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INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES IN STUDYING AMERICAN CULTURE THROUGH ZOOM AND ONLINE INTERVIEW

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Abstract
Studying American culture can be challenging for Indonesian university students due to the geographical distance that limits opportunities for direct cultural experiences. This study explored students' reactions to and perceived benefits of learning American culture through Zoom meetings and email interviews. Using a qualitative approach, the study was conducted from September 2023 to January 2024. 25 university students participated in two Zoom meetings (60–80 minutes each). Each meeting featured one American speaker who discussed American business conditions or politics. Afterwards, students completed a four-question open-ended questionnaire. They also conducted group email interviews with Americans about education, ethnic and racial diversity, or leisure activities. At the end of the semester, students completed a five-question open-ended questionnaire about the email interviews. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings showed generally positive reactions to the Zoom meetings. All students reported new knowledge about American business and politics. By doing the email interviews, students experienced two benefits: gaining new knowledge (88%) and communicating with Americans (12%)**.** Challenges included unstable internet connections and delayed email replies. The findings highlight the potential of combining synchronous and asynchronous digital communication to complement classroom materials with first-hand cultural perspectives.

Keywords: American culture, cultural learning, email interview, intercultural communication, Zoom meeting

Introduction

Learning culture while learning a foreign language is important because language and culture are closely interconnected. Cultural learning can help students develop intercultural awareness and communicate appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. Lee et al. (2023), Nguyen et al. (2024), and Yang and Yang (2025) found that integrating intercultural learning into online English language learning through intercultural curricula, virtual exchanges, and mobile-assisted communication supported students' intercultural development and language learning. More recent research has also demonstrated the potential of online intercultural collaboration to support EFL learners' intercultural awareness and communication. Yeh et al. (2024) found that participation in a Taiwan–New Zealand telecollaboration program supported positive attitudes toward intercultural awareness and learning among Taiwanese college students. Similarly, Gustine et al. (2025) reported that Indonesian and Japanese students participating in a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project demonstrated intercultural competence in terms of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Although students can learn about the target culture through textbooks and internet resources, opportunities to interact with people from that culture can provide additional perspectives and experiences. However, it is not feasible for most students to experience the target culture by living in the country where it is practiced. Therefore, teachers need to find ways of

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providing cultural learning experiences. The use of technology for intercultural exchange allows learners to engage with people from different cultural backgrounds without geographical constraints (Alizadeh & Cowie, 2025). Naranjo-Toro et al. (2026) also highlighted the growing role of digital technologies, such as videoconferencing and online collaboration platforms, in supporting intercultural competence development in higher education.

Previous research has examined technology-enhanced intercultural learning and online exchanges in language education. Besides, Aji (2022) also explored Indonesian university students' reflections on an online school internship program and he found that online experiential learning provided meaningful opportunities for students to understand the school environment, gain new experiences, and reflect on their learning. Alizadeh and Cowie (2025), in their scoping review of 48 studies published between 2020 and 2025, identified virtual exchange as a pedagogical approach that can support language learning and intercultural competence through collaborative and reflective activities. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2024) investigated a virtual exchange program involving students from seven countries and examined their perceived language development and intercultural competence. Other studies have explored specific forms of online intercultural interaction, including telecollaboration and COIL (Gustine et al., 2025; Qilin et al., 2025; Yeh et al., 2024).

Although previous studies have examined technology-enhanced intercultural learning, particularly through telecollaboration and virtual exchange, less attention has been given to students' perceptions of combining synchronous meetings with guest speakers and asynchronous email interviews as complementary activities in an American Culture course. In particular, understanding how students perceive the benefits of these two communication formats may provide insights into their potential roles in cultural learning in Indonesian higher education.

Therefore, this study investigated Indonesian university students' perceptions of interacting with Americans through Zoom meetings and email interviews in an American Culture course. Specifically, it addressed the following research questions:

1. What were the students' reactions after participating in Zoom sessions with American guest speakers?
2. What benefits did the students perceive from participating in the Zoom sessions with American guest speakers?
3. What benefits did the students perceive from interviewing Americans by email?

Theory

Online learning can be in two forms: synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous learning enables participants to communicate in real time, which provides immediate feedback and discussion, whereas asynchronous learning allows participants to access learning materials and respond at different times (Hung et al., 2024). Students' preferences for these modes may vary depending on their learning experiences and needs, as each offers different opportunities for interaction and flexibility (Zeng & Luo, 2024). Moreover, Amiti (2020) discussed the characteristics of synchronous and asynchronous e-learning to support online learning. Among the available synchronous learning platforms, Zoom has been used to facilitate student engagement through real-time meetings (Natalie & Purnamaningwulan, 2024; Prasetya, 2024; Rojabi & Femilia, 2023). As stated by Kohnke and Moorhouse (2022), Zoom features, such as screen sharing, recording, and breakout rooms, can support interactive and collaborative language-learning activities. Furthermore, Zoom can be accessed through smartphones, laptops, and computers, which makes it practical for online learning (Laili & Nashir, 2021). Zoom's user-friendly interface and video-conferencing capabilities also support extended online sessions (Nurieva & Garaeva, 2020). In this study, Zoom meetings provided opportunities for students to interact with American guest speakers synchronously, while email interviews enabled students to communicate with Americans asynchronously. Combining these two forms of online communication may therefore offer learners varied opportunities to engage with cultural information and perspectives.

Videoconferencing can facilitate direct interaction between students and people from the target culture, providing opportunities to ask questions and discuss cultural practices and perspectives. Serhan (2020) examined students' attitudes toward using Zoom for remote learning, demonstrating the relevance of videoconferencing as an online learning platform. More recent

research has explored how online intercultural exchanges support communication and interaction in language education (Satar & Çimenli Olcars, 2025). For example, Alghasab and Alvarez-Ayure (2023) examined telecollaborative conversations between Kuwaiti and Colombian university EFL students and found that online interaction provided opportunities for learners to demonstrate curiosity, openness, and intercultural knowledge. Their findings also emphasized the importance of pedagogical preparation before students participate in online exchanges. Similarly, Qilin et al. (2025) found that a nine-week telecollaboration program between Chinese and Colombian university students contributed to improvements in several dimensions of intercultural communicative competence, particularly skills and awareness. These studies suggested that videoconferencing and other forms of online collaboration can provide meaningful opportunities for intercultural engagement. However, the benefits of synchronous online learning depend partly on how interaction is organized and facilitated. Thus, teachers should incorporate videoconferencing into learning activities. It should not be used as a tool to deliver information only.

In contrast, asynchronous communication allows participants to exchange information at different times. It also provides greater flexibility in responding to questions. Email interviews make students able to interact with people from the target culture. It also allows both the email sender and receiver to think about their responses without having to communicate in real time. As it was stated by Dahlin (2021), email interviews can provide participants with additional time to reflect on questions and develop their responses, which made the method useful for exploratory exchanges. Amri et al. (2021) discussed the benefits and limitations of asynchronous email interviews, highlighting their potential to overcome geographical barriers while they recognized challenges related to response time and participant engagement. Besides, Harris et al. (2024) reported that asynchronous email interviews allowed participants to provide thoughtful and reflective responses, although maintaining engagement and obtaining timely replies could be challenging. Oates et al. (2022) compared several types of online interviews and reported that the interview format could affect factors such as rapport and participants' willingness to share information. However, they found little evidence that the different formats led to differences in the quality or equivalence of the data collected. Although these studies focused on email interviews as a research method rather than as a learning activity, they offer useful insights into both the benefits and practical challenges of asynchronous communication. In language and culture courses, email interviews can allow students to explore cultural topics by exchanging questions and responses with people who have firsthand experience of the culture being studied.

Method

Research design

This study employed a descriptive research design to examine Indonesian university students' perceptions of two online learning activities: synchronous Zoom meetings with American guest speakers and asynchronous email interviews with Americans. These activities were incorporated into the course to provide students with opportunities to interact with Americans. They also gained firsthand perspectives on various aspects of American culture. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize response patterns and thematic analysis to identify recurring ideas in students' written responses.

Participants

All 25 students enrolled in the American Culture class participated in the study. Thus, the participants represented the entire class. All participants were English Literature majors at a private university in West Java, Indonesia. The students attended an American Culture class from September 2023 to January 2024. The students were in their fifth semester and were between 19 and 20 years old.

Research procedures

The students experienced two types of online learning activities: synchronous learning through Zoom meetings and asynchronous learning through email interviews with Americans.

Synchronous learning through Zoom meetings

Twelve class meetings were conducted on-site, while two class meetings were conducted online through Zoom, each lasting 60–80 minutes. The first Zoom meeting was conducted before the midterm examination, and the second meeting took place after the midterm examination. These two meetings were arranged to allow students to meet and interact with two Americans living in the United States.

The first American, who lived in Chicago, discussed business conditions in the United States, while the second American, who lived in Columbus, presented the contemporary political situation in the United States. During the Zoom meetings, students listened to the Americans' explanations and participated in question-and-answer sessions after each presentation. After each Zoom meeting, the students were asked to complete an online questionnaire through Google Forms.

Asynchronous learning through email interviews

Besides participating in synchronous learning through Zoom meetings, the students also experienced asynchronous learning by conducting email interviews with six Americans. The students were divided into six groups, and each group was assigned one American interviewee. Each group was required to interview the assigned American by email and ask ten questions related to the assigned topic, such as education, ethnic and racial diversity, and leisure time.

The email interviews were conducted between October and November 2023. Each group followed a communication procedure consisting of three to five emails, depending on whether clarification was necessary. The communication stages are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Stages of email communication

Stage	Email communication	Description
1	Introduction email	Each group introduced its members to the American interviewee and explained the interview process, including the schedule for sending questions and receiving responses.
2	First set of questions	Each group sent five questions. Before being sent, the questions were checked by the lecturer to avoid complicated questions and grammatical mistakes.
3	Clarification email (if necessary)	Each group sent an email to clarify unclear answers from the American interviewee.
4	Second set of questions	Each group sent another five questions to complete the ten-question interview.
5	Further clarification email (if necessary)	Each group sent another email to clarify any remaining unclear answers.

If no clarification was needed, each group sent only three emails in total: the introductory email and two emails containing the questions. If clarification was necessary, additional emails were exchanged. After collecting all the interview results, each group presented its findings in class. They were required to compare the American interviewee's point of view with the information presented in their textbook.

Research instruments

Two online questionnaires consisting of open-ended questions were used to collect the students' opinions about the learning activities. The first questionnaire was administered after each Zoom meeting through Google Forms. The questionnaire was anonymous so that each student could freely express their ideas and opinions. The same questionnaire was administered after both Zoom meetings. The questionnaire consisted of four open-ended questions:

1. How do you feel after listening to the sharing from the American?
2. What benefits did you gain from the American session?
3. Was there anything you did not like about the American's presentation?
4. Do you have any suggestions for the next session with another American?

The second questionnaire was administered at the end of the semester to collect students' opinions about the benefits of conducting email interviews with Americans. It consisted of five open-ended questions that allowed the participants to freely express their experiences and opinions about the activity. Both questionnaires were developed by the lecturer based on the objectives of the study and the learning activities conducted. However, neither expert validation nor pilot testing was conducted due to time constraints.

Data analysis

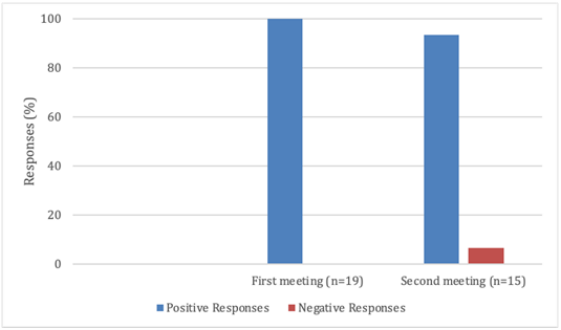
The data obtained from the online questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Related to the questionnaires administered after the Zoom meetings, only the responses to the first and second questions were counted and analysed to answer the research questions of this study. Questions 3 and 4 were not analysed because they were not directly related to the research questions. The students' responses to questions 1 and 2 were grouped based on recurring ideas. The frequency and percentage of each category were calculated using descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis was used to code and analyse the students' opinions in the second questionnaire.

There were several steps to analyse the data. First, the researcher looked at the responses and identified meaningful ideas. Second, initial codes were assigned and grouped related codes into categories. Third, the researcher developed broader themes. This process was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2023) approach to thematic analysis, which focuses on identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative data. The researchers also calculated frequencies and percentages to show how responses were distributed across the identified categories. Participants' real names were not included in the study as the questionnaires were anonymous.

Findings and Discussion

RQ1: Students' reactions to the Zoom meetings

The students' responses to the two Zoom meetings were analysed in order to identify their reactions to interacting with American guest speakers. Two subthemes emerged, namely: positive emotional and learning responses and technical limitations and preferences for face-to-face interaction. Figure 1 summarizes the students' reactions to the two meetings.



Note. Percentages are calculated separately for each meeting.
Figure 1. Students' reactions to the Zoom meetings

As seen in Figure 1, the total of 34 responses represents the combined number of questionnaire submissions from the two meetings. 19 responses were gathered after the first meeting and 15 after the second. As the questionnaires were anonymous, the number of unique students who submitted responses across both meetings could not be determined. All 19 respondents (100%) reacted positively to the first meeting, which focused on American business conditions. In the second meeting, which addressed American politics, 14 of the 15 responses (93.3%) reacted positively, while one (6.7%) expressed a concern about signal problems and preferred an on-site meeting. Overall, 33 of the 34 questionnaire responses (97.1%) were positive. The qualitative responses further illustrate the reasons for these reactions, particularly the students' excitement about learning directly from Americans and their appreciation of the opportunity to gain new cultural insights.

Subtheme 1: Positive emotional and learning responses

Most students expressed excitement, enjoyment, gratitude, and interest after interacting with the American guest speakers. Their comments also indicated that hearing directly from people living in the United States provided opportunities to gain information and perspectives about American society. The following excerpts related to the first meeting illustrate these reactions:

> *I feel excited! I gained so much knowledge from her explanation, how willingful she is to explain things one by one* (S4).
> *I'm enjoyed the meeting so much. It's interesting to hear the story from the real American.* (S7).
> *I feel grateful that we can meet a real American and interact with her. She's so nice and the materials presented well.* (S14).

These responses show that students appreciated the information shared by the American guest speaker. They were also grateful to have a chance to interact with someone from the target culture. S4 focused on the knowledge gained and the speaker's willingness to provide explanations, while S7 found it interesting to hear about American experiences firsthand. S14 also expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to meet and communicate with an American. Overall, the comments suggest that students' positive reactions show that they did not just enjoy the session, but they also valued the chance to learn about another culture through direct interaction with the American.

Positive reactions could also be seen in the second meeting, which focused on American politics as S8 mentioned: "I feel excited because I can learn how the political system there and the differences between America and Indonesia." Moreover, S9 commented, "I felt intrigued to try and vote in the US because of how excited most of the Americans are about voting based on [name]'s presentation." S14 emphasized the knowledge gained from the presentation: "I feel enlightened. I received many new insights regarding the political activities in America."

These students' statements suggest that the discussion of American politics encouraged them to compare the political systems of the United States and Indonesia. They also learnt more about American civic life. S8 specifically mentioned comparing the two countries, while S9 showed interest in how voting works in the United States. S14's response also suggests that the session helped broaden the student's understanding of political activities in America.

In addition to their positive reactions, some students expressed a desire for longer sessions to allow more opportunities to ask questions. Four students indicated that the available time was insufficient for them to raise all their questions. S10 stated, "I'm just sad about the time, because I want to ask more questions but could not because of the time limit." S12 also suggested increasing the session duration because he still wanted to ask many questions. These comments suggest that they wanted more opportunities with the speakers.

Subtheme 2: Technical limitations and preferences for face-to-face interaction

Although the responses were mostly positive, one student preferred to have an on-site meeting because of technical difficulties during the second Zoom session. S2 stated, "I really hope to interact with onsite method because we could learn more clearly without signal trouble around us." This response indicates that the student appreciated the opportunity to interact with the American speaker. However, he perceived the online meeting as a limitation because of the signal problems. This comment is important because it shows the difference between students' attitudes toward the cultural-learning activity and their experiences with the technology used. The student did not directly express a lack of interest in learning about American culture. Instead, his response suggests that technical difficulties affected his preference for on-site meetings.

RQ 2: Perceived benefits of the Zoom meetings

Related to the perceived benefits of the Zoom meetings, there was one theme found, which was gaining new knowledge about American culture and society. This theme consists of two subthemes. First, learning about American business and workplace culture. Second, understanding

American politics and comparing political practices across cultures. Figure 2 shows the students' responses from the two Zoom meetings.

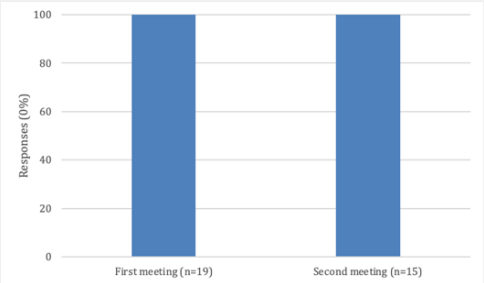


Figure 2. Students' perceived benefits of the two Zoom meetings

As shown in Figure 2, all students who completed the questionnaires reported gaining new knowledge from the Zoom meetings. In the first meeting, 19 respondents (100%) mentioned gaining new knowledge about American business and workplace culture as a benefit. The same result was found in the second meeting on American politics. 15 respondents (100%) reported a similar benefit. These findings suggest that students valued both sessions as opportunities to learn about American society through the Americans' personal experiences and viewpoints. Although both meetings covered the different topics, they provided a similar learning benefit from the students' perspectives.

Theme 1: Gaining new knowledge about American culture and society

All responses from both meetings indicated that students perceived gaining new knowledge as a benefit of interacting with the American guest speakers. The content of this knowledge was various which depended on the topic of each meeting. Based on the students' comments, it can be seen that the sessions provided insightful information related to the Americans' specific experiences and practices.

Subtheme 1: Learning about American business and workplace culture

Students who attended the first meeting highlighted their learning about American business conditions, workplace experiences, and interactions among people from different cultural backgrounds. For example, S18 reflected on the guest speaker's experience working with colleagues from diverse backgrounds:

> *I get a lot of insight, especially about her experience working in a company that welcomes many people that have different background, race, and culture. Even though there are some challenges when working with them, she tries to be more careful on how she act and say while also know more about others culture so she wouldn't offended her colleagues.* (S18)

S19 emphasized the information gained about American business conditions, "I got a lot of new information about the business conditions in America and how the American's perspective of business in their country." Meanwhile, S14 stated, "I got new insights from the Americans, starting from their cultural things, how Americans live, and their work ethic, which is good to apply. Americans are hard workers, and that's nice to be a hard worker."

The first meeting gave students insights into American society through the guest speaker's personal and professional experiences. S18's response is particularly interesting, as it draws attention not only to diversity in the workplace but also to the need to communicate thoughtfully with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. In contrast, S14's comment reflects how students related some of the practices discussed to their own everyday lives. However, these comments reflect the students' own perceptions and interpretations. Therefore, they should not be taken as evidence that the practices mentioned are common to all Americans or workplaces in the United States.

Subtheme 2: Understanding American politics and comparing political practices

The second meeting offered students with information about American political practices, such as voting and election-related customs. S8 described several specific details that stood out to him: "I gained insight into US politics such as stickers, non-offensive post-vote conversations, and free doughnuts." S2 similarly emphasized learning about voting-related practices and the election system: "I got a lot of info about do and don't to talk about voting day and the election system."

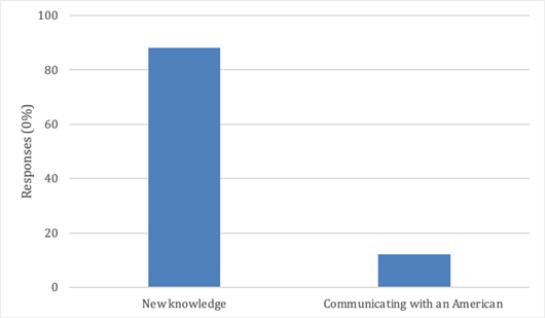
Beyond acquiring information about American politics, some students connected the guest speaker's explanation to their knowledge of Indonesian politics. S14 explained:

> *The benefit that I got is that I can compare between the political situations that are happened in America with the political situations that are happened in Indonesia and learn that there are some situations that happened in America that is similar to what happened in Indonesia, while there are some that are not.* (S14)

This response indicates that the session encouraged the student to consider similarities and differences between the two countries. Rather than viewing American political practices in isolation, the student related the information to a familiar national context. Such comparisons suggest that the meeting offered an opportunity for students to reflect on their existing knowledge and consider how political practices may vary across societies.

RQ 3: Perceived benefits of the email interviews

To provide an answer to the third research question about the benefits that the students obtain from doing email interview with the Americans, the responses are classified into two main benefits.



Note. Percentages were calculated using the total number of students (n = 25). Each student was assigned to one main category based on their perceived benefit.

Figure 3. Students' perceived benefits of the email interviews

Figure 3 illustrates the two benefits students perceived from conducting email interviews with Americans. Most students (22 or 88%) reported gaining new knowledge, particularly about American education, ethnic and racial diversity, and leisure activities. Meanwhile, three students (12%) stated that they were benefited from communicating with an American. These findings suggest that email interviews were valuable as students could obtain information about American society. Nevertheless, to be able to communicate with an American itself was also meaningful to three students. They appreciated the opportunity to interact with and learn directly from an American.

Discussion

RQ1: Students' reactions to synchronous cultural interaction positive emotional and learning responses

The findings of this study are in line with recent research on virtual exchange and intercultural learning. Nguyen et al. (2024) examined students' perceptions of their language development and intercultural competence after participating in an online cultural exchange program involving students from different countries. Their findings highlighted the structured online interaction in exposing students to perspectives from other cultural backgrounds. Alizadeh

and Cowie (2025), who reviewed 48 peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025, also shared similar findings. Their review showed that technology-based virtual exchange can support language learning and intercultural competence through collaborative and reflective activities. The students in this study also appreciated the opportunity to interact directly with Americans using the online interaction.

Nonetheless, the findings need to be considered in the context of the learning activities conducted in this study. Students' responses mainly reflect their positive experiences and their appreciation of the cultural information shared during the Zoom meetings. They do not necessarily show measurable gains in intercultural competence or students' lasting understanding of American culture. However, some comments, particularly those comparing American and Indonesian political systems, suggest that the discussions encouraged students to think about differences in cultural and institutional practices. This is an important aspect of cultural learning, which involves more than memorizing information about another country. Students are also required to consider how social and political practices may be different across contexts.

The way the guest speakers presented the information and shared their experiences became another factor that may have shaped students' positive responses. S4 appreciated the speaker's step-by-step explanations, whereas S7 found it interesting to hear about life in the United States from someone with firsthand experience. These comments show that the way cultural information is delivered can influence students' learning experiences. Personal opinions from the guest speakers can add useful perspectives to the information that students find in their textbooks and other learning materials. However, teachers should also encourage students to examine the Americans' sharing critically, since one person's experiences and opinions cannot represent those of all Americans. Instead, such sharing can become a starting point for further discussion and help students explore cultural similarities and differences.

The findings also offer practical suggestions for teaching English and culture at the university level. Before inviting any guest speakers, teachers can introduce relevant vocabulary and background information to help students follow the discussion. Students can also prepare several questions in advance so that they can involve more actively in the sessions. Afterward, they could relate the speakers' experiences to the course materials. They could also discuss similarities and differences between American and Indonesian contexts. Through these follow-up activities, students' interest may develop into deeper cultural exploration and more thoughtful reflection.

Technical limitations and preferences for face-to-face interaction

The issue of technical difficulties is related to Serhan's (2020) study, which examined university students' attitudes toward remote learning through Zoom. Serhan found that students had negative views of how Zoom affected their learning experiences and motivation, although they also appreciated Zoom's flexibility. However, the results of the present study are different. Almost all students responded positively to the two Zoom meetings, and only one student was unsatisfied due to the unstable internet connection. This difference may indicate that students' experiences with videoconferencing depend partly on the learning context and the way the platform is used. In this study, Zoom allowed students to interact with the guest speakers and learn about American business and politics. These opportunities may have contributed to students' positive responses despite the technical problem reported by one student.

The organization of online interaction is also important to be considered in intercultural learning. Satar and Çimenli Olcars (2025) explored how participants managed changes in discussion topics during online intercultural exchanges. Their study highlighted the importance of coordinating interaction to keep discussions flowing smoothly. In this study, the activities mainly consisted of presentations by American guest speakers followed by question-and-answer sessions. There were no extended intercultural exchanges. However, their findings offer useful insights into planning online communication. Student's comment about signal problems becomes a reminder that successful online interaction depends on well-organized presentations and discussions. It also depends on the practical conditions that allow students to participate.

Besides, these findings also point to several considerations for teaching practice and institutional support. Before an online guest-speaker session, teachers could test the audio and internet connections. Teachers need to explain how students can report technical problems and

prepare alternative materials in case the connection is interrupted. Institutions also need to consider whether students have reliable internet access and suitable devices for participating in online activities. If connection problems occur frequently, teachers could provide supplementary materials or arrange follow-up activities to ensure that students do not miss any important information.

However, the preference for face-to-face interaction should be interpreted with caution. It does not necessarily mean that onsite meetings are more effective for all students, particularly since only one respondent preferred to have an onsite meeting in the questionnaires. This response draws attention to a possible limitation of online learning. Therefore, a balanced approach would recognize the benefits of online interaction while also addressing the technical problems that may affect students' participation.

Overall, most students responded positively to the Zoom meetings. They appreciated the Americans' sharing about business and politics. Students also gained insights into American society and compared it with the Indonesian context. Nevertheless, the comment about internet problems shows that technical conditions can affect the learning experience. The findings suggest that online guest-speaker sessions can be a valuable part of cultural learning. However, the sessions should be supported by careful preparation, meaningful opportunities for interaction and reflection, and adequate technical arrangements.

RQ2: Perceived benefits of the Zoom meetings

The findings indicate that students perceived both Zoom meetings as sources of new knowledge about American culture and society. Although the topics differed, the guest speakers' accounts gave students access to information about business, workplace interactions, lifestyles, and political practices. The consistency of this response across both meetings suggests that students valued the opportunity to learn directly from people sharing their experiences and perspectives.

These findings are consistent with recent research on technology-mediated intercultural learning. Alizadeh and Cowie (2025), in their scoping review of 48 peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025, found that technology-enhanced intercultural exchange can support language learning and intercultural development, particularly when activities involve interaction, collaboration, and reflection. Similarly, Lee et al. (2023) found that an online EFL curriculum incorporating intercultural learning could support students' intercultural development and English learning. Although the participants and instructional contexts differed from those in the present study, these findings support the educational value of using online interaction to introduce cultural knowledge and create opportunities for learners to engage with perspectives beyond their immediate environment.

An important insight from the present findings is that the perceived benefit extended beyond simply receiving information. Some students connected the speakers' accounts to broader issues of cultural diversity and communication. S18's response showed an awareness of the importance of understanding colleagues' cultural backgrounds and communicating thoughtfully in a culturally diverse workplace. S14's comparison of American and Indonesian political situations illustrates how learning about another society can encourage students to reflect on their own cultural and social environments. This kind of comparison is valuable because cultural learning is not simply about becoming familiar with practices in another society. Cultural learning also involves considering how these practices relate to one's own cultural and social context. The guest-speaker sessions provide opportunities for students to connect new information with what they already knew and had experienced. However, since the data were drawn from students' written perceptions, the findings should not be taken as evidence that the sessions directly developed their intercultural competence.

There are several implications for English language teaching related to the findings. First, teachers can use online guest-speaker sessions to complement textbook content with speakers' personal experiences and perspectives on cultural and social issues. Students can relate classroom discussions to real-life situations by listening to guest speakers whose backgrounds or expertise are relevant to the course topics. Second, teachers can encourage more active engagement by asking students to prepare questions before the sessions and write reflections afterward. They might consider what they have learned, compare the speaker's experiences with their own, and reflect on whether the information has challenged or confirmed their existing views. Third, teachers need to guide students to interpret individual experiences critically. Although a guest speaker's sharing can

offer valuable insights, it could not represent an entire national culture. Teachers can provide follow-up discussions and additional sources to help students recognize cultural differences within a society and avoid making broad generalizations.

Overall, all students viewed the Zoom meetings as an opportunity to learn more about American business, workplace culture, and politics. Some students also related what they learned to issues of cultural diversity and comparisons between the United States and Indonesia. These findings show that online guest-speaker sessions become a useful way to cultural learning in EFL classrooms, especially when direct interaction is supported by guided reflection and critical discussion.

RQ3: Perceived benefits of the email interviews

The findings indicate that the main perceived benefit of the email interviews was gaining new knowledge about American society, as it was reported by 22 students (88%). By asking questions about American education, ethnic and racial diversity, and leisure activities, students were able to explore specific aspects of American life by communicating directly with the interviewees. This suggests that the email interviews gave students access to cultural information that might not be covered in their regular classroom materials.

The students' responses also suggest that the interviews exposed them to different experiences and perspectives about American society. For example, students who asked about education learned about differences between private and public schools. Meanwhile, students who explored ethnic and racial diversity became aware that racism and discrimination remain issues in the United States. Others gained insights into how Americans spend their leisure time. These responses show that the interviews introduced students to a various social and cultural topics, rather than presenting American culture as a uniform set of practices. Nevertheless, the information shared by the Americans should be understood as personal perspectives, not as a complete representation of American society.

The fact that most students gained new knowledge as the main benefit also points to the value of using questions to guide cultural inquiry. By preparing and asking their own questions, students could focus on topics that are interesting for them. They could also explore aspects of American society that are not provided in their textbooks. By doing the email interviews, the students could explore specific topics through written questions and responses. Students could formulate questions around their assigned topics and obtain information directly from the interviewees. This format may have helped them focus on areas of interest and revisit the written responses when reviewing the information. Thus, email interviews offered a different learning experience from the Zoom meetings by providing a written record of the exchange and allowing students to explore selected cultural topics in greater detail.

Although only three students (12%) identified communicating with an American as a benefit, their responses suggest that the interpersonal aspect of the activity also contributed to their learning experience. Students appreciated the opportunity to contact an American, receive answers to their questions, and communicate with a person from the target culture outside the classroom. S23 valued the interviewee's prompt and detailed responses, while S21 described the experience as both informative and enjoyable. These comments suggest that the activity was valuable not only for the information that students gained but also for the opportunity to communicate with someone from a different cultural context. Although few students mentioned this benefit, their responses highlight the interpersonal dimension of exchanging culture through online meetings.

These findings are in line with the studies of Dahlin (2021) and Saarijärvi and Bratt (2021), which discussed the practical and methodological advantages of email interviews. As email interviews are asynchronous, participants can respond at a convenient time and have an opportunity to consider their answers before sending them. This feature was relevant to this study, as the students and American interviewees were separated by geographical distance and time differences. As S23 noted, the interviewee responded promptly, provided detailed information, and addressed the students' questions. In addition, the written format allowed students to revisit the responses when reviewing the information they had received.

However, the asynchronous nature of email communication meant that students sometimes had to wait for replies. S5 expressed concern about a delayed response, indicating that the wait

created uncertainty about whether the interviewee would eventually reply to the email. This suggests that while email interviews offer flexibility, delays can affect students' expectations and interrupt the communication flow. Therefore, teachers who plan similar activities could set clear expectations about response times, allow sufficient time for the exchange, and prepare alternative tasks for students to work on while they are waiting for replies. These arrangements may help students remain engaged throughout the activity.

Overall, the email interviews provided the opportunities for students to explore several aspects of American society and communicate with them through written exchanges. Although the main perceived benefit was gaining new knowledge, some students also valued the opportunity to interact with the American. These findings suggest that email interviews can serve as a useful supplementary activity for cultural learning, particularly when students are provided with clear topics, opportunities to develop their own questions,

The complementary roles of synchronous and asynchronous communication in cultural learning

Taken together, the findings highlight the complementary roles of synchronous and asynchronous communication in providing university students with opportunities to learn about American culture. Students had the opportunity to interact with American guest speakers in real time, hear about their personal experiences, and ask questions during Zoom meetings. The email interviews allowed students to explore specific cultural topics through written questions and responses. Both students and the interviewees were able to communicate at a convenient time. Students viewed both activities as opportunities to gain new cultural knowledge, although they engaged with the speakers in different ways. Zoom meetings focused on immediate interaction and oral communication; whereas the email interviews offered a more flexible way to exchange written information.

The two activities also exposed students to different aspects of American society. Through presentations and live discussions, the Zoom meetings introduced American business conditions and politics. The email interviews allowed students to look more closely at specific issues, such as education, ethnic and racial diversity, and leisure activities. Therefore, using both activities gave students opportunities to explore American society from different angles and through different forms of communication.

These findings suggest that combining synchronous and asynchronous activities can provide various opportunities for cultural learning in EFL classrooms. Rather than replacing textbooks or regular classroom instruction, these activities can complement existing teaching materials by giving students access to personal experiences and perspectives from people of different culture. To maximize their educational value, teachers should provide opportunities for students to prepare questions, compare information from different sources, and reflect critically on the cultural perspectives they encounter. In this way, online communication activities can become part of a broader instructional approach that encourages students to engage with cultural information, consider different perspectives, and relate what they learn to their own contexts.

Conclusion

Throughout the study, it was discovered that most students gave positive responses to learning American culture using Zoom and email interviews. They could explore the Americans' explanations and learn from the speakers' experiences. The activities also allowed students to encounter personal experiences and perspectives which might be different from what is presented in their textbook. In terms of Zoom meetings, almost all students responded positively to the sessions, and all students who submitted responses to the questionnaires reported gaining new knowledge related to American business and politics. Several students also reflected on cultural diversity in the workplace and compared American political situations with Indonesian. These responses suggest that the Zoom meetings provided not only information about American society but also opportunities for students to relate the speakers' experiences to their own cultural contexts. In terms of email interviews, the students gained two main benefits: new knowledge and the opportunity to communicate with the Americans. Specifically, 22 students (88%) gained new knowledge related to American education, ethnic and racial diversity, and leisure time, while three students (12%) benefited from communicating with the Americans. These findings indicate that the

main value of email interviews was the cultural information obtained from the interviewees, although the communication itself was also meaningful to some students. However, one student could not get a full understanding of the topics discussed in Zoom due to a connection problem. Some students also expected longer Zoom sessions to have more opportunities to ask questions. In terms of email interviews, the students faced unexpected long waiting times for delayed replies from the Americans.

This study has a few limitations. First, a relatively small sample of university students participated in the study. Second, the participants only experienced limited Zoom meetings and several email interviews with a limited number of American participants. As a result, the findings cannot represent the students in this university in general, and the perceptions and experiences of the participants may not reflect those of a wider student population. In addition, the findings were based on students' perceptions and written responses. Therefore, they indicate what students believed they had learned and experienced rather than objectively measured improvements in their cultural knowledge or intercultural competence. The limited number of meetings and interviewees also meant that students were exposed to only a small range of individual experiences and perspectives about American culture.

The findings suggest that Zoom and email interviews can provide opportunities for university students to learn a target culture from the American guest speakers themselves. These two communication tools offer different but complementary learning experiences. Zoom allows students to interact directly with the speakers, listen to their explanations, and ask questions immediately. Meanwhile, email interviews provide more time for the interviewees to reflect on their answers and give detailed responses. These activities can complement the textbook used in class by introducing students to the Americans' personal experiences and perspectives, which may not be covered in conventional learning materials. Therefore, lecturers can encourage students to prepare questions before the meetings and interviews. They need to compare the information obtained from the Americans with the cultural information provided in their textbooks. Follow-up discussions can also help students reflect on cultural similarities and differences. Besides, the discussions can make students consider how cultural practices may be various across societies. For example, students can discuss the speakers' experiences of workplace diversity or compare political practices in America and Indonesia. However, lecturers should also guide students in evaluating each American's view critically, since one person's experience may not reflect the views or experiences of an entire culture. They should also prepare alternative materials or activities in case unstable internet connections disrupt the Zoom sessions.

For further research, more students, more Zoom sessions, and more email interviews are required to gain a more in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions regarding their reactions and the benefits of using Zoom and email interviews to learn American culture. Including more American participants with different backgrounds and experiences would also provide students with a wider range of cultural perspectives. In terms of digital media, Zoom is the only live communication platform used in this study; for further research, it will be interesting to provide students with more digital media for learning American culture, such as related websites, podcasts, or YouTube videos. Therefore, the students can learn and compare not only from the textbook but also from American guest speakers and other digital media offered worldwide. As these other digital media are not live in the same way as Zoom, unstable internet connections during synchronous interaction may be less of an issue. Students are encouraged to find the right time and place to access those digital media. In terms of email interviews, the students chose to use Gmail as the tool; however, for further research, it would be valuable if students tried using online chat as an interview tool. Further insights into how different communication formats influence students' interaction and perceived learning benefits can be gathered by comparing synchronous online chat with asynchronous email interviews. Further research could combine interviews, reflective journals, or pre- and post-activities to gain a deeper understanding of students' cultural learning experiences. Moreover, it could examine whether their cultural knowledge changes through these activities.

This study confirms that Zoom and email interviews can be used as tools that provide opportunities for university students to learn a target culture from the American guest speakers themselves. Nevertheless, learning a target culture through Zoom and email interviews has a few limitations, such as unstable connections and unexpected long waiting times for the interviewees'

replies. Despite these limitations, learning a target culture through Zoom and email interviews is still recommended because students can gain first-hand experiences and perspectives directly from the Americans. When these digital communication tools are combined with classroom instruction, textbooks, and reflective activities, they can enrich students' cultural learning experiences by connecting classroom knowledge with personal perspectives from another cultural context.

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