

**ELT in Covid-19-Augmented-Technological-Educational
Ambience at the Private Universities in Bangladesh**

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This study aims to examine obstacles the students encountered and the modifications they recommended in English language teaching and learning at private universities in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. The mixed method approach comprised of both qualitative and quantitative research methods is applied in this study. The findings of the study show that all participants go through virtual English language learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. And the majority of them mention the difficulties of adopting a new approach in ELT suddenly including unstable network connections, costly internet data packages, unskilled teachers, load shedding, mental stress, teacher-students' lack of technological skills, not having technological devices and sense of remoteness as the prevailing disadvantages during COVID-19. This study also recommends that university authorities should train students and teachers concerning technological devices. In addition, it also suggests that uninterrupted internet network and power supply, high-speed internet, and fair virtual assessment should be ensured. The prevalent result of the study is that online English language teaching and learning at private universities in Bangladesh require considerable pedagogical and technological modifications.

INTRODUCTION

As the World Health Organization (WHO) declares the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic after diagnosing Coronavirus infection in different countries of the world, the government of Bangladesh announces an emergency shutdown of all educational institutions from March 17 to March 31, 2020, to avoid the outbreak of the virus (Haque & Hossain, 2022; TBS Report, 2020). Since the COVID-19 pandemic brings an unanticipated change to the life of the people and affects every sector of the world, quarantine creates the necessity of emergency virtual e-learning at the universities of Bangladesh like almost all countries of the world. Consequently, on 7 May, the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC) officially allow private universities to conduct online classes and assess the university students online to continue teaching and learning smoothly (Abdullah, 2020). Some studies assert that online learning is one of the solutions to continue university teaching during the pandemic period because virtual learning can help teachers and students in teaching and learn English (Anggita, et al. 2020; Azwandi, et al. 2019; Syahrial & Syafryadin, 2020; Syafryadin, et al. 2020; Septinawati, et al. 2020). Thus, the educational system experiences a sudden shift from the traditional offline classroom to the virtual one. Truly, this sudden transmission affects teachers' and learners' performance (Trust & Whalen, 2020) as well as resource limitations and organizational discrimination (Aguilera & Nightengale-Lee, 2020).

The existing literatures reveal that the success of online English Language Teaching at private universities depends on some factors- smooth and inexpensive internet connection, technologically skilled teachers and students, appropriate teaching method and the attitude and satisfaction of the students (Sultana & Khan, 2020; Haque & Hossain, 2022; Islam, 2021).

A study confirms 'that although the teachers are changing their perception of their negative views about online classes, their teaching is being troubled by many external factors too. Nonetheless, there are still several aspects of online classes that need to be addressed and students' feedback can be a crucial factor

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(Rony & Awal, 2019). Dhawan (2020) also shows that students face problems understanding the exact issues discussed in the online classroom 'because most online classes are conducted based on one-way interaction (teacher to student)'. Another study (Mondol & Mohiuddin, 2020) suggests 'that personal attentiveness can be an approach to create an active learning environment and that 'there are several external factors that affect the teaching-learning process in an online classroom, for example, the teaching-learning process gets hampered resulting in the motivation swing and less participation.

This study strives to find what are the pedagogical changes the teachers of private universities situated at the district level in Bangladesh bring to English language teaching classes and assessment of students in online education during pandemic crises like COVID-19.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current literature divulges that the rapid breaking out of the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled universities to conduct classes and assessments virtually though they started online classes and evaluations some months later (Mpungose, 2020). In truth, COVID-19 brought a huge change in education had to adapt the situation. Primarily, "this situation challenged the education system across the world and forced educators to shift to an online mode of teaching overnight. Many academic institutions that were earlier reluctant to change their traditional pedagogical approach had no option but to shift entirely to online teaching-learning," (Dhawan, 2020). Dhawan (2020) also envisages that students encounter difficulties in understanding the topics related to English language learning because most of the online classes are conducted through one-way interaction. The study recommends that individual seriousness can be an approach to creating an effective learning setting. The study of Mondol and Mohiuddin (2020) reveals that

some external factors that affect the teaching-learning process in a virtual classroom, for instance, "teaching-learning process gets hampered resulting in the motivation swing and less participation,". Virtual English language classes are often considered the student passive where the 'spontaneous exchange' of ideas does not happen between the teacher and the students in real time (Shenoy et al., 2020).

In the perspective of Bangladesh, online teaching during COVID-19 comes into existence as an urgent step to the sudden shutdown of universities along with other educational institutions to stop the spread of the disease. The closure of the universities is so abrupt that nobody understands how to teach and evaluate students in the new normal teaching approach virtually. It becomes even more challenging for the teachers and the learners to teach and learn the English language (Paul, 2022). Language teaching and learning at the universities in Bangladesh was already very problematic (Rahman and Pandian, 2018), and transforming from onsite classes and assessments to online classes and assessments made things even more difficult. Truly, online Language Teaching needs several technological supports such as computers, laptops, mobile phones, headphones, software, high-speed internet connection, etc. Teachers and students all around Bangladesh face problems for the lack of these essential technological devices along with interrupted high-speed internet services during the COVID-19 pandemic (Al-Zaman, 2020). Particularly students and teachers from far-off areas of Bangladesh were deprived of these facilities. Even though at the tertiary level of education some measures were taken by the authorities to provide this support, they could not do it because of many limitations (Rahman et al., 2021). Various studies also find that unstable internet connection was a prevalent obstacle to successful online English language teaching and learning processes. (Majed et al., 2020; Al-Zaman, 2020). The huge demand for the internet can be also one of the reasons for the speed down (LightCastle Partners, 2020). In the truest sense of the term, the economic crisis played an important part in students' and teachers' incapacity to afford to buy devices like computers, laptops and mobile

phones which are indispensable for virtual education (Majed et al., 2020). Only about 36.7% of families in Bangladesh have internet access, and only around 5.6 % have computer facilities (Majed et al., 2020; Al-Zaman, 2020). Because of these difficulties, students undergo mental health issues such as anxiety and frustration, specifically among lower-income students because of their inability to afford the required technological facilities (Al-Zaman, 2020). This mental stress provoked students to commit suicide (Lathabhavan and Griffiths, 2020; Mamun et al., 2020). All these problems came together as prevalent challenges in conducting online language classes and assessments.

Again, Raheem & Khan (2020) ensured that during the countrywide global lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, online teaching and learning can be safe and effective in reinforcing students' English language skills among many other potential courses on many facets of knowledge. During the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown, Basilaia & Kvavadze (2020) conduct a case study in Georgia by using Google Meet among the target participants to impart virtual education and the findings reveal that the sudden move to the online mode of education demonstrated fruitful. There exist diverse problems and challenges in the way to familiarize and assimilate technologies for ranging and strengthening education in the contexts of Bangladesh-like countries, while Shohel and Kirkwood (2012) find that often many of interconnected phenomena demand concurrent decisive solutions, i.e. economic solvency, availability of technical support, socio-political stability, attitudinal change, pedagogical adoption, etc. The study of Islam (2016) asserted that Bangladesh, like many other countries is treating the improvement of her education system as one of the major policies to bring an end to poverty and implement development that comprises the augmentation of ICT skills of the citizens and the building of a society enriched with information availability. Allo's (2020) study uncovers that most of the learners learn virtually during the Coronavirus crisis.

According to Farah & Ahmed (2014), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is emerging swiftly and people want to enjoy its

Multidimensional usages. 'One of which is education through online which can be called by many names, like Virtual Learning, Remote Learning, Off-site Learning, Web-Based Learning (WBL), Web-Based Instruction (WBI), Web-Based Training (WBT), Mobile Learning (or m-Learning), Nomadic Learning Internet-Based Training (IBT), Distributed Learning (DL), Advanced Distributed Learning (ADL), Distance Learning, Online Learning (OL) etc' (Hossain, 2021).

Bangladesh has been definitely digitalized and many scholars are underlining the significance of teaching through technological assimilation into Bangladeshi education programs, especially the tertiary level of education curriculum. 'Therefore, the traditional setting in higher education is being relocated to non-fenced virtual classrooms from the four-walled ones by virtue of the technology-based resources that are being increasingly applied to fruitful teaching and learning in the mode of reciprocating tools and devices including whiteboards, multimedia projector, mobile phones, TV channels, social networking websites, MOODLE, Podcast, web quest, website, ebooks, e-journals, e-encyclopedia, e-dictionary and some more virtual resources' (Mahmuda, 2016, as cited in Hossain, 2021). Similarly, Sarker, et al. (2019) mention 'that e-learning has attained considerable acceptance among most of the students who routinely spend time internet and electronic devices regularly in learning through online arrangements, like lecture videos, course information, postings of fellow students in the forum and comments and suggestions of the teachers. Nonetheless, the researchers, Sarker, Mahmud, Islam & Islam, (2019) mention that there are a number of constraints such as insufficiently designed learning materials, weak internet connection and unavailability of equal online as well as technological scopes to all teachers and learners; and to solve these issues and ensure an unquestionable flow of e-learning, coordinated endeavors by all stakeholders, such as students, lecturers, administrators and policymakers are must so that the design and implementation of online education conform to the need, desire and expectations of every individual in it' (Sarker, Mahmud, Islam & Islam, 2019, as cited in Hossian, 2021). To make educational services and

activities more fruitful, academic institutions in Bangladesh are categorizing web-based tools in growing amounts when many universities have developed academic gateways where teachers upload the virtual lectures and instructions, and students can join the portal to learn from all over the place (Chowdhury, 2020).

As in the pandemic period, the universities of Bangladesh like the universities all over the world have no option without transforming traditional onsite classes and assessments into virtual classes and evaluations, online classes and assessments are in function. The existing literature copes with the problems and prospects of English language teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic period at public and private universities, colleges and schools as a whole. Though some studies are found specifically on ELT or virtual education of public universities of Bangladesh, very few researches focus on English language teaching at private universities of Bangladesh but they aren't concerned with the challenges the students of private universities face in the COVID-19-like pandemic period. Therefore, this study aims to demystify the existing challenges in technology-based English language teaching students of the private universities situated in the district level in Bangladesh encounter in and explore the recommendations they suggest, on the basis of their individual as well as shared experiences in this respect.

METHOD

This study, to explore the problems the students encounter and the suggestions the participants recommend to execute virtual English language teaching and learning during the COVID-19 period at private universities in Bangladesh, applied a mixed-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies on account of revealing more comprehensive findings on the research problems (O'Cathain, Murphy & Nicholl, 2007). 10 open-ended questions were set in the research questionnaire for students of four private universities in Bangladesh to divulge their individual experiences and observations relating to the challenges they encounter and the behavioral

Adjustments they perceive when they learn the English language during the ongoing COVID-19 remote.

Population and Sampling

The population of this research comprised 41 English language learners from six different Bangladeshi private universities namely, Rabindra Maitree University, Pundra University of Science and Technology, First Capital University of Bangladesh, Dhaka International University, Northern University Bangladesh, and European University Bangladesh. The researchers randomly sent a questionnaire to more than 80 students of these universities in total. Of them, 41 students sent responses to the questionnaires. The study developed simple random sampling because it is a neutral approach to receiving replies from an enormous group (Horton, 2021).

Data Collection

The researcher collected qualitative data on the research question from the target population. Since the study was conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown which inhibited all sorts of in-person communications, it used various information technologies, i.e., Facebook, Messenger, Email, and Cell Phone. We sent the questionnaires to the participants through email or messenger and requested them over the cell phone to answer the questions at their earliest convenience. Though nearly 50% of the participants didn't answer the questions, around 50% of them, in open-ended questionnaires, can provide relatively detailed responses that, far and away, address the questions accurately (Hyman & Sierra, 2016; Desai & Reimers, 2019).

Data Analysis

In this mixed-method research, we made collected qualitative data quantitized through unitization, categorization and coding. Quantitizing refers to transforming the qualitative data into numerical forms, which emerged as a major way of mixed-method research (Sandelowski, Voils & Knaf, 2009). We unitized

and categorized the data into incongruent codes to present the variables numerically (Srnska & Koeszegi, 2007).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Students' Perception

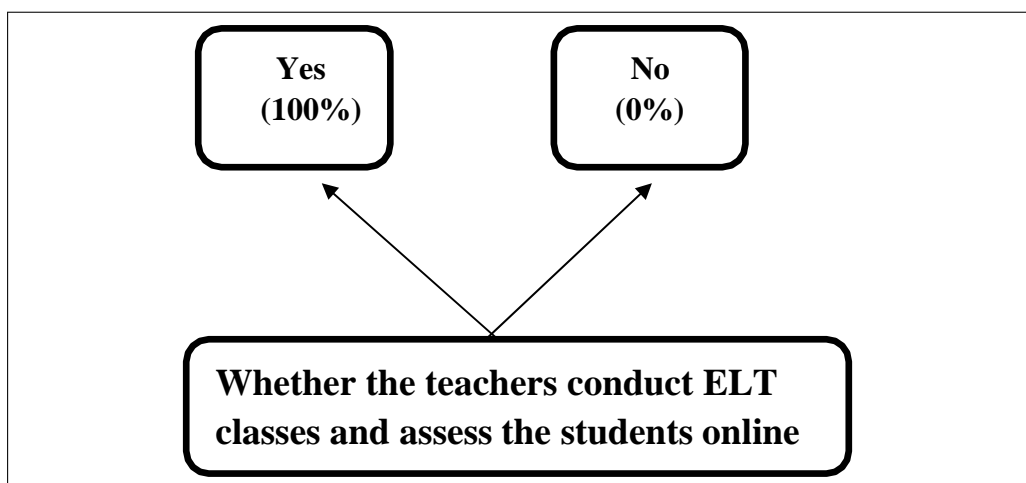


Figure I: Whether the teachers conduct ELT classes and assess the students online during COVID-19

All of the participants (100%) who participated in the open-ended survey asserted that the teachers conducted classes and assessed them online during COVID-19 but some participants also added that their virtual class started three or four months later after the University Grant Commission and Education Ministry of Bangladesh allowed the private universities to continue classes and assessment online. Because, their university administrations were, in fact, somewhat confused about whether their online classes and assessment will be validated or not later. And at the beginning, many teachers and students didn't have any idea concerning the apps used for online classes and assessments.

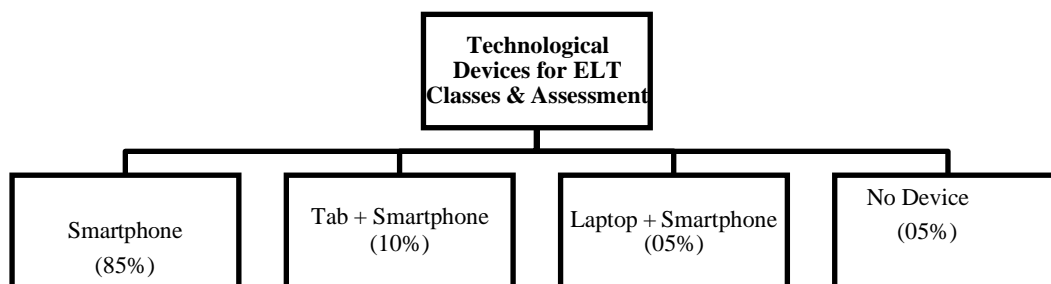


Figure-II: Technological Devices the students used for ELT classes & Assessment

85% of them used smartphones when attending ELT Classes and got assessed at the university as the technological device while about 10% of the participants used both tabs and smartphones. More specifically, 05% of the students applied both laptop and smartphone and the last one admitted that he/ she had no smartphone, tab and laptop

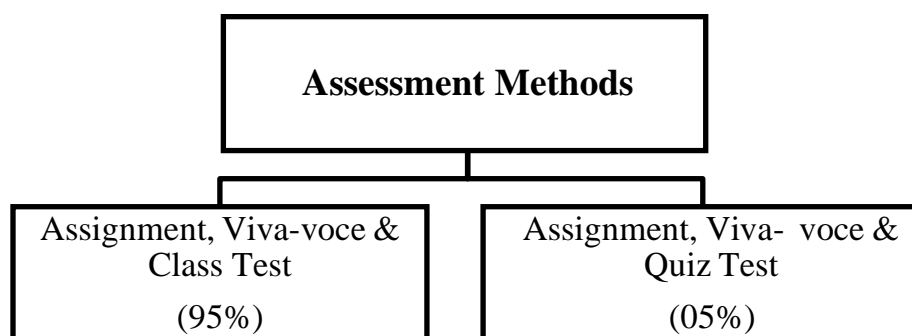


Figure-III: Assessment methods through the students were assessed

As methods of assessment during COVID-19, 95% of the participants revealed assignment, viva voce and class test and 05% of them mentioned assignment, viva voce and quiz test as the test formats to assess them.

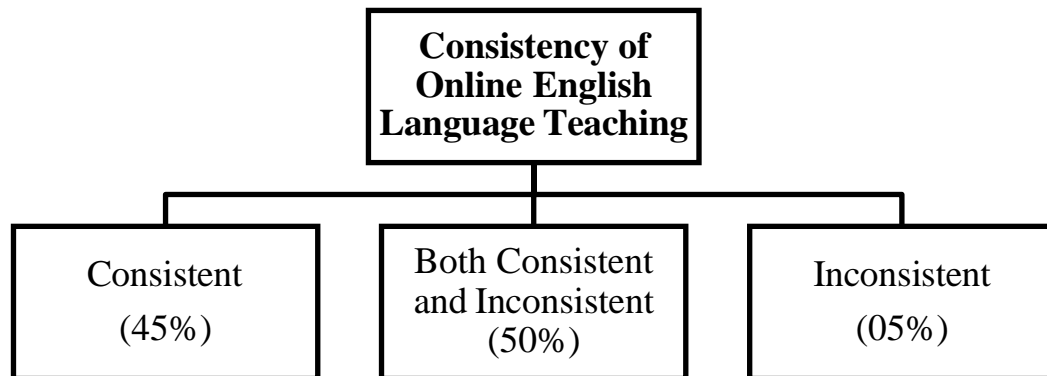


Figure-IV: Consistency of Online English Language Teaching

Around 45% of the students regard online English Language Teaching as consistent while nearly 50% of the participants considered it to be both consistent and inconsistent. And 05% of the students acknowledged online assessment as inconsistent.

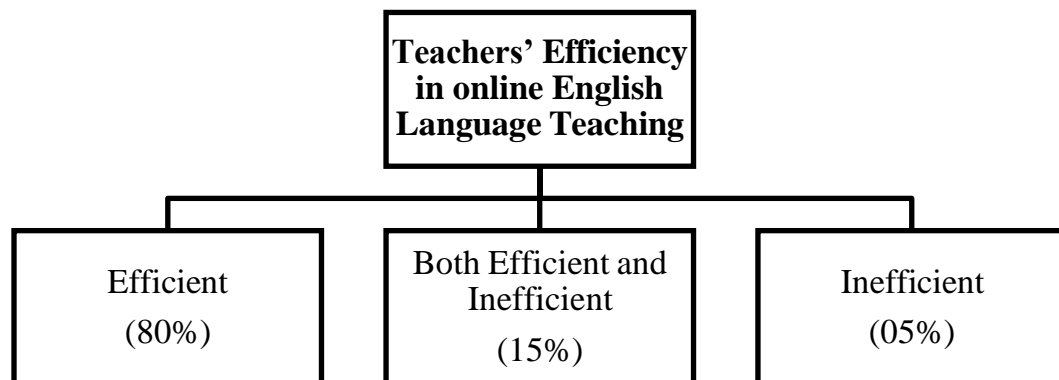


Figure-V: Teachers' Efficiency in online English Language Teaching

80% of the students considered the teachers to be efficient in online English Language Teaching during COVID-19 while 05% of the participants affirmed that the teachers are both efficient and inefficient. And 05% of the participants confessed the teachers to be unskilled.

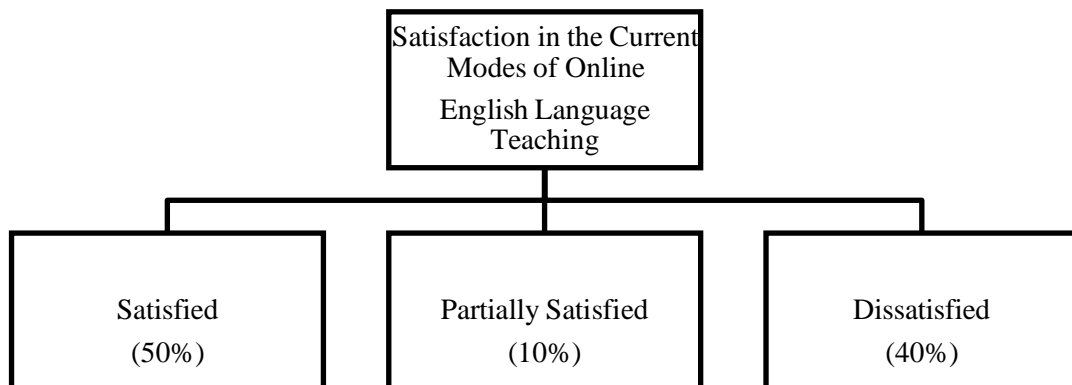


Figure-VI: Students' satisfaction with the current modes of online English Language Teaching

Nearly 50% of the participants were, after considering all the problems and benefits, satisfied, 40% of the participants were dissatisfied and 04 of the students were partially satisfied with the online English Language Teaching.

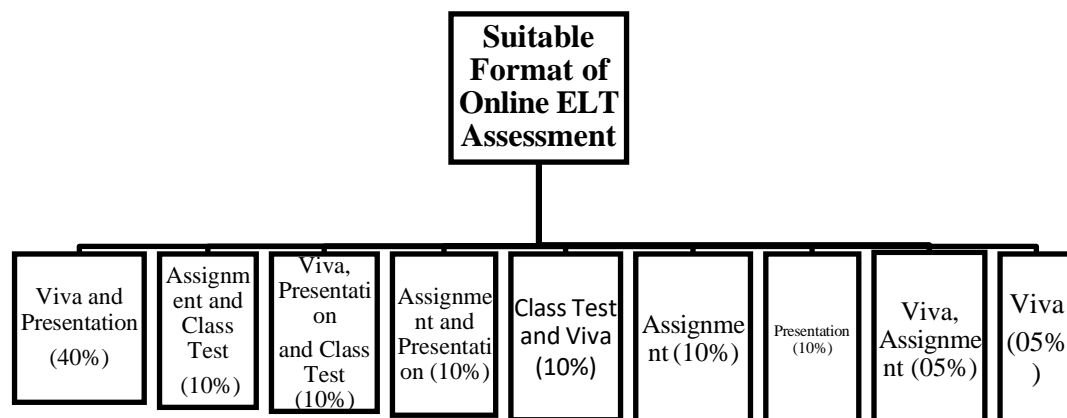


Figure-VII: Suitable format of online English Language Teaching during COVID-19

About 40% of the students regarded long viva voce and presentation as a suitable format for online English Language Teaching during COVID-19 whereas 10% of the participants stated assignment and class test, 10% of the students mentioned viva, presentation and class test, the 10% revealed assignment and

presentation, 10% believed class test and viva, 10% denoted assignment, 10% considered presentation. But 02 of the 21 participants gave different opinions in regard to choosing the suitable format for online assessment. In them, 01 specified viva and assignment and the last one avowed viva-voce.

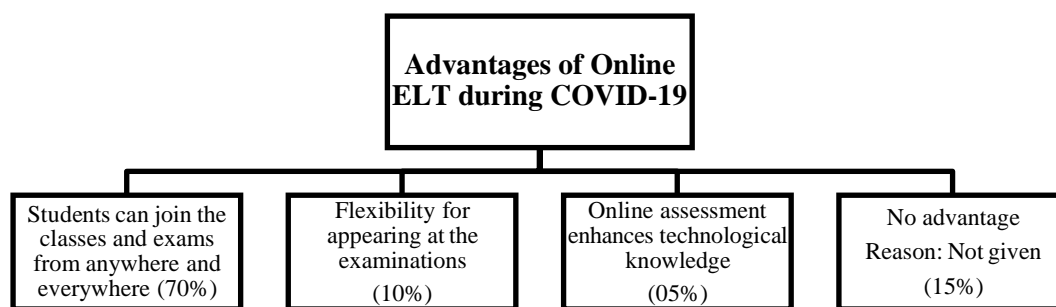


Figure-VIII: Advantages of Online English Language Teaching during Pandemic

More than two-thirds of the participants (70%) exposed the advantages they enjoyed in online assessment during COVID-19 asserting that they can attend the classes and examinations from anywhere. Again, 10% of the participants considered schedule benefits for appearing at the examination to be the major advantage of online assessment. 05% of the students revealed that online assessment develops the technological knowledge of the students. So, it was a great opportunity for the students to introduce themselves to the new electronic devices like and smart phone, laptop or tab or the new software like Zoom Meeting App OR Google Meeting App in the new online assessment. On the contrary, about 15% of the participants found no advantages in online assessment during COVID-19. They mentioned that it was difficult to adopt a new approach in ELT suddenly.

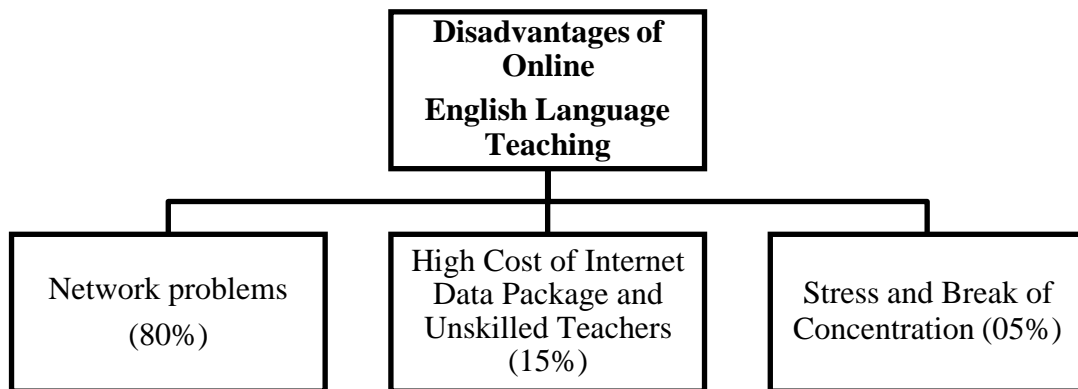


Figure-IX: Disadvantages of Online English Language Teaching during COVID-19

Around 80% of the participants acknowledged unstable network connection as the prevailing disadvantage they faced in online assessment whereas 15% of the participants claimed that the costly internet data package and unskilled teachers were the main downside. Likewise, the last 05% of the 41 students approved that online assessment exacerbates mental stress and it also breaks concentration.

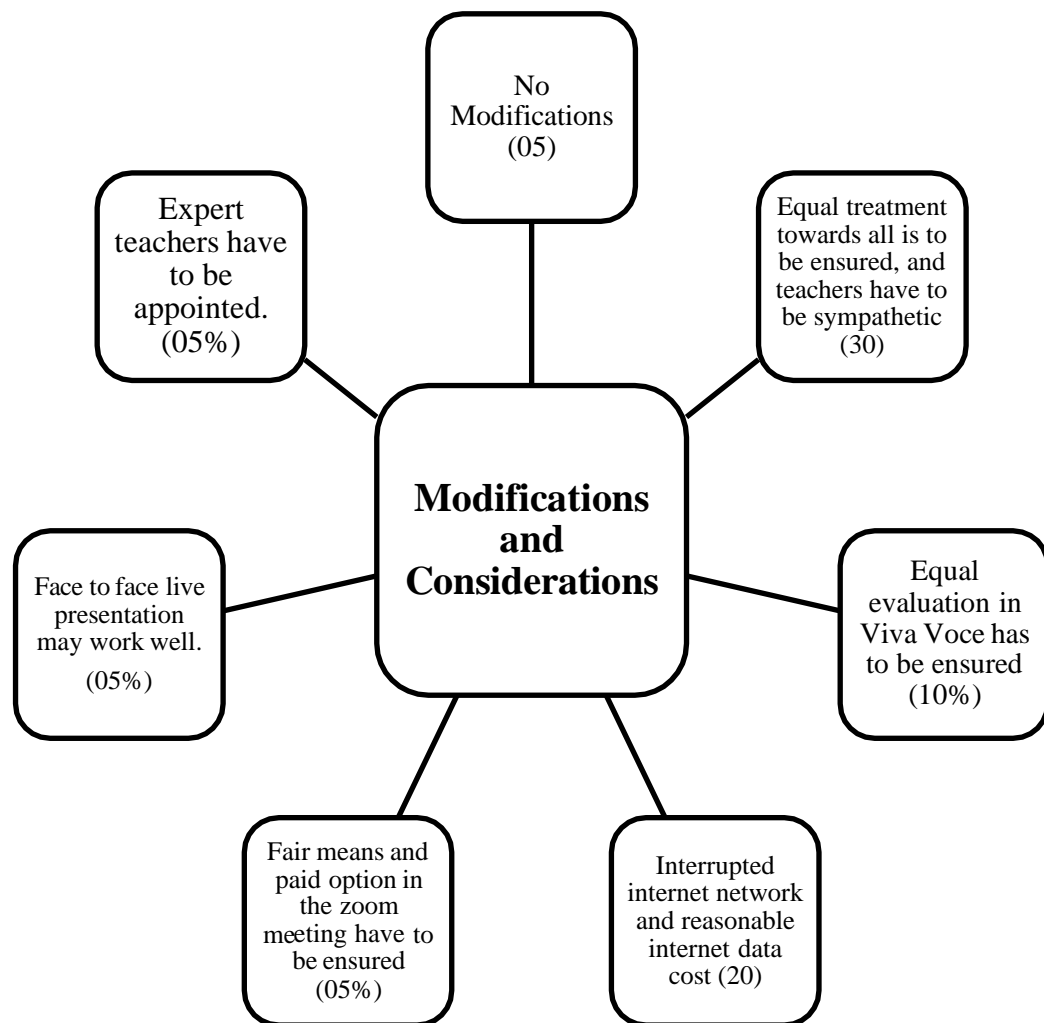


Figure-X: Expected Modifications and Considerations in English Language Teaching during COVID-19

Almost all (90%) of the students recommended that some modifications must be brought into English Language Teaching during COVID-19 although 10% suggested no modifications. 30% of the participants commented that teachers' equal treatment in the assessment must be confirmed and also they should be very cordial to the students while 10% of the participants also added that equal evaluation in viva voce should be taken into account, 20% of them avowed that interrupted internet network and reasonable internet data cost are the prevalent recommendations. Likewise, 05% of the participants emphasize making

sure fair means in the online exam while 05% of students considered face-to-face live presentations making videos of their presentations and uploading them on their Facebook page to be fruitful. Similarly, 05% of the participants confessed that technologically skilled teachers are important so that they could evaluate the students accurately, 05% of the students recommended ensuring the validity of the assessment, and 02 of the 41 participants suggested that the ELT teachers should ensure equality in marking. And the last two participants left the question of modification unanswered.

DISCUSSION

Even though all the participants in this study assert that their teachers of ELT courses at universities conduct their English language classes and assessment in online mode during the COVID-19 pandemic, they were confused concerning virtual teaching and learning approaches. As all the students responding to the questionnaire of this research get taught and evaluated online, they find it sometimes problematic and sometimes beneficial. That is why, they suggest some recommendations to make English language teaching and learning more fruitful. However, the study finds that the majority of the participants used smartphones when attending ELT Classes and got assessed at the university as the technological device and the rest of the students used tabs and laptops. As methods of assessment during COVID-19, the participants revealed assignment, viva voce, class test and quiz test as the test formats to assess them. Half of the students regarded online English Language Teaching as consistent whereas nearly half of the participants considered it to be both consistent and inconsistent. Again, most of the students considered the teachers to be efficient in online English Language Teaching during COVID-19. The majority of the students considered the teachers to be efficient in online English Language Teaching during COVID-19 while some of the participants affirmed that the teachers are both efficient and inefficient. Nearly 50% of the participants were, after considering all the problems and benefits, satisfied, and 40% of the participants were dissatisfied. Many students regarded long viva voce and presentation and some students considered

assignments to be the suitable format for online English Language Teaching during COVID-19. Likewise, most of the participants divulged the advantages they enjoyed in English language learning at their universities during COVID-19 asserting that they can attend the classes and examinations from anywhere. Again, some of the participants considered schedule benefits for appearing at the examination and the opportunity for the students to introduce themselves to the new electronic devices like smartphone, laptop or tab or the new software like Zoom Meeting App OR Google Meeting App in the new online assessment to be the major advantages of online assessment though few participants found no advantages in online assessment during COVID-19. They mentioned that it was difficult to adopt a new approach in ELT suddenly. In contrast, around 80% of the participants acknowledged unstable network connection as the prevailing disadvantage they faced in online assessment whereas the rest of the participants claimed that the costly internet data package and unskilled teachers were the main downsides and that online assessment exacerbates mental stress and it also breaks concentration.

LIMITATION

As the study was led during the COVID-19 lockdown, the study came across several impediments and so it has some limitations too. The sample population could not be approached in person and therefore the researcher had to contact them over the phone, on social media or on-internet communications to remind the responders time and again. The study also could not include a larger number of populations for more representational findings in the researched question.

SUGGESTIONS

Considering all the problems and prospects in the findings, the study proposes some recommendations that might be applicable both in Bangladesh and of course in many other countries of the world on the conditions of the situation, resource capacity and academic approaches. The study recommends that the prevalent online-education-related problems the students face like interrupted

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Internet networks and low internet speed, load shedding, students' lack of technological skills, not having technological devices, sense of detachment, etc. should be solved to make English language teaching more effective. Each of the universities needs to launch a technological inquiry team to help the students. Equal evaluation in viva voce, uninterrupted internet connection and reasonable internet data cost are the prevalent recommendations. Likewise, the research also recommends that making sure fair means in the online exam, face-to-face live presentations making videos of their presentations and uploading them on their Facebook page to be fruitful. Similarly, the study also adds that technologically skilled teachers and ensuring the validity of the assessment are the prevailing recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS

The grave concern of this study was to find the impediments and challenges English language learners of the private universities of Bangladesh encountered when they were taught and assessed online during the COVID-19 pandemic and the considerations required to make English language teaching and learning more effective. Among the major obstacles faced by the students are interrupted internet connection and low internet speed, load shedding, students' lack of technological skills, not having technological devices, costly internet packages, mental stress at the time of assessment and a sense of remoteness. As Spivey & McMillan (2014) revealed a strong affirmative connection between students' efforts and their course performance, especially in virtual education and evaluation during the COVID-19-like pandemic periods. The study speculates that English Language Teaching online at private universities in Bangladesh has a strong possibility to serve the purpose to the hilt but some modifications are needed to make English language teaching and learning more effective.

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