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Learners' Engagement in the Online Classes at the University Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The growing pandemic situation has led the world's education to the online platform where students' engagement has been the prime concern of educators, teachers, and researchers. This study aims to report the level of engagement in the online classes in addition to the feeling of the teachers and students towards it. Only a few studies on students' engagement in the university-level online classes in Bangladesh have yet been conducted. To find the in-depth perfective result, this study has used a quantitative method where one hundred and thirty-eight participants including teachers and students took part in questionnaire surveys. The questionnaires were designed to study three types of engagements like participatory, performance, and skill engagements in virtual education at the level of higher study in Bangladesh. Through a quantitative analysis, our findings show that, though the students get themselves involved in online platforms, their level of engagement varies in terms of these three types of engagements. Data also revealed that the teacher-student interaction level in the online classes is not satisfactory though it lessens the students' anxiety level. The purpose of this study was to see the learners' engagement and their attitudes towards online classes. The only limitation is that it is only a small and quantitative study whereas a qualitative study may help to get into more depth the result of it.

Keywords: Pandemic, Online, Engagement, Perspective, Participatory.

Introduction

COVID-19 has placed several challenges in all sectors, especially in the field of education. After the lockdown had been announced throughout the world, researchers started thinking immediately about how to keep the continuation of the education process ensuring quality and effective learners' participation. Thus the popularity of online platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, etc. for E-learning started growing fast, though it is not new in the modern world. To keep pace with the other countries, private universities in Bangladesh, later public universities too, adopted the idea of taking classes online which is being continued even today. In the beginning days, both students and teachers find it much more difficult to conduct the class online as they never experienced it earlier but gradually it has been flexible and practical. Even E-teaching has created new opportunities to expand the learning environment for diverse student populations (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010). With that, new questions have been faced by teachers related to the students' engagement in these online platforms.

Due to the socio-economic condition, most of the universities in Bangladesh have large classrooms consisting of 80-110 students per class (Tarannum, 2010). In public universities, this number is higher than that, where students sit close to each other. So the educators find the idea of online classes more effective than the face to face classes, as maintaining social distance is almost impossible here. In this situation, easy internet access has opened new hope for the students of higher education who are expecting to pursue their degrees in time as season jam can be great damage to their academic life. However, online and distance learning programs sometimes fall short when it comes to outlining the scope of courses or the expectations placed on online students in concrete terms (Kandiko & Mawer, 2013; Parkinson & Forrester, 2004). There might be several reasons behind this. Firstly, in Bangladesh, the idea of online classes is new to both teachers and students. Secondly, online classes have begun without pre-training suddenly. Moreover, technological issues like lack of smartphones and good internet connection are the big issues here in the ways of ensuring learners' engagement in the online classes.

Mobility of learning in online classes is based on learner autonomy and interactive learning actions (Liaw, Huang, & Cheng, 2007). It has been often reported by the teachers that students fail to respond when they call their names and this is difficult for them to carry out interactive activities with the students as they are not responding.

Teachers-students interaction leads to students' satisfaction. (Zhang, Gao, Ring, and Zhang, 2007) believed that teaching is much more responsive to facilitate online discussion which makes students more comfortable with their discussion and thus the teachers can hold the role of a mentor.

This study aims to open a new window of thinking about the learners' engagement afresh. Engagement techniques might be the possible solution to making online learning products for university students so that they can be successful to obtain their academic degrees with quality education in the online classes. Moreover, if students' engagement can be ensured, distance-learning or e-learning might bring a great change in the percentage of education in the

upcoming era as students living in different areas of Bangladesh will have easy access to education in their comfortable position. For this, it is important to understand the level of students' engagement and their attitudes towards online classes first.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out the answers to these two research questions.

1. What is the level of learners' engagement in online classes?
2. What is the learners' and teachers' attitude toward online classes?

Literature Review

The Impact of Technology on Education during Pandemic

Due to minimize the impact of pandemics on education, a large-scale online education activity was introduced worldwide in the field of teaching and learning.

Because of the technological advancement in the modern era, the current education systems have already been influenced by the evolution of technology. The influence on education has reflected positively mitigating the loss in education by adopting technologies in education systems (Chick et al., 2020).

In this coronavirus outbreak, technology helps the education systems to find a new way and it leads the way to a new approach to education (Kumar et al., 2020). An investigation on the effect of modern technology on education during coronavirus outbreaks was found in a research done by Al-Marroof et al. (2020). This research following a convenience sampling approach collected the data of 450 participants (180 males and 270 females) who were students of the British University in Dubai, UAE. The result shows online education lessens the fear of loss in the field of education.

But, online education is not just a crisis response plan', rather it is considered an exploration of a new method of teaching with the power of reformation (Wang, et al., 2020). It emphasizes the formation of autonomous learning activities (Zhou et al., 2020).

According to the research done by Ni (2013), online education breaks the limitations of time and space and broadens the ratio of the class digitally worldwide. Therefore, teachers and students from

a far distance can be closed virtually through online classes. That is why it can be called an open education. These flexibilities of the online platform make a learner-oriented environment as the teachers shares videos, audio, text materials, photos and other visuals, the learners can identify which one suits them. (Alhamid, 2020)

Students' Engagement in Online Classes

The online education system is based on a formation transforming traditional teacher-oriented teaching to autonomous learning (Zheng, 2020). Similarly, Leo (2019) argues that by using cutting-edge internet technology a teacher can make an interactive classroom. It makes a collaborative environment as the students autonomously engaged in the study with their teachers from their homes. Thus, it teaches the learner to be a self-managed person and this self-management help to grow autonomous class engagement (Yu, 2020).

Knowing about the level of the learner's engagement is very useful when a teacher wants to design the class or wants to evaluate an individual learner's performance. However, this process of identifying the actual level of learners' engagement is hard work. Traditionally learners' engagement is being measured by observing the overt behaviors of the learners, which are varied due to the learners' cultural backgrounds (Chism, 2020).

Importantly, many papers have already been done on the same topic identifying the level of learners' engagement and focusing on different measures to get the level of learners' engagement. For example, Skinner, Wellborn, and Connell (1990) focused on grades to identify the level of learners' engagement. Secondly, Guthrie and Alvermann (1999) focused on some specific tasks (reading, writing, and so on). Thirdly, Skinner and Belmont (1993) tried to make the connection between learners' engagement and motivation.

However, a large-scale research, NSSE (2000), was done at Indiana University to identify the 'macro level' of learners' engagement and the result shows only the students overall perceptions.

We need to know the 'micro level' of the learners' engagement too (Handelsman et al., 2005) to design an active class during this pandemic. Handelsman

et al (2005) developed a multidimensional measure (participation, performance and skill engagements) to identify the level of learners' engagement. That paper also showed the reliability and validity of the data collected from 266 undergraduate students studying at the University of Colorado at Denver.

Particularly, in this study Handelsman et al (2005)'s 'multidimensional measure' has been used as a useful tool to identify the level of the learners' engagement in the online classes at the level of higher education in Bangladesh.

Methodology

Participants

This study was done with the students along with faculty members from seven different public and private universities in Bangladesh. One hundred and thirty-eight participants participated to give their responses to the questionnaire. Out of the total participants, one hundred and seventeen attendees are the students and the rest twenty-one are the faculty members. Participants were selected randomly based on convenience and purposeful sampling. The data collection process was done online. The reason behind this is that all the educational institutions were under lockdown due to the covid pandemic and they switched to virtual education. As the universities started virtual education, it was easier to make contact with the participants online. Because of the online data collection process, participants from different regional institutions got involved in this study. Thus, this selection of participants provided a fairly representation of data collection.

Instrument

This is a quantitative survey research. For the purpose of studying the level of learners' engagement in online classes and the learners' and teachers' attitudes towards the online classes a questionnaire was developed. A five point Likart scale was used ranging from always to never and from strongly agree to strongly disagree given after each statement. The responses were rated as always/strongly agree =1, very often/agree=2, sometimes/neutral=3, rarely/ disagree=4, and never/strongly disagree=5. I have developed an instrument technique from Oraif and Elyas' (2021) instrument, which will investigate EFL Learners' Engagement in Online

Courses in Saudi Arabia. This survey did not blindly follow Oraif and Elyas’ (2021) instrument rather a modified questionnaire was used to make it more appropriate. This questionnaire has closed-ended along with some open-ended items in two parts: one for the learners having 4 sections and another is for the teachers having 3 sections.

For the learners:

- A) SECTION A: Instruction
- B) SECTION B: Personal Information
- C) SECTION C: Learners’ Engagement
 - Sub-section 1: Participatory engagement
 - Sub-section 2: Performance Engagement
 - Sub-section 3: Skill Engagement
- D) SECTION D: Learners’ Perceptions
 - Sub-section 1: Attitudes
 - Sub-section 2: Learners’ Preference

For the teachers:

- A) SECTION A: Instruction
- B) SECTION B: Personal Information
- C) SECTION C: Teachers’ perceptions
 - Sub-section 1: Attitudes
 - Sub-section 2: Teachers’ preference

The questionnaire itself is provided in the appendix section.

Result

This section analyzes the collected data for giving the answers to the questions of this study (A. what is the level of learners’ engagement in the online classes? and B. what is the learners’ and teachers’ attitude towards online classes?) To answer the first question this study analyzes the level of the three types of engagements like participatory, performance and skill engagements in the online classes at the level of higher study in Bangladesh. Moreover, for the second one, the descriptive statistics shows learners’ and teachers’ attitudes toward online classes in the Bangladeshi context.

Participatory Engagement

Table (1) measures the values of the items from 5 to 7 which are included in the section of ‘Participation / Interaction Engagement’ in the questionnaire. In comparison to tables no 2 and 3, this analysis shows that participation/interaction engagement stands in the third position scoring the mean: 2.2450 and std. deviation: 0.97707. Item (7) from the table (1)

illustrates that the majority of the students maintain their attendance rate of 60 to 90 percent. In addition, Item (5) having the mean: 2.1624 stating “Very Often” tells that the learners studying in virtual classes at the level of higher studies in Bangladesh ask questions to their teachers very often while they do not understand a topic properly.

Table 1 Participation/Interaction Engagement (Descriptive Statistics)

Items	No. of Participants	Mean	SD
5. I ask question to my teachers when I don't understand the lesson during online classes	117	2.1624	.99097
6. I can engage myself eagerly to online class activities	117	2.0171	1.01695
7. Mark the probable level of your attendance	117	2.5556	.92330
Participation / Interaction engagement		2.2450	0.97707

Performance Engagement

Table (2) focuses on the grades and online activities of the students during the online classes. Interestingly this analysis shows a very positive stand of the learners’ performance engagement in the online classes stating “Very Often” with the mean: 2.0342 and std. deviation: 0.97962. The very mean: 1.9744 stating “Always” for the item (9) says that maximum number of the students always complete the online activities during classes. Moreover, performance engagement stands in the second position in comparison to the rest of the two types of engagements during online classes.

Table 2 Performance Engagement (Descriptive Statistics)

	No. of participants	Mean	SD
8. I make a good grade in online class test	117	2.0940	.94671

9. I eagerly complete the online activities during the classes	117	1.9744	1.01252
Performance engagement		2.0342	0.97962

Skill Engagement

The mean (1.6895) with an std. deviation (0.94648) of 'Skill Engagement' indicates a very positive view of it as it appears to be stood in the first

place marked as 'Always' in the instrument. Item (11) acquiring the highest percentage rate (69.2%) expresses that majority of the students always complete the homework given in the online classes. But, item (10)- 'I take notes in online classes' shows a little bit contradictory result as less than half of the students do not always take notes during online classes through note-taking is one of the important learning skills. However, a good number of the students (58%) argue that they always listen carefully to the class lectures during online classes (Item-12 hitting 58.1% in the option of "Always")

Table 3 Means & Percentages of Skill Engagement

	Always	Very Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	SD
	%	%	%	%	%		
10. I take notes in online classes.	47	22.2	21.4	5.1	4.3	1.9744	1.13306
11. I finish all the homework given in online classes.	69.2	17.9	10.3	0.9	1.7	1.4786	.84688
12. I listen carefully in online classes.	58.1	27.4	9.4	5.1	00	1.6154	.85949
Skill engagement						1.6895	0.94648

Learners' Perceptions

Table (4) measures the attitudes of the students at the university level in Bangladesh toward online classes. The results show that students like to choose a neutral state to express their feeling. The statistical mean (1.95) of item (14) "I feel there is a lack of interaction during online classes" expresses that the majority of students agree with the fact that there is a shortcoming in the field of interaction in online classes. At the same time, the data results show students have agreed that they feel less anxious in online classes. In addition, the mean of 2.5556 of item 13 illustrates that students find that the online classes are more convenient than the classroom method.

Table 4 Learners' Perceptions (Descriptive Statistics)

	No. of participants	Mean	SD
13. Online classes are more convenient than classroom method.	117	2.5556	1.20662

14. I feel there is a lack of interaction during online classes.	117	1.9573	1.00338
15. Lack of computer skills makes it difficult for me to participate in the online classes.	117	2.6068	1.21028
16. I feel less anxious in online classes.	117	2.3761	1.09644

Learners' Preference

Chart no (5) evaluates the learners' thoughts on some online class activities they found more effective. Interestingly, 72.6% percent of the students have found that a 'Question-answer session' is the most effective online class activity, which boasts the interactions. Though the students find quizzes, showing videos, and power point presentations more effective activities, assignments seem less effective in online classes in comparison to other activities.

Teachers' Perceptions

The descriptive analysis in table no (6) 'Teachers' Perceptions' describing the online class system shows some interesting results. The mean (3.2857) of item no. 4 states that the majority of teachers show their neutral position to state that online classes are more convenient than the classroom method. However, the teachers 'strongly agree' that a lack of teacher-student interaction is seen in

the online classes and the mean (1.8) of the item (5) validates it. A comparison between the item-7 and 8 tells that the teachers 'always' (the mean-1.4 of item no.8) ask questions to the students but they very often get some questions from the opposite, yet not frequently. Undoubtedly, the online class system is a new challenge and with it, the results show that the majority of teachers have agreed that they have improved their skills through online classes.

Table 6 Teachers' Perceptions (Descriptive Statistics)

	Participants	Mean	SD
4. Online classes are more convenient than classroom method for me.	21	3.2857	.90238
5. I think there is a lack of teacher- student interaction in online classes.	21	1.8095	1.07792
6. Lack of computer skills makes it difficult for me to use the online teaching method effectively	21	4.0476	1.07127
7. I feel that my skills as a teacher have improved through online teaching.	21	1.8571	.65465
8. I get questions from the students during online classes.	21	2.4286	.87014
9. I ask questions to my students in online classes.	21	1.4762	.74960
10. My students eagerly participate in the online class activities.	21	2.2857	.71714
Valid N (list-wise)	21		

Chart 5 Learners' Preference

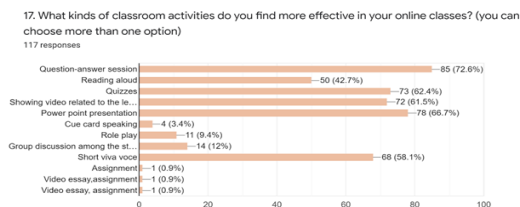
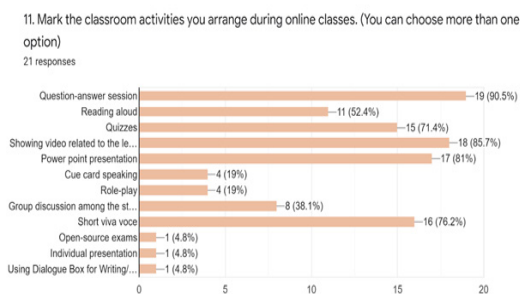


Chart 7 Teachers' Preference



Discussion of Results

The data analyses we get from the tables show that the students get engaged themselves in online classes but their level of engagement varies in terms of three types of engagements such as participatory,

performance, and skill engagements. The results show that though the students get engaged through participatory and performance engagements, they maintain the skill engagement most and it stands at the first level in comparison to two other types of engagements. Thus, these findings give a clear answer to the first research question of this paper.

Some controversial but interesting results are found in the data analysis under the level of learners' engagement. We find that skill engagement stands at the first level and the majority of students complete their homework but they do not take class notes always though it is a very important skill for them. Similarly, in performance engagement, the student eagerly completes online activities but they do not always get good grades. Lastly in participatory engagement, though attendance is not that much satisfactory, students get engaged eagerly and ask questions when they don't understand.

The teachers' and learners' perceptions analysis provide some interestingly cohesive results. Both the teachers and learners think that there is a lack of interaction in online classes. However, the students feel less anxious in comparison to classroom mode. Both of their attitudes mark out a positive tone to

say that online classes are more convenient than the classroom mode system. In the question of preferable class activities, interestingly both teachers and learners prefer question-answer sessions most along with short viva, quizzes, and power-point presentations. Thus, these findings clearly answer the second research question of this paper.

Limitation

Undeniably, there are some external and internal factors that have some direct and indirect influences on learners to make them self-directed in an online learning environment (Hammarlund et al., 2015). Factors like goals, guidelines, syllabus, curriculum design, pedagogical design, class system, class size, testing system and so on. As this study has been done to find out the level of the learners' engagement in online classes it does not focus on the different types of influences on learners' engagement in online classes. So, there is a need to do further research on the effects of external and internal factors on learners' engagement.

Furthermore, open or semi-structured interviews along with questionnaires to evaluate attitudes make a survey design more appropriate (Wenden, 1991). As it is a very small-scale research, those instruments could not be used. Therefore, further research should be done with more elaborate instruments.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It has already been discussed that this study has done on learners' engagement in online classes and learner's as well as teachers' attitudes towards online classes. In the discussion of results segment this study sets three types of learner engagements to find out the level of their engagement. These are participatory, performance and skill development engagements. Majority students agreed that online classes are more convenient though attendance rate of the learners is not satisfactory. Both the teachers and learners will be benefitted by the findings of this study as this study will help them to become more engaged in online classes.

Furthermore, this study also shows the learners' and teachers' attitudes towards online classes. It has already shown that most of the students prefer question-answer session and short viva much. But,

majority of students and teachers agreed on a same point that there is a lack of interaction in online classes. Therefore, this study will help the teachers to understand the learner given preferences about online class activities for increasing teacher-student interaction.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for the Learners:

Section A: Instruction	
<p>Dear participants :</p> <p>We are carrying out a research on 'learners' engagement in the online classes at the university level in Bangladesh'. This study can be beneficial for teachers as well as students as it will help them to understand both the level of the learners' engagement and the perceptions of learners and teachers towards online classes. Thank you for giving us your valuable time to fill in this questionnaire. Your answer will be entirely anonymous. If you have any questions about this questionnaire, you can ask us or send us at mizanur.eng@uits.edu.com / firoz.akanda@uits.edu.bd</p> <p>Regards, Mizanur Rahman Babu, Lecturer at UITS Firoz Akanda, Lecturer at UITS</p>	

Section B: Personal Information			
1.	Write the name of your university (write here)	
2.	Write your current semester (write here)	
3.	How many semesters have you finished through the online class system? (write here)	
4.	Choose your gender	Male	Female
		Prefer not to say	

Section C: Learners' Engagement						
(1) Participatory Engagement						
SL	Items	Always	Very often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
5.	I ask question to my teachers when I don't understand the lesson during online classes.					
6	I can engage myself eagerly to online class activities.					
7	Mark the probable level of your attendance.	Below 10%	10%- 30%	30%-60%	60%- 90%	More than 90%
(2) Performance Engagement		Always	Very often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
8	I make a good grade in online class test.					
9	I eagerly complete the online activities during the classes.					
(3) Skill Engagement						
10	I take notes in online classes.					
11	I finish all the homework given in online classes.					
12	I listen carefully in online classes.					

Section D: Learners' Perceptions						
(1) Attitudes						
13	Online classes are more convenient than classroom method for me.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14	I feel there is a lack of interaction during online classes.					
15	Lack of computer skills makes it difficult for me to participate in the online classes.					
16	I feel less anxious in online classes.					
(2) Learners' Preference		Put tick (√)mark/s				
9	I ask questions to my students in online classes.					
17	What kinds of classroom activities do you find more effective in your online classes? (you can choose more than one option)	Question-answer session				
		Reading aloud				
		Quizzes				
		Showing video related to the lesson				
		Power point presentation				
		Cue card speaking				
		Role play				
		Group discussion among the students				
		Short viva voce				
		Other:(write here)				

Questionnaire for the teachers:

Section A: Instruction	
<p>Dear participants:</p> <p>We are carrying out a research on 'learners' engagement in the online classes at the university level in Bangladesh'. This study can be beneficial for teachers as well as students as it will help them to understand both the level of the learners' engagement and the perceptions of learners and teachers towards online classes. Thank you for giving us your valuable time to fill in this questionnaire. Your answer will be entirely anonymous. If you have any questions about this questionnaire, you can ask us or send us at mizanur.eng@uits.edu.com/firoz.akanda@uits.edu.bd</p> <p>Regards, Mizanur Rahman Babu, Lecturer at UITS Firoz Akanda, Lecturer at UITS</p>	

Section B: Personal Information		
1.	1. Name of your affiliation (organization name) (write here)
2.	2. Write your designation (write here)
3.	3. Mention the number of the semesters you have finished up through online class system.(use number only) (write here)

Section C: Teachers' perceptions						
(1) Attitudes						
4	Online classes are more convenient than classroom method for me.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	I think there is a lack of teacher- student interaction in online classes.					
6	Lack of computer skills makes it difficult for me to use the online teaching method effectively					
7	I feel that my skills as a teacher have improved through online teaching.					
8	I get questions from the students during online classes.					
9	I ask questions to my students in online classes.					
10	My students eagerly participate in the online class activities.					
2) Teachers' preference		Put tick (✓)mark/s				
11	What kinds of classroom activities do you find more effective in your online classes? (you can choose more than one option)	Question-answer session				
		Reading aloud				
		Quizzes				
		Showing video related to the lesson				
		Power point presentation				
		Cue card speaking				
		Role play				
		Group discussion among the students				
		Short viva voce				
		Other:(write here)				

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