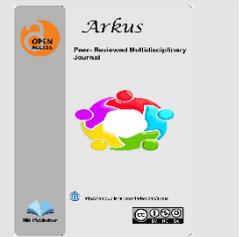# The COVID-19 Conundrum and the Lived Experiences of Indonesian Final Year University Students

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A B S T R A C T

The overarching research on the COVID-19 pandemic is dominated by the science-medical research area. There is a lacuna of research addressing the social dimension of the pandemic in relation to everyday lives. This research has utilized Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology to address the question of "How do Indonesian final-year students deal with the pandemic, and how do they make sense of it through their lived experiences?". Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were generated in order to interview 24 final-year university students. The findings and discussion revealed that two major themes emerged: challenges and disappointments. The participants cited supervision problems along with unsupportive home situations and loneliness/isolation as the challenges during this pandemic. This research also explored the way in which a sense of disappointment lies within the displacement of their living events, such as the loss of a spatial identity which is represented by the university spaces, through to the missed chance of having a graduation ceremony. The COVID-19 pandemic is a spiraling conundrum wherein the physical dimension of health often eclipses the mental-psychological dimension. This research demonstrates that the lasting effect of the pandemic stretches beyond the materiality discourses of public health. The social dimensions of everyday living experiences should be taken into consideration by policymakers, including university boards, when formulating higher education policies during the pandemic.

1. Introduction

Following the WHO declaration of the emergence of a novel coronavirus disease in 2019 (caused by SARS-CoV-2) as a pandemic on March 11th, 2020,[1] higher education institutions around the world embarked on a journey into uncharted territory.[2] All academic activities, including teaching, supervising, and examining, were abruptly transferred online using video conferencing technology and other platforms. Unesco has warned that the digital divide is still the biggest issue in education since roughly more than half of the population in the world has no access to the Internet.[3] Even if they do have access to the Internet, the sudden and radical change from offline to online working-from-home policies being adopted in many countries has meant that the academic process has encountered its biggest challenge yet. Research on the basics of COVID-19 has often (so far) been in favor of medical and public health areas. Therefore it is pertinent to fill this lacuna of research from the social dimension side as well. This study is focused on the lived experience of final-year Indonesian students who, from our initial observation, suffer the most in comparison to their younger counterparts. Their final year requires independent work in which the students must produce a written thesis that is examined as a requirement for graduation. Students in the final year also usually need deeper attention and have a closer relationship with their supervisors. Nevertheless, this pandemic has halted one of the most important phases

in producing a final thesis. This paper poses the central question of how final-year students deal with the pandemic and how they make sense of it through their lived experiences. The next section elaborates on the overarching kinds of literature and the methods that inform the development of this research.

While there is very limited research that has been undertaken specifically on the COVID-19 pandemic, most research falls into the medical science area. There hasn't been any research on COVID-19 (at least not yet published) highlighting the social impact of the pandemic, especially on university students. Apart from several newspaper reports, this research fills in the lacuna of research on how the COVID-19 pandemic affects university students. This research proposes questions on how final-year students deal with the pandemic and how they make sense of it through their lived experiences.

This research defines 'experience' as something that any student is exposed to during their final year of university. It could also mean how they interpret, give meaning, and build a sense of awareness of such a condition and exposure. The literature has been considerably robust in the field of student challenges and wellness concerning their university degree. Although not specifically focused on the challenge of the pandemic, this literature is still pertinent as an analytical tool for this research.

Several research studies in the field of education, pedagogy, and psychology have provided useful literature on the final year students' experiences. While the majority of universities in Indonesia mandate that students conduct research in their final year and provide a written thesis or dissertation, universities abroad have made the distinction between honors and non-honors degrees. Students who choose an honors degree usually have to conduct research within their final year. Research has shown that self-efficacy is the most distinctive factor that determines whether students succeed in conducting their final-year research.[4] Similar research undertaken in Australia involving 295 students also showed that male rather than female students had a higher self-efficacy characteristic, thus making the connection between the lower number of females pursuing post-graduate education in the future. Similar research has also been conducted in the UK with a sample of over 5000 students across the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities which resulted in the research students achieving better grades compared to those in the teaching-based program, especially the disadvantaged students.[5] This research concludes that the success of conducting research provides the students with a better chance of applying for a doctoral degree.

However, research on the subject of university students, although not specifically on final year students, also found numerous problems that could arise along with students dealing with their academic years, including communication problems with their lecturers/supervisors, mental health, anxiety, and academic stress. A large-scale study in the US comprised of 8,977 students from 20 colleges concluded that stress has been cited as an academic impediment for the majority of students.[6] The research concluded that the students who declared their stress and anxiety had a lower GPA compared to those who didn't. The other study focused on Australian law students and other vocational studies and found that academic demands, career pressure, social isolation, and study/life balance are all contributing factors in terms of the student's stress level.[5,7,8] A similar research study identified the causes of academic stress, including exams, assignments, time pressure, grade pressure, and future uncertainty.[1] Akgun et al. used the term 'learned resourcefulness', and described the ability to manage pressure and stress as being similar to 'self-efficacy' that was extrapolated earlier by Shaw.[9]

A study conducted in England proposed the urgency of conducting stress and anxiety tests on students (elementary and higher education) to have a better understanding of how to support students' mental health and well-being.[6,10,11] Robotham et al. also warned that student mental health is considered to be under-researched, paling in comparison to the

more robust research on adult mental health. Several research studies have also made cases around the issue of the student-supervisor relationship as a contributing factor for final-year students in relation to finishing their research projects. Another study formulated the complex dynamics between students and higher education teachers.[12] They stated that although teachers have "hierarchical superiority", teacher-student relationships are genuinely reciprocal in the sense of "mutually wanting to relate and being responsible for maintaining a relationship, overcoming obstacles, maintaining boundaries and experiencing the positive outcomes". Influential research by Frymier et al. highlighted two important skills that higher education teachers should possess to maintain successful teacher-student relationships (TSR), which are referential skills and ego support.[13] Furthermore, the paper illustrates referential skills as "effectively explaining the teaching content". Ego support is "meeting the student's emotional need and motivating them to succeed". Similar recommendations were made in other studies on a teacher-student relationship, such that TSR should be regarded as a relevant construct in higher education since it clearly affects students' successful study progress.[14,15,16] (These research studies overall state that the communication and interpersonal connection between students and teachers significantly determines the success of their academic study and should not be taken for granted.[17]

Research on lived experience is at the heart of the phenomenology tradition. Derived from existentialist philosophy, phenomenology is concerned with what it means to 'be human'. While there are various scholars that have engaged with it, phenomenology can be divided into two schools of thought, namely the work of Edmund Husserl and the work of Martin Heidegger. The former, based on the work of Husserl, believes that scholars should separate their beliefs in search of the participants' experiences, while the latter, following the work of Martin Heidegger, see the scholars' own experiences and interpretation as an integral part of the interpretation and analytical process.[18]

Heidegger laid the foundational aspect of hermeneutic phenomenology by proposing the basic question of "What is the meaning of being?" in his influential work, Being and Time (1962). Continuing the philosophical work of Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger posed the important question of what it means to be a human being, thus revealing primary and experiential meanings of what it always already is to be a human in everyday life[19] to be able to have a whole understanding of one's lived experiences, phenomenology researchers usually treat the participant interviews as stories. van Manen[19] states that lived experience is a series of narratives or stories of a person's detailed description of a past experience and is usually told in conversational and accessible language.

Using phenomenology to reveal lived experiences could be regarded as highly descriptive, subjective, and reflective.[20,21] However, different from other forms of qualitative methodology such as narrative inquiries and ethnography, phenomenology is focused on the 'human experience' that plays into details while at the same time describing the inherent senses and awareness of being 'something'. This in turn, produces a level of attention and empathy that is usually lacking in other qualitative methods.[22]

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a popular method used in research in the educational field, as in the work[19], which heavily informed this research. In the book, Spier asked the central question of "What does it means to be an educator?" Following interviews with 12 university educators, Spier concluded that his research actively promotes "the culture of listening," not only from the side of the educators but also from the perspective of university leaders and policymakers. The next section lays the groundwork for the methods chosen in this research.

2. Methods

The phenomenological tradition informed the direction of this research. Far from merely being a research method, phenomenology is a philosophical branch that questions human experiences and their

stream of consciousness from the first-person point of view. Rooted in qualitative methodology, phenomenology can be described as "an inquiry to describe a lived experienced" because it explores the state of being in the world through the thoughts of those who experience it.[18] Some of the researchers stated that phenomenology is "writing the pain" since it delves into first-person phenomenological accounts.[23] To broadly categorize it, phenomenology is divided into Husserlian and Hiedeggerian.[21]

This research follows the Heideggerian phenomenological account since the researchers involved in this study were also able to provide their own experience of working under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe that our own experience as researchers and lecturers will enrich our understanding and interpretation of the student's lived experiences. Roberts and Taylor.[24] suggested that the lived experience is "the knowledge humans have of how it is to live a life in regards to being someone or something unique in everyday situations." Furthermore, researchers also suggest analyzing lived experience using a "peeling the onion" process in such a way that the data is read carefully. The meaning should be interpreted in the most emphatic way to get a complete look at the embodied or lived experiences of the individuals participating in the research.[24]

Two focus group discussions, each with 6 participants and 12 in-depth interviews, were employed as the data collection method. In the end, 24 final-year students were interviewed whose ages and semesters varied. Although most of the participants were in their 8th semester, we also interviewed students in their 10th and 14th semesters. The age of the students varied from 21 to almost 24 years old.

The in-depth interviews and FGDs were conducted solely through video conference technology, specifically, Zoom, and the interviews each ran for approximately 30 to 60 minutes. All of the students (16 female and 8 male) agreed to be recorded and for us to use their actual names. However, we have decided to use their initials to protect their privacy. The participants often talked in a more open and relaxed manner once they were informed that their initials would be used instead of their real names. A set of interview guidelines were prepared, although the interviews often followed the conversation dynamics. This research also briefly interviewed 3 lecturers and supervisors to gain their own account of academic work during the pandemic.

It is important to note that although the term used in this research refers to "final year" students, the more appropriate term would be "last semester" students. Since academic years in the majority of Indonesian universities are divided into semesters rather than years, this research specifically interviewed last semester students. All of the students interviewed in this study were doing their final research without any coursework left. It is also important to note that all of the students were living with their families instead of in the student's accommodation (kos-kosan) and dormitories (asrama). This paper also used the term undergraduate thesis or undergraduate dissertation interchangeably to refer to the final research report that the students must produce in order to graduate, popularly known in Indonesia as skripsi.

Furthermore, this research acknowledges the limitation that video conferencing is not ideal when it comes to capturing the students' lived experiences, let alone when in the form of group discussions. Phenomenology is often favored in one-on-one interviews instead of group discussions.[18] However, the COVID-19 pandemic has been an extraordinary experience. Where the participants also admitted to being happy to participate in this research since they could see their friends in the video conference. The FGD forums, in turn, provided a sort of happy space for the participants to engage in conversation to tell their own accounts among their peers whom they were separated from because of the work-from-home policy. The conversation flowed smoothly, oftentimes defying the interview guidelines since the participants seemed to enjoy telling their stories. The phenomenological tradition emphasizing people's 'viewpoints' allowed us to ask open-ended questions such as "How are you

feeling doing work during the pandemic?" or "Tell us about your family members," thus making the interview emphatically conducted at the pace of the participants rather than according to the research team's agenda.

The procedural steps proposed by van Manen[19] in the aforementioned section were heavily inducted into the interviewing process. We kept in mind that our position as supervisors must have made some students uncomfortable, and therefore the questions we crafted were mostly open-ended. We avoided academic jargon and big words, focusing solely on the students thinking, feeling, and processing of their own experiences. The interviews and FGD transcripts were then analyzed thematically. The interview transcripts were read repeatedly by the research team until the major themes were generated. The major themes were then analyzed thoroughly until it revealed several sub-themes. The next section elaborates on the development of the major themes and sub-themes in more detail.

3. Results and Discussion

The transcripts obtained after the two rounds of FGDs and 12 in-depth interviews provided robust data, which was then thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis is a popular technique in data coding and analysis that focuses on the themes that have emerged during the data collection. Several major themes emerged during the FGDs, which have been best summarized using the picture below.
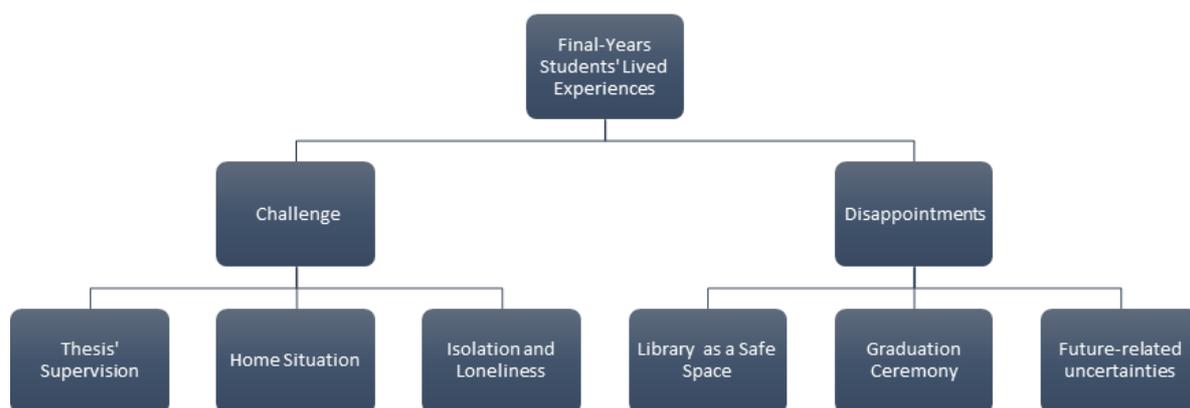

Figure 1. Themes and sub-themes of the final year students' lived experience during COVID-19.

The central question being addressed in this research is "How do final-year students deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, and how do they make sense of it through their lived experiences?" Reading, re-reading, and contemplating the reflexive interpretation was necessary following the principles of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology. While the participants' narratives or stories were being read and re-read, hermeneutic phenomenology offers the researcher's own account and lived experience, which manifests in the process of interpretation.

Two major themes were identified as central themes within the interview transcripts, which are (1) challenges and (2) disappointments regarding the way that the final year students experience the pandemic. When asked, "How do you deal with being in the midst of a pandemic during your final year?," the participants answered with "challenges", "barriers', "sudden change" , "big change," and "difficulties." Thus, we have put together these assertions under the major theme of "challenges."

The interview and FGDs took an exciting turn when we started asking them, "How do you feel?", "How's your situation?" and "What do you miss the most?" The participants started discussing their emotions and feelings using numerous adjectives such as "sad", "confused", "worried," and "anxious." Such a reaction is very different from the first phase of the interviews, where the participants often reflected on the behavioral changes and their survival mechanisms when dealing with dissertation writing in the turbulence of the pandemic. The second phase of the interviews felt more intimate and emotional even for the interviewers, reflecting the bitterness of the pandemic reality and the bleak future that awaits them as fresh graduates. The sub-themes under the major themes of "challenge" and "disappointments" have been elaborated on in detail below.

Thesis supervision

The participants raised concerns about the supervision during the work-from-home policy. Such a policy has forced the university to conduct thesis supervision solely online. This means that the supervisor and students arrange their own process and this is diverse from one supervisor to another. The students identified numerous concerns ranging from a technological impairment, where some supervisors were unable to use technology and meet the demand to concerns over the inadequate quality of the supervision. Some of the supervisors prefer solely to supervise through email, minimizing the online interactions, and others agreed to manage their supervision through video conferencing. This leads to imbalanced support for the students.

However, the participants overwhelmingly admitted that they very much prefer face-to-face interaction where the message is clearer. They can talk freely to their supervisors rather than doing supervision through video conferencing. The participants stated:

"It's difficult for me to understand what my supervisor wants only through email or Whatsapp messages. There's nothing compares to face-to-face interaction." (EDS, 8th semester)

"I feel like final-year students are the ones who have been disadvantaged by the whole pandemic compared to other students. This semester is when we need direct communication and close interaction with the supervisors the most. We have been very misfortune in that sense. How can you ask so many questions about your project only through video call? It's impossible" (HMG, 8th semester).

On the other hand, the obligation to teach, supervise and examine through video conference technology has put more of a burden on the university lecturers. They too voiced concerns that their day-to-day routine during the work-from-home policy had them tied to their laptops, sometimes far beyond their usual working hours. Some of the lecturers that we briefly interviewed for the purpose of this research stated that managing their work online has serious consequences not only physically but also mentally as well. These are their statements:

"Look, we have to supervise 15 students, teach 10 classes, not to mention examine proposals and finals. How can we be expected to sit in from of the laptop, doing video conferences all-day every day? On top of that, we have to write publication as well" (AR, lecturer)

"This is a very challenging situation for all of us. Lecturers, students, everyone. One day everything is fine, and the next day we are forced…forced to move all of our work online. It's hard, energy-draining, and exhausting. No lecturers can move their work online smoothly" (IY, lecturer)

Home situation

Some students live in cramped households where they have to share with many family members. One student had to share with 9 family members including their infant nephews and nieces, which made writing their thesis during the day non-existent. Another student stated that although she only has to share the home with her father and younger brother, she has to do domestic chores. Being the only female in the household has meant that she is expected to do more domestic chores, substituting the loss of her mother. Here are the related excerpts:

" I am the only woman in my family, so naturally I am inclined to do more chores…just like any housewives do. It's never-ending tasks" (TT, 8th semester)

"I lived with 9 family members, including my nephews and nieces. Everybody is at home. I need to be awake at night just to get to my thesis" (CP, 8th semester)

"We live in *kampong*, where all of our relatives also live nearby. They don't seem to care about government guidance on social distancing. So, almost every day, my relatives visit us freely. I couldn't work at all during the day and had to sacrifice my sleep in order to work on my thesis" (FR, 8th semester).

Isolation and loneliness

Some of the students stated that the work-from-home policy isolated them from their support system, which consists of their friends. Friendship and peer groups have been highlighted as a loss during the pandemic. One student even breached the distancing protocols to meet his friend in order to cope with the workload. He stated,

" I visited my friend, and three of us will work together from midday to noon on our thesis. I am the type of student who can't work alone. I need to be surrounded by my friends. Otherwise, I won't finish my thesis." (RN, 8th semester)

Other students stated that meeting their friends regularly on campus was their support system throughout their studies, and now, it is getting hard. She stated:

"My friends are my supporters, and it's meaningful to meet regularly with those who are also through the same journey. It's important for me. And now, it's hard because, of course, Whatsapp-ing couldn't remotely adequate for the connection that you crave. You missed your friendship."(SV, 14th semester)

" It feels alone and lonely. You work by yourself. I missed being amongst my friends. You can see that because you're all through the same thing, and you can see that many people working on their final project. You lost that togetherness." (JN, 8th semester)

Other than the numerous challenges stated above, the students also mentioned disappointments. These "disappointments" were probed during the FGD interviews by asking them things about "their feelings", "things they missed," or "could no longer expect" caused by the pandemic. Discussing things that they missed took an interesting direction because

it felt more intimate, emotional, and even bittersweet. The participants expressed their "disappointment" over the graduation ceremony, the library, and the future that awaits them after graduation. Many answers emerged, and the sub-themes are as follows.

Library

The participants overwhelmingly stated the university library was their 'own' space during the writing of their thesis. Hence being unable to work from the library is cited as being one factor tied to disappointment. This was quite surprising during the interviews as the lecturers often thought that students rarely visited the library. The word 'library' was mentioned quite a lot during the discussion since this is the place where the participants worked on their projects before the pandemic. It is also the thing that they miss a lot.

"I missed our library. I prefer reading actual books to downloading pdf on the Internet." (HMR, 14th semester).

"I feel like our library is our safe, cozy place. I'm alone but still surrounded by other people. It's quiet but also not isolating. It never occurred to me that I would ever miss the library before. But I do, now. It's not a matter of literature 'cause you can still get it on the Internet. It's just the space of calmness that I need." (NL, 8th semester)

Graduation ceremonies

The biggest disappointment for the final-year students in this study was being unable to attend their graduation ceremony. Graduation is often perceived as the highlight of their degree for undergraduate students and also for their parents. Some of the participants expressed their disappointment over the graduation ceremony that they may never get the chance to attend.

"When I think about it, it feels like horror. Graduation is like...the peak of everything we've done for the last four years, it may not happen at all, just the email stating that you have passed ...this is your certificate." (MR, 8th semester)

"Graduation, I think, is more about the parents. It's their day after they worked so hard to put us into

college. It's more important for my parents than for me. I think they will be disappointed as well." (YSN, 8th semester)

Other than disappointments over their graduation ceremony that may be organized online this year, the participants also voiced concerns over future uncertainty. The pandemic has forced numerous business closures, not to mention a staff reduction in many corporations. Indonesia is no exception in this matter.

Future-related uncertainties

The majority of the participants stated that they are going to apply to corporations once they graduate. Some stated that they prefer state-owned corporations (BUMN) over those in the private sector. A small number of participants stated that they wanted to work in the media or creative industries, and only one participant stated that she would pursue entrepreneurship and was not interested in working in a corporation. However, almost all of the participants voiced their concerns regarding future uncertainty.

"I'm worried because it feels like we have been greeted by storm after a storm during this pandemic. I realize that the job prospects are so bad. The news said we will face a great depression."(AQ, 8th semester)

"It worries me, of course. My cousin graduated three years ago and she's still looking for a job. I would like to make my mom proud 'cause she's the only parent I have. And I have wasted three years of my study." (SV, 14th semester)

Two of the participants even wanted to prolong their education to have a practical qualification in the film industry (as a videographer) and as a graphic designer. Even so, they were not quite sure whether their job prospects would be better with more qualifications or not.

"At least it will make me more confident because I have additional skills. And, there will always be possibilities for self-employed as well." (NL, 8th semester)

As mentioned earlier, phenomenology is best exemplified by the work of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. While Husserl's approach could be described as more traditional and structured in the sense of being descriptive in its nature of interpretation, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology offers a more reflexive, circular, and dialogic approach as its mode of interpretation. Considering the researcher's position as a university lecturer impacted by the working policy during the COVID-19 pandemic, hermeneutic phenomenology is best applied in this research.

Surviving the storm

Challenges refer to things that the participants had to overcome during the completion of their thesis. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced universities around the world to abruptly and radically change their academic practices. This situation is becoming even harder, as Unesco warns, for disadvantaged students such as the disabled, those of a lower economic background, and immigrant (international) students. According to their website, the greatest barrier in university practices around the world is overcoming the digital divide.[25] Having access to technology is a privilege that not all students, especially those in the developing world, have.

The challenges related to the online work were quite substantial for some students, including some of our participants. While the need for literature is quite easily provided by the Internet, some of the students stated that the challenge of engaging in thesis supervision online was significant. Abruptly being disconnected from face-to-face interactions with their supervisors has been cited as difficult during the pandemic. The majority of students prefer face-to-face interactions rather than online interactions. This result is not surprising since direct and interpersonal communication is an important factor for higher education students, as has been mentioned in various studies[14,15,16] Having a good interpersonal relationship with their supervisor could boost the students' self-efficacy and ego, supporting them to finish before graduation. Research writing can be a daunting task for students who used to work in groups. Hence the

final year (or, in this case, the final semester) could be challenging for some students. One student (RN) mentioned that he breached the government's advice and visited his friends since he could not work on his dissertation alone. This has been mentioned earlier in the result section, suggesting that peer support is fundamental in relation to the student's well-being.

However, the radical changes in academic practice have also proven to be challenging for the lecturers too. Being demanded to suddenly adopt the technology of online teaching could have a detrimental effect. The lecturers approached admitted that they suffer from "Zoom fatigue" and "burnout" from having to stare at computer laptops during the day for a long period of time. This has been made worse by university officials being seemingly unaware that the digital divide also affects faculty members. Older lecturers have more difficulty managing their teaching online, let alone doing more work, such as supervising and examining solely through a video conference. This has resulted in the level of attention given during the supervision process to each student varying. Some students meet their supervisors online regularly, while others can only send their work in through emails without having direct communication. It is understandable that students have become more anxious about their final projects. One student used the term "surviving the storm" to define the challenges and adversities faced in their final year. It could have layered meanings, such as surviving the pandemic and also surviving the uncharted territory of academic practice.

Coping with loneliness

Dissertation writing can be a long and lonely journey. Throughout the years, students become accustomed to working in groups, more often with their close friends. This pandemic has catapulted the loneliness and isolation factors in relation to the adversity of dissertation writing. Under normal conditions, the students often need more time to conduct independent research work. Under this 'new normal', the student not only has to conduct their dissertation, including the data collection, solely

through online technologies. They are also displaced from their familiar campus setting and bound to work from home exclusively. Their home situations often offer no easy solution. One student was living with 9 of their family members. Another student lived in a slum area where their relatives visited regularly. Another student had to do more domestic chores as she was the only female in her family after losing her mother. This made her final year even more challenging. Some students have to be awake until dawn to find a peaceful time window to do the writing in.

The students admitted that they still contacted their close friends regularly, but that is not adequate in terms of capturing the human communication process. As mentioned in the literature section, stress, anxiety, and mental illness are profound in relation to the student's failure to complete their education[6,10,11] This pandemic has made students more vulnerable and anxious concerning their job opportunities after graduation. Some universities are offering online counseling for their students, academic members, and administration staff to help them cope with the pandemic.[2] This is quite rare in Indonesia, although some private universities have begun to provide this service as well.[26,27,28]

University spaces as a spatial identity

It was surprising that during the interview, the participants stated that the "library is their safe space". Towards the second phase of the interview, when "How do you feel?", "How do you make sense of this pandemic?" and "What have you missed the most" were asked, and the conversation turned more intimate and reflective towards their feelings and their awareness of their experience. The library represents a familiar setting where they usually work on their thesis in solitude but not isolated compared to working from home for our participants. The university library that the students regularly visit during their final year offers a spatial identity and commonality of what it means to be a university student. Research on spaces providing spatial identity has been documented in

several studies[4,29,30] Spatial identities is defined as a result of a connection between people, physical elements of places, and activities associated with them[30] University spaces are more than just the physicality of the building in which students, staff, and faculty members spend their everyday lives. It is also a formative and ongoing meaning-making process where the academic identity is embedded and constantly negotiated.[4] Furthermore, Siuty asserted that the meaning-making process is complex and ever-changing, following the way spaces have been 'experienced' in order to sustain academic processes[4] Library spaces offer a sense of comfort and belonging where the identity of being a university student lies within the participants. Such a sense of belonging is now deeply missed, regretted, and displaced by the turmoil of the never-ending pandemic conundrum.

4. Conclusion

This research was driven in order to address the question, "How do Indonesian final-year students deal with the pandemic, and how do they make sense of it through their lived experiences?" In order to answer the question, hermeneutic phenomenology derived from the work of Martin Heidegger was utilized. Within the lengthy elaboration of the results finding and discussion, it is revealed that the pandemic has heavily impacted the final research projects of the final year students. The challenges were identified through numerous factors, such as the communication barrier with their supervisors, unsupportive home situations, and a sense of loneliness and isolation. This research has also explored the way in which a sense of disappointment lies within the displacement of normal living events, such as the loss of a spatial identity due to the missed chance of having a graduation ceremony. The Covid-19 pandemic is a spiraling conundrum where bodily and physical health often eclipses the mental-psychological dimensions. This research shows that the lasting effect of the pandemic stretches beyond the discourses of public health. The social dimension of the everyday living experiences of the common people should be taken into consideration by policymakers, including university boards, when formulating the future policies of higher education institutions in Indonesia.

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