

Adapting to Online Teaching and its Impact in the Post-Pandemic Era: Perspectives of Bangladeshi Private University EFL Teachers

Received 30 September 2023, Accepted 15 January 2024, Published online: April 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36832/beltaj.2023.0701.04>

Journal homepage: <https://www.journal.belta-bd.org/>

Adiba Murtaza

Assistant Professor, Southeast University

Email: adiba.murtaza@seu.edu.bd

Abstract

COVID-19 disrupted education globally and forced the world to adopt remote teaching and learning. In Bangladesh, private universities were the pioneers in this shift. The teachers had to adapt to this new normal situation quickly. This study explored how English teachers of Bangladeshi private universities responded to this new online teaching mode. Data were collected through focus group discussion (FGD), interviews and questionnaire survey to delve into how their adaptation experience impacted their teaching in the post-pandemic era. The quantitative data analysis from the survey and the qualitative analysis of the FGD revealed perspectives relevant to effective online teaching methodologies in language classrooms in the Bangladeshi context. The qualitative data gathered from the interview sessions revealed that even in this post-pandemic era teachers continue using acquired online skills such as blended teaching, online conference meeting tools, learning management systems and online forms among others. The lessons learned in their adaptation to online teaching are helping them now in various ways.

Keywords: Online teaching, English teachers' adaptation, Bangladeshi private universities, New normal pedagogy, learning theories

INTRODUCTION

With the outbreak of COVID-19, the world experienced a lockdown that affected almost all spheres of life and this brought uncertainty in the educational sector. This led to a complete closure of all the on-site traditional classes at all levels of educational institutions worldwide. Locking down businesses, however, did not mean shutting down education. To keep the education system operational, the mode of teaching had to shift from on-campus traditional classroom teaching to online teaching. The whole world had to adapt to remote teaching and learning, and this new teaching mode appeared effective worldwide. Bangladesh was not an

exception to this. During this time of crisis, many educational institutions in Bangladesh started taking the initiative to offer online education with whatever resources they had. In Bangladesh, private universities played pioneering roles in this shift.

However, this new change in the educational system was very challenging for the teachers as well as the students. In these low-resource contexts, neither the teachers nor the students were fully ready for this new normal situation. There were several issues like, contextual constraints, electricity failure, internet connectivity, access to smart devices, and lack of proper technological skills. Also, a lot of questions were raised regarding this shift in education. In a country like Bangladesh will the teachers be able to conduct classes with the use of new technological tools, having so many barriers and other constraints? Are they ready enough? Are they trained enough? Are the students ready? There were a lot of uncertainties. In this context, the study was conducted to explore the English teachers' adaptation to online teaching in English departments of different private universities and what major challenges were faced during times of emergency. The aim of the study was to investigate if the technology used for online education was effectively embraced by the teachers. The overall objectives of this research were to explore the online teaching adaptation experiences of Bangladeshi EFL teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic as well as to identify the ways the teaching-related activities of those teachers have changed in the post-pandemic era. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- a. What were the experiences of Bangladeshi private university EFL teachers while adapting to teaching online during COVID-19?
- b. What changes did this experience bring in their teaching and other related activities in the post-COVID-19 era?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Navigating through the COVID-19 pandemic was hard for people of all sectors of society. The core issues pertaining to education were: privacy concerns, digital divide, inequity, and the lack of essential skills and competencies to name a few (Bozkurt et al., 2020). These issues were more prevalent in the South-East Asian countries. A one-size-fits-all kind of idea did not work there. All the variables ranging from target learners, their backgrounds, demography, and access to information were needed to be taken into consideration (Bordoloi, 2021).

A considerable number of research studies have been carried out on online teaching in Bangladeshi public and private universities. Bashir et al. (2021) carried out research on 26 students of the Department of English from 11 public universities in Bangladesh to understand the challenges faced by the learners studying English at the tertiary level. Through their research, they identified some challenges which include a) lack of access and affordability, b) cost of Internet connectivity, c) lack of technological competence, d) challenges related to pedagogy and materials, e) assessment-related concerns, and f) psychological factors. With the sudden shift to online teaching, education systems went through difficult times globally, particularly in low-resource countries. Aktar et al. (2022) discussed how the teachers coped with emergency remote teaching (ERT) in a developing country like Bangladesh with low resources. They mainly focused on virtual classrooms in higher education through teachers' narratives. Using data based on interviews, they found that private and public university teachers experienced challenges while trying to adopt and adapt at the same time. The data revealed that Emergency remote teaching is challenging in a low-resource context as many universities did not have a virtual

learning environment here in Bangladesh and it was difficult for the teachers to maintain the virtual platform with the students. It is difficult for an online teacher to conduct classes in the context of low resources, low connectivity, and no prior online infrastructure.

Assessing learners' progress was one of the key challenges of online education during the pandemic. Kabir et al. (2022) found that assignments, quizzes, short answers, oral tests, reading tests, and presentations were methods (listed in the order of frequency conducted) used for online assessments during the pandemic. For exam-related support provided online, 64% of the students mentioned that they got enough or somewhat support from their teachers. Their study showed that while the students were generally in agreement that online assessments were fair and accessible, the teachers' perspective was quite the opposite. For the reliability (integrity) of the online assessments, the teachers were equally divided in their opinions. In terms of achieving the stated learning outcome, the majority of the teachers believed that the target was met although more than half the students disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement.

Educators found very little time to react and adapt when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world. However, even when they had to switch to the online teaching mode, they did not forego the classic and well-established pedagogy and learning theories. The pedagogy and learning theories underlying online teaching practices need to be in alignment with our understanding of established learning theories including social constructivism. The behaviourism theory views learners as passive participants (Guney & Al, 2012). However, to ensure proper learning, frequent assessments need to be conducted. In the case of online teaching, this is quite easy to achieve through assessment tools like ClassMarker or Google Forms Quizzes. Today educators can use online formative assessment tools such as self-tests or teacher-assigned quizzes to increase learners' engagement and knowledge acquisition. The liberationist theory says that students are free to learn what they want to learn and how they want to learn (Cortina & Winter, 2021). The plethora of available resources on YouTube, Podcasts, and online learning platforms give students the true liberty to choose what they want to learn and how. By exploring on their own from various resources, the students can then learn for themselves. The constructivism theory affirms that learners have the ability to construct their own knowledge (Driscoll, 2005; Cortina & Winter, 2021). Collaborative tools like Google Docs or Microsoft 365 help learners do so in a well-organized manner. Tools like Google Docs for collaborative document processing, Messenger for communication, and Zoom breakout room for real-time virtual group discussion can all be used in a meaningful manner. Connectivism is relatively a new learning theory. It views the learning process as a holistic integration of the network (Siemens, 2005). In online or interactive learning environments, individuals share their interests, information, experiences, skills, and opinions through network connections. Thousands of blogs, news stories, book reviews, journal articles, video clips, and podcasts can be accessed using Internet technology such as databases and search engines. Connectivism is a learning philosophy that uses a set of nodes to connect hundreds of networks to promote synchronous and asynchronous learning. Individuals can use these links to access reliable information from millions of sources, which they can replicate, repeat, and distribute within their social networks, as well as delete, criticize, and discard inaccurate, obsolete, and unreliable data. Having acquired information from a series of nodes, connectivism describes learning as an informal opportunity that transforms individuals into 'nodes' themselves, equally capable of sharing their knowledge and expertise with other individuals. Messenger groups, Viber groups, etc. are frequently used to form a network of learners through which they stay connected and continually keep learning from each other.

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to explore how the Bangladeshi private university English teachers adapted to online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic and identify the ways the teachers are using the lessons learned in the post-pandemic era. For this purpose, the researcher employed a mixed-methods approach which involves quantitative and qualitative data analysis. For the quantitative part, there was a questionnaire survey with a total of 42 questions. Apart from demographic questions, there were closed-ended and open-ended questions relevant to the topic. This questionnaire was validated and tried out by two senior colleagues. The researcher used Spreadsheet tools (Google Sheets) to analyze the data both in quantitative values and with visual representation in graphs. For the qualitative part, there were two sets of semi-structured questions which were used in a) a Focused Group Discussion (FGD) to discuss the experience of adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic, and b) individual interview sessions to learn about the changes in teaching in the post-pandemic era. Both sets of questions were piloted by experts. The data analysis for the qualitative part was done thematically. To gather an adequate number of responses for the quantitative research, 99 English teachers teaching in 24 different private universities were randomly chosen. All the respondents were from across the country.

For the qualitative research, the FGD included 8 teachers from 3 different private universities, and for the interview session, 6 teachers from the same three private universities. These teachers were expected to give insightful information based on their experiences, development, and barriers to language teaching in a virtual platform. These teachers were selectively chosen. There were 2 FGD sessions and both sessions continued for 30 minutes. The individual interview sessions continued for an average of 15 minutes per participant. The FGD sessions as well as the interviews were conducted through Zoom and Google Meet platforms and the whole sessions were recorded with the permission of the FGD participants. This can be mentioned that standard ethical measures were followed throughout the data collection process.

Data Collection & Analysis

The researcher conducted an online survey (using Google Forms) to collect data from the English teachers of Bangladeshi private universities. The link to this survey questionnaire form was distributed through emails, and strictly administered Facebook groups of private university teachers only. The ranks of the participating teachers ranged from Lecturer to Professor with varying levels of experience in teaching. Table 1 shows the distribution of ranks, the count of teachers and their teaching experience.

Table 1: Rankwise participant counts

Rank	Count	Teaching Experience (years)				
		0 - 5	6- 10	11- 15	16- 20	21 +
Lecturer	47	33	12	2		
Senior Lecturer	10	6	4			

Assistant Professor	32	4	12	14	2	
Associate Professor	9			4	2	3
Professor	1					1
Total	99	43	28	20	4	4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

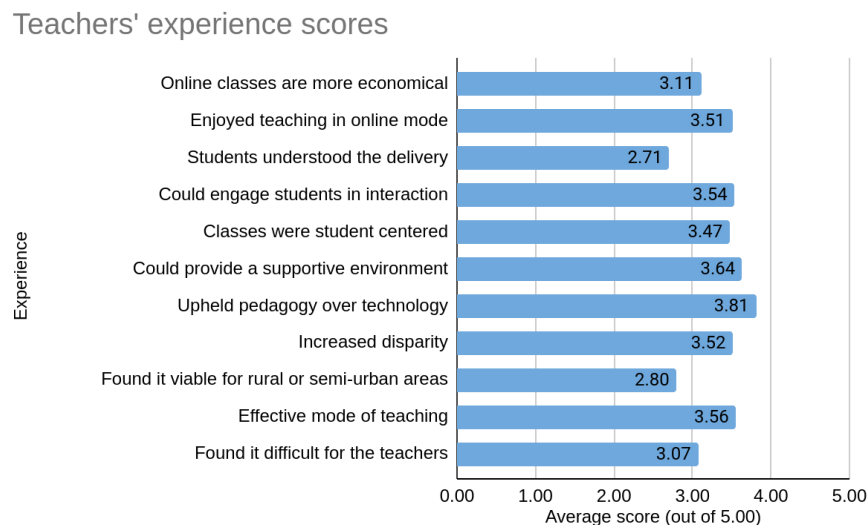
The data gathered from the survey and the FGDs revealed some key issues related to the experience of adapting to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online survey regarding online teaching adaptation

The analysis of the gathered data revealed several difficulties related to the successful implementation of online instruction in the COVID-19 situation at private universities in Bangladesh. The barriers identified from the data analysis revealed the facts that affect online teaching and learning such as availability of power (electricity), internet connectivity, access to smart devices, maintaining EMI, financial conditions of learners, online safety, digital divide of students, assessment techniques, and collaborative teaching.

Training is crucial for any new adaptation. 79% of the teachers surveyed received some form of training for online teaching. The ones who received training felt more confident about their experience level compared to those who did not. Those who received training rated their experience level at 3.18/5.00; whereas, the teachers who did not receive training rated their experience level at 2.84/5.00.

Figure 1: Average Likert rating scores for teachers’ experiences

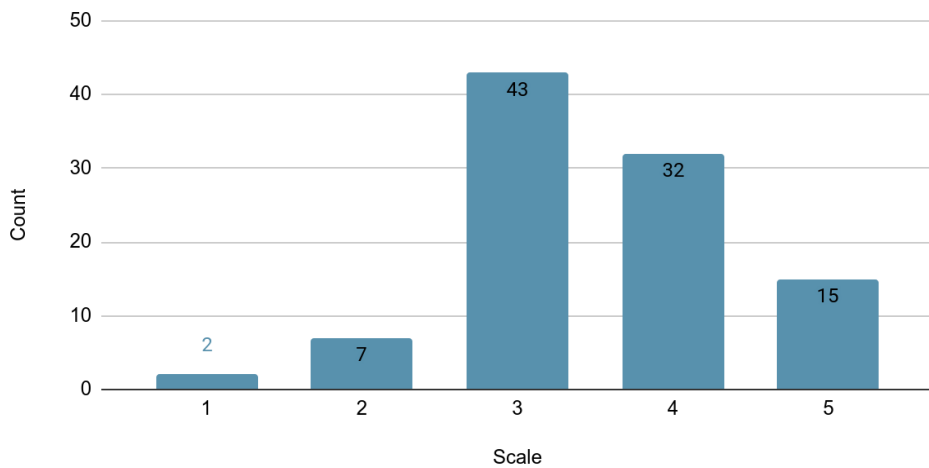


Teachers were asked several Likert scale questions regarding what they experienced in online teaching. The responses are shown in Figure 1 in a bar chart. The teachers expressed fairly positive responses regarding their enjoyment, student engagement, student-centered classes, and supportive environment and generally found it to be an effective mode of online teaching. However, as Figure 2 suggests, they were not as positive about students’ understanding of the class delivery, particularly in the context of rural or semi-urban areas.

Figure 2: Online teaching for students from rural/semi-urban areas

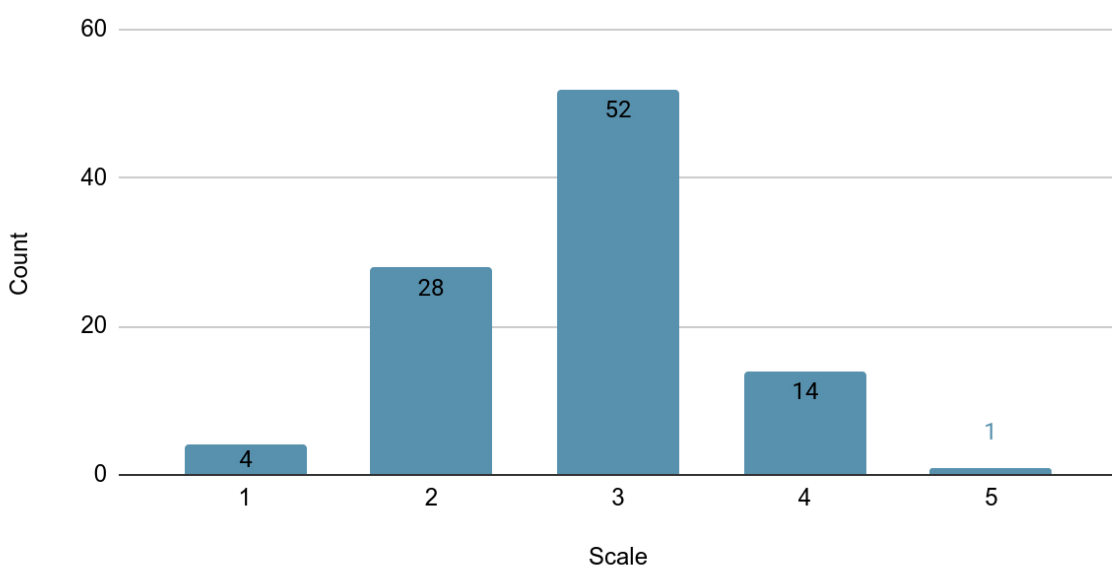
Online teaching increases disparity

Average score 3.52/5.00



Online teaching is viable for students of rural/semi-urban areas

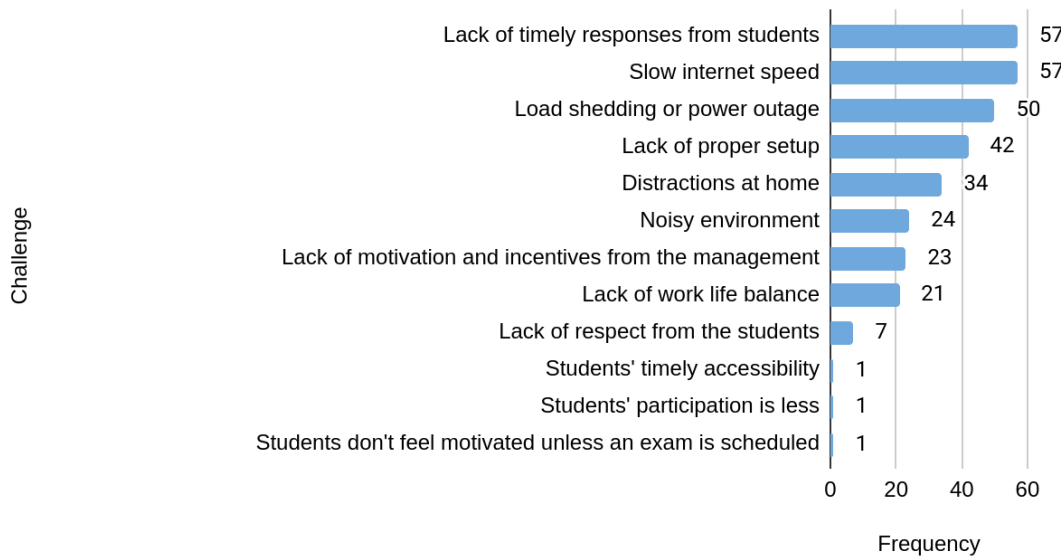
Average score 2.80/5.00



In Bangladesh, a large number of the population stays in rural or semi-urban areas. Hence the concern about the digital divide is quite high. 41 of the 99 teachers surveyed mentioned that 50-75% of their students are from rural or semi-urban areas. The surveyed teachers are largely in agreement that online teaching increases disparity among students.

Figure 3: Challenges faced by the teachers in delivering classes online

Teachers' challenges in online teaching

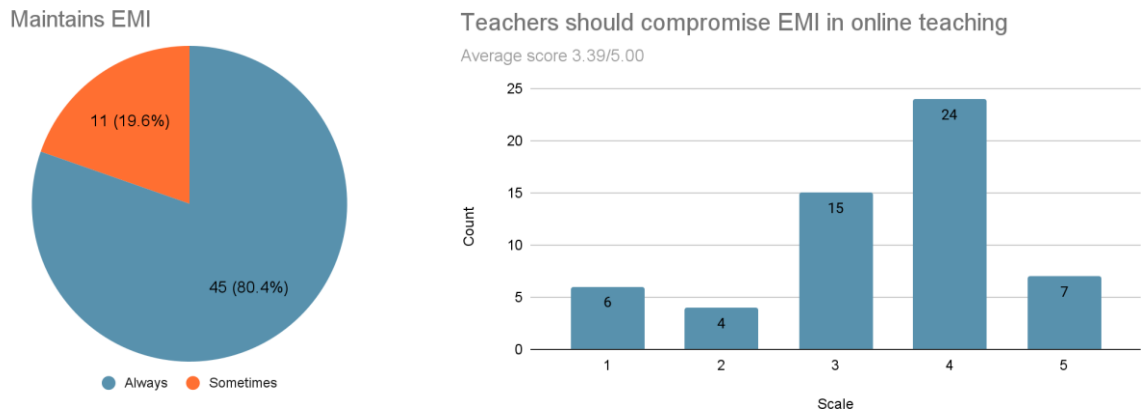


When asked about the challenges, the surveyed teacher could pick multiple options. The responses were tallied up to find the most common causes – they are shown in Figure 3. 57% of the participants mentioned both slow Internet speed and lack of timely responses from students as key challenges. Load shedding (50%), lack of proper setup (42%), and distractions at home (34%) were also among the top challenges listed. It is interesting to note that while some of the challenges mentioned by public university students of Bangladesh (Bashir et al., 2021) and the one conducted on the teachers of the private universities of Bangladesh are common, some challenges are different.

When asked for suggestions, they shared some interesting ideas. Teachers can upload video recordings of the classes and slides for the students; this will help the students who miss a class to watch it later or review parts of the lecture when needed. Teachers may take extra hours to conduct the classes as some students cannot attend the classes on time. Teachers need to be supportive of their situation and provide extra time. They have to reach out to them using a platform that will be accessible and economically viable for them. Teachers have to contact them, asking their peers to cooperate with them and provide them materials or resources they need.

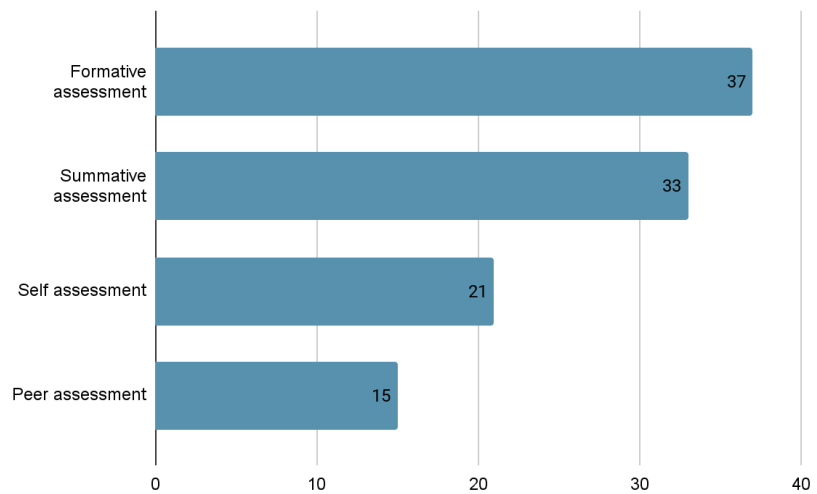
As the target participants for the survey were all English language teachers, they were asked if they maintained English Medium Instruction (EMI) in class. As seen in Figure 4, 80% of the surveyed teachers said they did. However, there was a strong agreement among the survey participants that EMI can be compromised while teaching online.

Figure 4: Maintaining English Medium Instruction



The survey participants were asked about how they assessed their students' performance. Most participants responded that they used both formative and summative assessments. Figure 5 shows the distribution of choice for assessments for the participants.

Figure 5: Forms of assessment

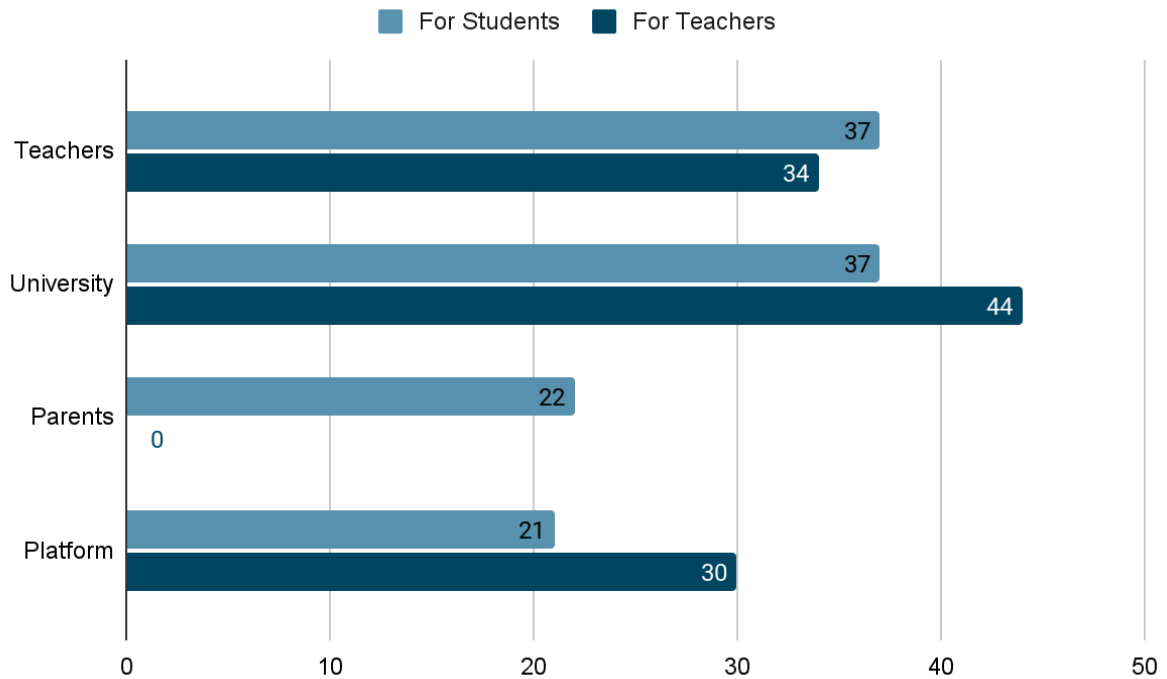


As for tools, most teachers use Google Forms for assessment, followed by some favoring Microsoft Forms. ClassMarker, Nearpod, and Kahoot were among the other tools teachers used for assessment.

Just like classroom teaching, the safety of the teachers and learners from bullying and harassment in online mode needs to be ensured, as well. In Figure 6 it is seen that the surveyed teachers feel that the responsibility to ensure online safety from harassment and bullying of

students should be on the teachers and the university. More importantly, the safety of the teachers should be ensured by the university and the teachers themselves.

Figure 6: Responsibility for ensuring online safety



One key advantage that onsite teaching has over online teaching is that the teacher can make classes interactive by engaging the students. When asked about how to make online classes engaging for the students, the participants suggested group discussion, pair work, and debates.

FGD on adapting to online teaching

In the FGD sessions, teachers shared their experiences of engaging students in meaningful activities in online classes. Most of the teachers mentioned that they gave case-based assignments, group work, pair work, sometimes individual work, quizzes, PowerPoint projects, video projects, etc., and involved them in discussions. Some teachers shared that, they engaged students by asking questions and asking them to give examples from real-life experiences. One of the teachers said, “I assign them classwork in chat boxes. They answer there, I check it and give feedback”. One senior teacher gave details about how engaging his class was:

I involved them in group discussion, short writing activities through chat-box in Google Meet, Google form and Google doc, doing activities together through PowerPoint slides, student presentations through screen share, group speaking activity, debate, games, YouTube videos, etc. (FGD-T1)

Students from semi-urban/rural areas face more difficulties in joining online classes mainly because of electricity failure and internet connectivity. In the FGD sessions, teachers said that they took extra measures to help the students from semi-urban or rural areas. Most of the teachers mentioned that they recorded the whole class, uploaded it in Google Classroom, and emailed it to the students. They also said that they kept all the class materials, PowerPoint slides, and other resources available for the students by uploading them to Google Classroom so that

they could watch, listen to the lecture, and read the notes at their own convenient time. Some teachers gave extra tutorial hours to the students in rural areas. Some teachers said that they were available for the students all the time as they were connected through Facebook messenger groups, WhatsApp groups, and Viber groups, so the students could reach the teachers any time they wanted. Some teachers suggested that the university can grant money to buy Internet packages.

The data also revealed that there are some advantages of online classes. Some teachers mentioned that there are some flexibilities in online classes; both teachers and the students can join the class from their homes, and they don't need to go out and get stuck in horrible traffic. Some teachers said that student attendance was increased. While talking about the positive sides of online classes, one of the faculty members mentioned,

There are some advantages such as Travel time saving, money saving, more organized, more transparent, tech-savviness, diversity, everything can be recorded, technology-based class management, etc. Students can stay with their parents and family members can share their knowledge in their own areas. At least, they are able to avoid any traffic and attend the classes timely. It saves time and energy. (FGD-T2)

Another faculty member said

Online classes allow students to plan study time around the rest of their day. Students can study and work at their convenience. Course material is always accessible online. The recorded classes help the students to keep pace with the class, even if they miss the previous class. (FGD-T5)

From The FGD sessions, it was clear that there are some disadvantages to online teaching. Some teachers revealed that it was difficult to understand whether the students were there and listening to the lectures because most of the students used to keep their cameras off during the classes. Some mentioned that student engagement is less if compared with the live classes. Some teachers also talked about the validity and reliability of the assessment; others mentioned that the noisy environment, lack of proper setup, Internet, etc. create problems in conducting online classes. One teacher mentioned

As a teacher, I cannot see their faces to understand how much of the delivery they understood. I am having backache and pain in my ear from sitting at the desk for a lot of hours and wearing the headset. Personally, online teaching has increased my workload a lot more. Students, I suppose lack the opportunity of learning from peers. The lack of teacher-student bonding is another big issue – I think this is what is leading to the disrespectful attitudes some students are showing. (FGD-T3)

According to another faculty member,

Certain cultural beliefs and attitudes might hinder the successful implication of online teaching and learning. To create a congenial learning environment, we need to keep those cultural issues in mind. Universities may offer Internet packages/data to students by reducing waivers. That will be a part of branding indicating that the University is providing both waiver and data. (FGD-T4)

The impact of online teaching in the post-pandemic era

The individual interview sessions with the teachers about how the online teaching adaptation experience has impacted their classes and other related activities brought out several interesting facts.

All the participants mentioned that they still use many of the tools they learned to use during the COVID-19 pandemic. One participant mentioned that before online teaching, he did not

know much about the usage of Learning Management Systems (LMS). Using an LMS now, he can share the results of assessments of the students individually; thereby maintaining privacy. Sharing class materials with the students has become relatively easy for him. These were seen as necessary. Now that he knows how to use this feature, he can provide the service the way it's meant to be provided.

Armed with the knowledge of how to use technology in times of crisis, all the participants showed more confidence in taking up new challenges. Should there be any lockdown due to the pandemic or political unrest, they can carry on with online classes and switch back to onsite classes when the situation improves.

Another participant mentioned that during the pandemic, students were communicating with the teachers on online platforms very frequently. This is a practice that is still maintained; as such, she feels teachers are much more easily reached now, as they are more accessible online. The pandemic has changed her perspective in some other light, too. She added:

This pandemic has changed me as a person, I think. I can now empathize with the students. Seeing so many deaths around their families, and so much suffering, I am more compelled to listen to them now than I did before – I can counsel them, or at least be there for them if not anything more. This has improved the bond I have with my students. I can connect better with them. (Interview-T1)

Online teaching has brought with it a fair share of problems, as well. Multiple participants have mentioned that students are still after easy grades. They try to engage in unfair means: using AI tools like ChatGPT for assessments, and copying and submitting materials from online resources. Some students are just not putting enough effort into classes anymore.

The data and feedback analysis from the survey and the FGD showed that while the EFL teachers of Bangladeshi private universities adapted to online teaching, some issues caused hindrances to online teaching. Internet connectivity, uninterrupted power supply, access to smart devices, and the socioeconomic condition of the learners are some key ones on that list. The findings of this research are in agreement with that of Bashir et al. (2021). The neighbouring country, India experienced very similar issues in this regard, as well (Bordoloi et al., 2021; Hassan et al., 2020).

The individual interview session confirms that the teachers are still using the tools that they learned when they were introduced to online classes. The knowledge they acquired during the pandemic not only helps them in classroom teaching but goes beyond that in this post-pandemic era.

CONCLUSION

There are several key findings from this research. The data analysis showed that the students remained motivated despite the challenges. The teachers showed that online classes could be conducted successfully with limited resources. Teachers and students are now more connected than ever before. Most Learning Management Systems have an app version or can be accessed on smartphones making the classroom available in both the teachers' and students' pockets.

The main goal of this research was to gather the perspectives of the English language teachers of Bangladeshi private universities about remote teaching and learning, particularly how they are adapting to this new normal situation and how they are still using the knowledge. It is inspiring to note that despite the limitations and interruptions, the teachers of private universities

were motivated to continue remote teaching and learning. They felt that they were thriving despite tough times. The shift from classroom teaching to online teaching and then to a blended one became the ‘new normal’ for them and as the findings above suggest, they had adapted rather well.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adiba Murtaza is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Southeast University. She has published several articles in peer-reviewed journals at home and abroad. Her research interests include ELT methodology, materials development, EMI, and the use of technology in language teaching. She is undertaking her doctoral study in ELT at the Bangladesh University of Professionals. She is a member of BELTA and IATEFL.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Murtaza, A. (2024). Adapting to online teaching and its impact in the post-pandemic era: Perspectives of Bangladeshi private university EFL teachers. *BELTA Journal*, 7(1). 1–13. doi: <https://doi.org/10.36832/beltaj.2023.0701.04>

REFERENCES

- Aktar, T., Maniruzzaman, M., Khan, H. R., & Hasan, M. (2022). Teachers’ narratives from initial virtual classrooms and professional development during the COVID-19 pandemic in developing Bangladesh. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 23(3), 230–245. <https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.1137293>
- Bashir, A., Uddin, M. E., Basu, B. L., & Khan, R. (2021). Transitioning to online education in English departments in Bangladesh: Learner perspectives. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v11i1.34614>
- Bordoloi, R., Das, P., & Das, K. (2021). Perception towards online/blended learning at the time of Covid-19 pandemic: An academic analytics in the Indian context. *Asian Association of Open Universities Journal*, 16(1), 41–60. <https://doi.org/10.1108/aaouj-09-2020-0079>
- Bozkurt, A., Jung, I., Xiao, J., Vladimirschi, V., Schuwer, R. Egorov, G.,...& Paskevicius, M. (2020, June 5). *A global outlook to the interruption of education due to COVID-19 pandemic: Navigating in a time of uncertainty and crisis*. Zenodo. <https://zenodo.org/record/3878572>
- Cortina, R., & Winter, M. (2021). Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of liberation. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 23(2). <https://doi.org/10.52214/cice.v23i2.8577>
- Driscoll, M. P. (2005). *Psychology of learning for instruction* (3rd ed.). London: Longman Pearson.
- Dunaway, M. K. (2011). Connectivism: Learning theory and pedagogical practice for networked information landscapes. *Reference Services Review*, 39 (4), 675-685. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00907321111186686>

- Guney, A., & Al, S. (2012). Effective learning environments in relation to different learning theories. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 2334–2338.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.480>
- Hassan, M. M., Mirza, T., & Hussain, M. W. (2020). A critical review by teachers on the online teaching-learning during the COVID-19. *International Journal of Education and Management Engineering*, 10(6), 17–27. <https://doi.org/10.5815/ijeme.2020.05.03>
- Kabir, M. Md. N., Haider, Md. Z., Khan, R., Roshid, M. M., Jahan, A., & Sultana, S. (2022). Online assessment practices of English language teachers and students in higher education in Bangladesh: Challenges and choices. *BELTA Journal*, 6(1).
<https://doi.org/10.36832/beltaj.2022.0601.04>
- Siemens, G. (2005). Connectivism: A learning theory for the digital age, *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*, 2.
-



© 2023 The Author(s). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.