Effectiveness of Online Mode of Teaching of English Language Courses in Tertiary Level Educational Sectors in Bangladesh

Sadia Afrin Shorna
Assistant Professor, Department of English
University of Asia Pacific, Dhaka, Bangladesh
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5325-6278

Iffat Jahan Suchona
Lecturer, Department of English
University of Asia Pacific, Dhaka, Bangladesh
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9278-5252

Abstract
The aftermath of COVID-19 has affected the lives of Bangladeshi people and impacted dramatically on the educational systems. Due to the pandemic situation, the Bangladeshi tertiary education sector had to switch to an online learning and teaching model from the traditional ones. This paper aims to identify the obstacles encountered by the university teachers in online teaching during the pandemic in Bangladesh. An exploratory qualitative research methodology has been used in this paper. The study was conducted among the teachers working in several universities of Bangladesh. Open-ended questions and semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted among 13 male and 17 female educators to collect data regarding the problems faced by them. The findings revealed four different categories of impediments that the teachers faced during the online mode of teaching and learning. The study results can be helpful to the regulatory authorities and employers of higher education institutions who are planning to adopt online teaching as a regular activity in the future.
Keywords: COVID-19, Bangladesh, Online Teaching and Learning, Teachers' Perspectives

Introduction

Adapting to the unexpected obstacles posed by the COVID-19 epidemic has taken a heavy toll on individuals worldwide. This pandemic has had a significant impact on global socio-economic and other fundamental issues, including educational issues. Due to the pandemic situation, both teachers and students have experienced the academic shutdown in Bangladesh as of March 2020. The closure of academic institutions brutally impacted most students and other people connected in the educational sector. Many countries have already started implementing an online education system worldwide to close the academic gap, which is still an ongoing process (Rahman, 2020). Online education has become an alternate option for classroom-based learning. Teachers and students now meet each other via Zoom, Google Meet, and Moodle to continue the learning process.

E-learning and online courses have existed in mostly the developed countries around the world. However, it was not common in a developing country like Bangladesh, although the access and use of the internet were reasonably available. Even software like Zoom or Google Meet was not being used for any official or academic purposes.

Generally, people used to utilize these platforms for emailing or social networking. However, the situation changed when the world got hit by the pandemic. Due to the unprecedented circumstances, the teaching and learning mode had gone online and this started with the tertiary level education system. And along with the new education system, a number of novel problems arose. Nonetheless, the educators who had to cope with the new situation all of a sudden could come up with a variety of solutions to solve the issues.

Rationale of the Study

A lot of research studies have been conducted on the impact of COVID-19 on educational systems, teachers, and students. However, how effective the e-learning system is for the English language courses in Bangladesh has not been addressed yet, let alone in the tertiary level. Hence, the researchers have attempted to find out whether the virtual education is good for the English language learners in Bangladesh universities from the teachers' perspectives.

Review of Literature

The research of Raheem & Khan (2020) inspects that during the unprecedented lockdown situation resulting from the COVID-19, e-learning system may be a customized and powerful instrument to support and enhance the students' English language skills. Regarding the proper implementation of online education amidst the unexpected closure, a case study by Basilaia & Kvavadze (2020) in Georgia revealed that the use of "Google Meet" among the learners to carry out virtual education proved quite effective.

However, distance learning has both benefits and limitations. Notably, in a developing country like Bangladesh, online education has not been easy to implement and endure. Many people in Bangladesh still do not have internet access at home. They may have mobile phones, but they do not have a high-speed internet connection to do necessary works. This lack of internet access interrupts the smooth flow of learning and teaching. Many Bangladeshi teachers face problems like accessing the internet during class time, for which they cannot conduct their teaching effortlessly. At the tertiary level of

education, this problem is becoming more severe day by day. Besides, lack of internet facilities, the teachers also encounter other barriers to online teaching. Hence, the primary goal of this study is to see how the tertiary level teachers help their students close the educational gap despite facing the challenges linked to e-learning. A study conducted on the Bangladeshi students reveals that a lack of attentiveness, involvement, and less possibility of classroom tasks through online platforms creates a lot of unwanted problems for the teachers to conduct the classes, especially the language courses (Al-Amin et al., 2021). Another study revealed that the majority of the teachers were engaged in the their e-learning process to bridge the study gaps between the learners and them but it was mostly the terrible internet speed and connection that used to get in the way (Parvej et al., 2021).

Starting from the moment the Bangladeshi government switched the education system to the online mode; many people doubted its suitability. Even many research studies have been conducted on this. Since, the COVID-19 affected the world globally, teaching and learning became online almost everywhere. This also became the subject matter of research for many authors. However, recently, several researchers have conducted their studies by addressing the problems faced by the students; ignoring the barriers ignored by the teachers. Only some researchers have studied about the troubles encountered by the teachers in online mode of teaching and learning. For instance, Gratz and Looney (2020) found that some teachers were unwilling to teach online because they lacked proper teaching skills, and some of their subjects did not suit the online mode at all. Likewise, Arora and Srinivasan (2020) stated that network issues, a lack of training, a lack of awareness, a lack of interest, less attendance, a lack of personal touch and a lack of interaction as major challenges faced by teachers in the online teaching–learning process. Moreover, Kaup et al. (2020) found that obstacles regarding technology, student engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic created a lot more problems for the teachers to maintain focus during the online classes. Many teachers were not even having usable laptops, internet connections and other devices to

make the most of the online teaching. In another study, Verma et al. (2020) pointed out that many educational institutions did not arrange for training sessions for the teachers so that they could easily and efficiently work from home.

Broadly identified challenges with e-learning are accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, life-long learning and educational policy (Murgatrotd, 2020). Many countries have substantial issues with a reliable Internet connection and access to digital devices. While, in many developing countries, the economically backward children are unable to afford online learning devices, the online education poses a risk of exposure to increased screen time for the learner. Therefore, it has become essential for students to engage in offline activities and self-exploratory learning. Lack of parental guidance, especially for young learners, is another challenge, as both parents are working. There are practical issues around physical workspaces conducive to different ways of learning.

Research Questions

Therefore, considering what has been discussed above, the researchers have formed the following questions,

- Is online teaching of English language courses as effective as the face-to-face mode of teaching?
- In online learning platform, what are the tools the teachers find effective to use for teaching English language courses?
- What are the drawbacks and strengths of e-learning mode of language teaching?

Methodology

The researchers have used an exploratory qualitative research methodology.

Sampling

The study was conducted among the teachers working in the Bangladeshi universities. To get diversity from the viewpoint of teachers, we approached around 42 teachers through email and phone from different universities. The interested participants were asked to give their written consent and submit the statement carrying ethics approval for participation in the study (Creswell, 2013). Finally, 30 teachers showed interest and agreed to participate in the studies who are engaged in online teaching and assessment during COVID-19. The study population has 13 males and 17 females with the age group 26–55 years. Utmost care was taken while selecting the participants as they had to justify the objective of the study.

Data Collection

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted and open-ended questions were administered to collect data from the teachers to gather information about the barriers faced in online teaching and assessment. The open-ended questions did not any predetermined limit or boundary. These questions were used as a pilot study with 10 teachers for its reliability and validity. Then, the modifications were incorporated as per the given suggestions. Owing to the lockdown condition, in-person interviews were not conducted, alternatively the participants were interviewed through the phone. All the interviews were recorded in the form of audio clips.

Findings and Discussions

To find out the effectiveness of the online mode of teaching of English Language courses at the tertiary level the researchers interviewed 30 teachers from different Universities from both public and private. Among them 13 are male and 17 are female. Most of the teachers' age ranges from 25-35, 4 of the teachers' age ranges from 36 to 46. All of them have completed their M.A in English Language and Literature and they also have teaching experience of more than 5 years. There are other teachers who have experience of more than 10 years.

Researchers asked them several questions during the interview. The researchers were trying to investigate the effectiveness of online classes. Researchers asked the respondent whether teachers prefer online classes or face to face classes for language courses. 10 of them responded that online class is better as "students can later access the recorded lecture" and because of "Covid situation online class is more feasible". Other teachers are more likely to favour face to face classes, as they can be "recorded'', "interactive" and create

opportunities for "classroom observation". They believe that the face to face class creates a "positive environment" and as teachers, they can "perceive the reaction of students" also, in real classroom students "pay more attention". Interestingly, some teachers prefer to use "both" options for classroom teaching as it "complement" each other. They opined, by combining these two modes of teaching, "learning will be more facilitated".

As it is a pandemic situation in Bangladesh, unlike many parts of the world it switched to online mode. In tertiary education, public and private universities are using online mode. Researchers asked the respondents which tools they are using for online classes. Majority of them are using "G-suite", "Google meet" and "Zoom" applications. Others said they use "WhatsApp" "messenger" for instant messaging to the entire class.

Teachers were asked what the benefits of teaching language courses were. They said, in the online mode they have the facility to share "materials easily and promptly". In this platform, students can be more familiar with "technology" and can "join the class from any place". Moreover, it "saves time" which we lose during the "traffic jam or to move to one place from another place".

To explain the drawbacks of online teaching most of the teachers said that due to "lack of student interaction", "ensuring student participation is a challenge". They added, "tracking individual student's progress" is also difficult in online learning. Sometimes during class time, students get "distracted by multitasking using social media" and are less motivated to listen to the class discussion. Moreover, "internet connectivity is a problem" for both students and teachers. Also the power outage is an issue. Some respondents pointed out that, in the online platform, all the students "do not enjoy equal facilities" and teachers often "do not understand whether the lesson is understood" by all.

Teachers were asked whether teaching productive skills are possible in online mode. They opined, in most cases, it is possible if the lesson plan is built considering online mode. For speaking, they said, they "use video, audio, listen to the speaking of the students" and can give feedback. For writing, "they assign writing topics' ' as assignments, projects,

reports and after students submit they can check it and can add feedback. They also added, in "Google classroom", they can upload the materials" beforehand in a systematic manner, so there is no fear of losing the content even after the semester ends. The problem uttered by most of the respondents is the classroom is overcrowded with students". It becomes difficult for teachers to listen or read "each assignment by every student" and give extensive feedback.

Regarding teaching receptive skills, teachers opined that it is possible to teach listening skills online and it is "easier than the other skills" as online they can use their own device to access the module. However, the network is an issue sometimes and in some cases, students feel "bored, less motivated" while listening to the recording and responding. Whereas for reading it is explained a bit difficult as it is an "autonomous activity" and "needs supervision".

Teachers were asked which mode of teaching is more effective, between Face to face classes and online classes. The majority of the teachers opined they prefer face to face classes as it ensures more "interaction", more "engagement". One respondent did not find it effective at all, s/he said, "A lot of students sleep or do other work after joining the online class". One teacher says,

"In public/private universities online classes have been introduced as a temporary and supplementary medium. So, students mainly are waiting for offline classes. They have not accepted online as an alternative."

The majority of the teachers said they get "sufficient institutional support" from their institution. The university holds a "workshop, set up the platform, gives training" for the teachers and students. A few teachers expressed that they have a lack of training and one teacher said even if there was training, s/he had" difficulty coping up" with the new system.

Teachers were asked about student interaction in both online classes and face to face classes. A majority of teachers said, online it seems that they are "teaching a computer, not human beings as the interaction is least". But in the face to face class, students tend to speak out their queries, problems even after the class they meet teachers to solve their problems. Some teachers said students are trying

to cope up as it has been quite some time of doing online classes and students are coping up".

Teachers were asked if online exams were as easy to monitor as face to face exams. Almost every participant responded negatively showing various reasons. They said it was very difficult to "prevent cheating" if it is a time-bound theory exam/ language course exam. Students copy and paste answers and even if the teachers understand it they can not penalize them for not catching red-handed. Also, the monitor screen of Google meet or zoom does not show every student at a time. It becomes a big problem when the class size is 50 and above. Also, students sometimes use 2 devices which are also difficult to track for an examiner. One respondent has said "motivating teachers and students that e-learning is not just a proxy; it can really be an alternative teaching and learning medium."

Limitation

While reaching out to the teachers, the researchers could not approach all the tertiary-level institutions in Bangladesh, which is one of the fundamental limitations of this study. Therefore, the scenario presented in this research reflects mainly the urban background based on Dhaka, Sylhet, and Chittagong. Moreover, there have been some similarities between the responses as some participants were from the same institutions. However, if the researchers could incorporate only one or two representatives from a particular institution, the findings could be more diverse.

Conclusion

Our study examined the effectiveness of the online mode of teaching language courses in the private and public universities in Bangladesh during this pandemic. The study revealed that some teachers face a few challenges in online language courses, but they have adopted different ways to compensate. However, most teachers supported the online system for teaching the language courses given the stable internet connection and proper knowledge of using the tools and their functions. Moreover, the problem of power cuts must be resolved all over the country to carry out the continuous flow of teaching online. Additionally, to maximize the teacher-student interaction, teachers can devise some practical strategies of motivation. For example, rewarding a student in the form of bonus marks in assessment can be helpful in this regard. However, all the teachers hold a negative attitude towards online examinations compared to face-to-face tests. Still, in continuous assessment, the teachers prefer Zoom, Google meet or Flexiquiz without hesitation. Teachers do support the onsite learning, but since by this time, most of the teachers and the students have been used to utilizing this online platform, they now prefer a system of blended learning where these two modes fit together.

References

Al-Amin, Md., et al. "Status of Tertiary Level Online Class in Bangladesh: Students' Response on Preparedness, Participation and Classroom Activities." *Heliyon*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2021.

Arora, Amit Kumar, and R. Srinivasan. "Impact of Pandemic COVID-19 on the Teaching–Learning Process: A Study of Higher Education Teachers." *Prabandhan: Indian Journal of Management*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2020, pp. 43-56.

Basilaia, Giorgi, and David Kvavadze. "Transition to Online Education in Schools during SARS-VOV-2 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic in Georgia." *Pedagogical Research*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2020. 2-10.

Gratz, Erin, and Lisa Looney. "Faculty Resistance to Change: An Examination of Motivators and Barriers to Teaching Online in Higher Education." *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design,* vol. 10, no. 1, 2020.

Hossain, Md. Mozaffor. "English Language Teaching through Virtual Classroom during COVID-19 Lockdown in Bangladesh: Challenges and Propositions." *Journal of English Education and Teaching*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2021.

Mishra, Lokanath, et al. "Online Teaching-learning in Higher Education during Lockdown Period of COVID-19 Pandemic." *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, vol. 1, 2020.

Raheem, Bareq Raad, and Amirullah Khan. "The Role of E-Learning in COVID-19 Crisis."

International Journal on Creative Research thoughts, vol. 8, no. 3, 2020.

Seage, Steven J., and Mehmet Türegün. "The Effects of Blended Learning on STEM Achievement of Elementary School Students." *International Journal of Research in Education and Science*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2020, pp. 133-140.

Tabassum, Mimma, et al. "Online Education during COVID-19 in Bangladesh: University Teachers' Perspective." *Aquademia*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2021.

Verma, Geeta, et al. "Science Teacher Education in the Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2020, pp. 483-490.

Weinhandl, Robert, et al. "Enhancing Flipped Mathematics Education by Utilising Geogebra." *International Journal of Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2020.

Author Details

Sadia Afrin Shorna, *Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Asia Pacific, Dhaka, Bangladesh,* **Email ID**: *sadia@uap-bd.edu.*

Iffat Jahan Suchona, *Lecturer, Department of English, University of Asia Pacific, Dhaka, Bangladesh,* **Email ID**: *suchona@uap-bd.edu.*