not meant to be generalised. First-grade teachers in different areas and demography may have different challenges with the present study, although the major issues such as uncooperative parents, limited resources and learning loss are believed to be typical issues experienced by first-grade teachers in Indonesian context. Therefore, research with broader context and participants is needed to be conducted to depict more visible problems that happen at the primary education level, especially first-grade teachers.

Disclosure statement

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