Teaching English to Young Learners in a Pandemic: A Bangladeshi perspective

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Abstract

Globally the COVID-19 pandemic has altered academic practices significantly. A nationwide online education had been in effect in Bangladesh since March 2020 due to the closing down of schools for an indefinite period. While several studies have explored the effects of such a sudden shift in the learning environment for the older students, the primary level students have not received as much attention. The present study examined the changes adopted, with regard to classroom teaching and assessments, in the English language classes at the primary levels in Bangladesh. A qualitative study was conducted with a pool of teachers (n= 7), students (n= 10), and parents (n=9) who were interviewed to obtain a comprehensive view regarding the new teaching-learning scenario. The responses showed that the adjustments made to the academic practices might have been enough to stop the system from coming to a halt, but they were inadequate and ineffective in addressing the language needs in a virtual environment.

Keywords: Online education, primary education, COVID-19, English Language Teaching

Introduction

Bangladesh went into the first lockdown due to the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020, putting a sudden and indefinite halt to all in-person educational processes. The lockdown was lifted and temporarily enforced a few times. Educational institutions were closed for safety purposes until September 2021. Despite the obstacles and issues getting in the way, teachers, parents, and students all over the country strove to continue the academic activities in these trying times. The present study aims to examine the adjustments that were made to realign the academic practices by the three main groups of stakeholders: teachers, students, and parents. Based on responses of these groups who actively participated in adapting to online education, the techniques and changes applied to English language teaching for primary level students were analyzed. The following research questions guided the study reported in this paper:

1.   What changes were made to the syllabus and the teaching practices?
2.   What changes were made to the assessment framework?

A Paradigm Shift in the Global Academic Scenario

As a global phenomenon, the outbreak of COVID-19 affected almost all countries across the world in a similar manner. Caught in the suddenness and newness of the events, the affected countries adopted novel techniques to continue the academic activities. Teachers reported making video instructions for parents and young children and sharing them on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp (Dias, Almodóvar, Atiles, Vargas, & Zúñiga León, 2020). Students, in return, took pictures of their homework and shared them via similar applications (Dias et al., 2020). Other than these, many educational tools such as Autodesk SketchBook, Google Forms, Google Classroom, Slack, and Kahoot were popularized among the teaching-learning communities (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Hu, Chiu, Leung, & Yellandet, 2021). Detailed reviews of such practices were also reported (e.g. Carrillo & Flores, 2020).

A wide array of studies has looked at the challenges faced by the stakeholders of online academic practices (e.g. Arora & Srinivasan, 2020; Gratz & Looney, 2020; Hu et al., 2021). Teachers reported having a lack of training and technological resources, network issues, difficulties in student management, and lower student as well as teacher motivation to be some of the obstacles that made the online activities challenging (Hu et al., 2021; Joshi, Vinay, & Bhaskar, 2020). Another major challenge for the teachers was to adapt the existing materials to make them suitable for the online practices for teaching and assessment (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). To meet the demands of the new system, teachers had to dedicate extra hours of work (Rauf, 2020) and more effort to additional planning (Gewertz, 2020). With regard to the learning outcomes of students, concerns were expressed regarding a general 'learning loss' resulting from limited or no learning experiences (Green, 2020). A vast difference in the level of achievements and retention among students was reported to be a challenge for the teachers (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020). A survey conducted in 26 countries of North and Latin America revealed the dire conditions of studying from home (Dias et al., 2020). A teacher reported that 12 of the 14 children could access the required learning platforms such as Microsoft Teams once a week or the Whatsapp calls once a month only. The unavailability of internet data as well as dedicated devices made it impossible to maintain the same pace and rigour in online academic practices (Dias et al., 2020). Countries that lacked the infrastructure to meet the demands of online teaching and learning suffered further crises. The technologically-dependent pedagogic practices resulted in a 'digital divide' in such countries (Mishra, 2020).

The online teaching scenario demanded the parents' active participation in the process, especially for the young learners. Some studies reported that very few parents rejected the shift to the virtual platforms

(Hu et al., 2021) while the others reported the classes to be 'less satisfactory' (Grover, Goyal, Mehra, Sahoo, & Goyal, 2021) and hazardous to health (Dong, Cao, & Li, 2020). A study conducted on a large group of parents (n= 3275) identified strong resistance from the parents due to children being subjected to online teaching (Dong et al., 2020). The general negative attitude and beliefs of parents regarding online learning emerged from three reasons: they felt that the online process lacked "a learning atmosphere" (p.5), children did not have enough self-regulation needed for this kind of activities, and the monitoring expected from the parents could not be provided due to their busy daily schedules.

Investigations into students' preferences also reported mixed responses. Even the regions where high accessibility was reported had most of the learners struggling with the study load and the quality of teaching (Bhaumik & Priyadarshini, 2020). While there was general recognition for the need to continue studies online, especially among older learners (e.g. Al Salman, Alkathiri, & Bawaneh, 2021), stories of students' hardship were ubiquitous (e.g. Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Besser, Flett, & Zeigler-Hill, 2020).

As a major component of formal academic practices, assessments in online teaching were restructured in significant ways. A wide variety of assessment techniques were used which included openbook exams, in-class Q/A sessions, take-home assignments, discussion board and peer review (Zhang, Yan, & Wang, 2021). A study conducted by Zhang et al. (2021) that elicited responses from the language teachers in China found that the selection of the tools was largely determined by contextual and experiential factors, i.e. there was a wide variety among the language teachers in terms of issues such as how important assessments were, which tools to use, what balance should be used between formative and summative assessments and so on.

Although virtual teaching-learning processes were not completely new, the urgency and the compulsion associated with the COVID 19 online teaching practices made the educators around rethink the pedagogic philosophy as well as execution. Teachers identified the need for the parents, learners, teachers, policymakers, and the school authorities to work in collaboration to determine the revised academic outcomes and techniques that could be suitable for the changed scenario (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). A lot of emphasis was given to collaboration among teacher-peers to develop new materials and assessment procedures (Guo & Li, 2020) and to technology-training for teachers (Moser, Wei, & Brenner, 2021). There were more advanced recommendations such as building a more interactive online community, building a differential support system for the families in need, and increasing parents' skills to support the academic process of children (Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, & Cook, 2020).

The challenges faced in the COVID-affected world were in many ways similar. Studies concluded that the obstacles did not vary across the countries; instead, they varied based on the socioeconomic status of the families involved (Dias et al., 2020). Countries that are otherwise recognized to have a sound infrastructure also reported stories of similar challenges coming from the teachers, learners, and parents (e.g. Fishbane & Tomer, 2020; Hamilton, Kaufman, & Diliberti, 2020). There were similar hurdles globally with vast differences within the same country.

Changes Adopted in Bangladesh

As a country that suffers from infrastructural limitations, Bangladesh initiated measures to ensure nationwide coverage of educational services soon after the first lockdown was announced in March 2020. The first major step to ensure continuous education across the nation was to broadcast academic lessons on the national TV. The private educational institutions, due to the availability of more resources, were able to make the transition to online platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams soon after the lockdown (Mahmud, Dasgupta, Gupta, Hasan, & Kabir, 2021). Supported by Bangladesh Research and Education Network (BdREN), the universities received access to free longer sessions on Zoom to continue their classes online (Rahman, Aziz, & Ahmed, 2020).

Impact of the Pandemic on English Language Teaching

E-learning is said to be first introduced in Bangladesh in 1956 via a radio-broadcasting programme which was later expanded by Bangladesh's first university to implement online learning, Bangladesh Open University (BOU) in 1992 (Islam & Selim, 2006). Although students nowadays are familiar with technology and smartphones with WiFi connections that allow them to easily search and view materials online, making classes interactive remains a challenge due to unreliable technology, difficulty of the user interface, and lack of keyboard literacy. While some studies reported a few advantages of online teaching and learning during the lockdown such as avoiding weather and traffic issues and attending classes from the comfort of home (Afrin, 2020), the challenges of implementing online education in the face of a deadly crisis were many. The teachers struggled to maintain communication with students (Mahmud et al., 2021), to keep up with the software and the technological skills required to manage web-based classrooms (Zaman, 2020), and to cover the content of the courses in the altered and curtailed teaching system (Zaman, 2020). On the other hand, the students' challenges were mainly due to internet connectivity and the expensive data packs (The Independent BD, 2020), unavailability of digital devices (Alamgir, 2020), stress and anxiety resulting from the pandemic (Emon, Alif, & Islam, 2020), and the loss of concentration (Fatema, 2020). To address some of the pedagogy-related challenges, Eusuf and Rabi (2020) emphasised the need for not only adopting learning methods but also creating new methods tailored to the context. According to them, transferring learning methods from traditional classrooms to online learning would only "partially address the problem," and they instead suggested "inclusive alternative methods" to be devised.

Assessment Issues in Schools

With the long break in offline classes in schools, and with the pandemic threats still around, new means of assessments need to be identified that are appropriate for assessing language skills. A study conducted on alternative assessment reported that despite the cognitive growth in the learners, there remained a lack of development in using the skills based on the knowledge acquired (Podder & Mizan, 2020). The authors reported that continuous or alternative assessment tools were not implemented in schools and that teachers as well as stakeholders would need further training. One of the participants revealed their desire to implement alternative assessment being road-blocked by the overwhelming responsibilities of teaching including teaching from the textbook, designing tests, preparing model test practice sessions, and checking scripts. Another study that examined the use of alternative assessment in the online scenario found that there was very little variety in the assessment tools used. Teachers mostly relied on take-home assignments and quizzes (Khan, Basu, Bashir, & Uddin, 2021). Most teachers expressed concerns regarding administering high-stake examinations (i.e. final examination) while a majority of the students felt that the online assessments were to be unfair and the grades would suffer (Khan et al., 2021).

The Present Study

The study examined the adjustments made in teaching English online at the primary schools in Dhaka during COVID-19. Although a large number of studies were reported regarding the impact of the pandemic on academic activities, very few of them documented the experiences of young children in primary schools. This small-scale exploratory research was conducted by accumulating the perspectives of parents, teachers, and students involved in primary education in Dhaka. A qualitative approach was followed to observe the changes adopted in school policies with regard to teaching and assessment and to understand if the changes were sufficient to continue online learning indefinitely.

Participants

Three groups of participants- seven teachers, nine parents, and ten students- were recruited for the study who were associated with the primary and junior schools based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The teachers were all employed in English medium schools teaching English language, or literature, or both to students of Class 1 to Class 8. Their years of experience ranged from 1.5 to 13 years. The students were from mixed backgrounds; there were two students from Bengali Medium (BM) schools, six from English Medium (EM) schools, and two from English Version (EV) schools with the national curriculum. Belonging to Classes 1 to 6, the students had an age range of 7 to 13 years. Nine of the students' parents were recruited to participate in the study who constituted the parents' group. Convenience and purposive sampling were employed to recruit the students and their parents, and the teachers respectively. A limitation of the study is that the teachers and the student-parent groups came from different curriculum backgrounds; unlike the teacher group, the student-parent group came from BM, EM, and EV schools. The recruitment of participants during the COVID time was challenging which is why the researchers continued with a mixed group of students. However, a possible benefit was that it allowed them to get an overall understanding of the scenario at the primary and the junior level.

Data Collection

The teachers, the students, and the parents were interviewed online or through phone calls with three sets of semi-structured interview questions. The interview was chosen as the data collection instrument because in-depth input was required to understand the decision-making process of the teachers for transforming an in-class curriculum to an entirely online-based curriculum. While the teachers' and the students' interviews concentrated on learning about the teaching and the assessment practices adopted during the COVID time, the parents' interviews focused on observing their roles in connecting their children to the virtual atmosphere by providing a conducive environment at home. All interviews were recorded on Zoom or through phone calls.

Research ethics was maintained throughout the data collection process. Verbal consent was taken from all participants before starting the interviews. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and that their and their institutions' data would be anonymous. Interview questions were carefully designed so that the participants were not psychologically harmed. For example, students were not asked about their individual academic performances.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was applied to the data gathered from the interview responses. Creswell's six-step Thematic Analysis (2012) was followed to perform the analysis. The audio recordings of interviews were transcribed and coded to generate themes that emerged from the responses. To ensure the accuracy of the findings, responses from three groups of participants i.e. students, parents and teachers were triangulated.

Results

The results, organised under a set of themes, are reported in direct relation to the research questions asked in the study.

Changes Made to Teaching (Research Question 1)

Online Classroom Mode and Management. When the pandemic forced schools to close, classes were conducted on ClassTune and Google Meet applications by two of the teachers. They later shifted to Zoom

because of the broader range of functions, such as screen sharing, video conferencing for large groups etc. The number of class periods was also reduced from seven/ eight periods to three/ four per day.

The teachers reported that their students were assigned homework on Google Classroom which they answered in their copies and sent pictures of via email. The heavy reliance on technology for the routine pedagogic activities made the task challenging, as identified by a teacher (T1). Giving and receiving individual feedback was reported to be a challenge in the online mode. One of the students (S4) mentioned that "… sometimes the questions are hard and I can't solve them by myself, and getting feedback is not possible online." A parent (P3) echoed this issue by saying that her son "… is missing out on proper feedback and guidance from teachers. If he gets stuck on a question, he needs to email (the) teachers and then wait for a reply and sometimes (the) teachers don't even reply." The teachers' struggle in the online system was expressed by a teacher (T1) who mentioned:

> The checking and everything is really difficult. When students are sending us the email…[it is] so difficult to understand their writing….There are grammatical mistakes, punctuation mistakes. How could I check each and everything and how could I read from their answer? So what I do is wait for the next class and tell each and every one you cannot write this, you should write this and so on. (T1)

One of the teachers (T4) used 'voice notes' to the homework or test scripts so that the students could hear their teacher's feedback. The students had the responsibility of reading the feedback and getting back to the teacher with queries. The teachers reported that dishonest submissions of homework had increased in the online situation. One of the teachers (T1) noted that she had received assignments done in a different handwriting than her student's. Besides this, three teachers noted a parent helping a student during tests.

Student Attitude and Motivation. All teachers noted a decline in active participation in class. One teacher (T3) reported that the students' expressions after a few days suggested that the classes had been 'imposed upon them' and another reported that 'the bonding with the students' had been compromised. The students were energetic at the beginning of the day but they became unresponsive in the later classes (T3). They sometimes even chose to not attend the class - an option not available to them before the pandemic. However, a teacher reported that the younger students (Class 2 and 3) were more excited than the older students to get opportunities to speak. A teacher (T3) mentioned regularly using group work and pair work to get students engaged among themselves and with the teacher. With Zoom's feature of breakout rooms, students could discuss a topic among themselves and share ideas after returning to the classroom. Most parents' responses were in line with that of the teachers. A parent (P4) stated:

> Previously they (students) enjoyed going to school and especially there were other activities/ extra-curricular/ physical interactions with friends. But now in online classes, they sometimes have a tendency to skip classes and the interest level seems low. This is also affected by poor internet connectivity at times. Continuous screen- viewing can also become monotonous at times and they feel bored.

Effect on English Skills. As the students chose to respond less in the online classes, two teachers reported that debating was the only practice they received regularly for speaking and listening. Additional implementation of verbal activities included oral quizzes instead of written ones. Three of the teachers said that the practice of writing also declined as fewer classes were held per day, and the number of broad-answer exam questions declined. Objective questions were also being implemented over broader, subjective ones in order to speed up the process of checking which further compromised the quality of writing. Reading was often practiced in class in the form of students reading aloud from their books.

Technological Training. All the teachers stated that they were trained in using Google Meet, Zoom, Google Classroom, and ClassTune for the purpose of hosting classes, distributing and collecting

assignments, providing grades and test questions along with report cards for parents to access. Google Form was widely used by the teachers for objective-type items where brief responses were assessed immediately for the student to see their results. Some of these platforms were also used for 'demo meetings' after classes to share ideas on managing online teaching.

Changes Made to Assessment (Research Question 2)

Assessment Procedures. Both formative and summative tests were employed by the teachers. The teachers reported having resorted to oral quizzes and surprise tests more than earlier to assess the students' performance. Due to the wide use of the objective-type knowledge-based questions that required less critical analysis on the students' part, the duration of the examinations was reduced in general. However, if any student could not submit within time, he/she had to notify the teacher immediately. Objective question test results featuring MCQs were calculated immediately by using Google Form.

Nature of Assessment Items. Most question patterns were simplified to suit the online resources available. One of the teachers acknowledged that a shortened time duration put pressure on the students but emphasized that a higher number of objective questions helped them earn easy marks (T4). The weight assigned to the different assessment tools varied among the respondents. Two teachers stated that the half-yearly and final exams carried only 40% marks due to a lower number of tasks and reduced duration while another teacher reported that her school scored the final exam out of 80 marks. The overall assessment was based on various criteria which included handwriting, participation, bringing books on time, dress code, helping out classmates, and extracurricular activities.

Validity and Washback. As the school syllabuses were not altered significantly, the tests were claimed to have content validity. According to the teachers, average student performance was fairly consistent with the previous year's results. With regard to a negative washback effect, most of the teachers reported that the exclusion or reduction of the broad answer questions in the examinations had significantly reduced the writing practice among the students. Although the final examination included broad answer questions, the teachers mentioned that the students did not practice writing sufficiently throughout the term.

Implications of Learning Language Online

Practice at Home. The responses of the participants varied with regard to the amount of practice the students had in the online system. The students identified that the amount of study done in the online system was the same as before the pandemic owing to their regular classwork, homework, tests, and examinations. However, one of the parents (P3) reported that "the teachers assign more homework now and he (the student) has to do a lot more self-study to keep up with the content since class timings are short." Another parent expressed a concern saying that 'the one-way communication' in the online classes was going to have an impact on students' communication skills and social relationships (P4).

Dealing with Distractions and Demotivation. The presence of distractions in a study-at-home situation was acknowledged by the students as well as the parents. A student (S4) mentioned that the game notifications popping up on the device she used during the class were an interruption. Another student reported that his peers used the private chat box on Zoom to communicate among themselves during the class (S1). Parents, in addition, reported that the students lacked the enthusiasm for online classes. Since the online platform did not allow for much interaction among the students, the class participation went down to a large extent.

Effectiveness of Lectures. Although most of the students claimed to understand the contents of the classes, two of them reported to have relied on recorded lectures to take notes afterward. Their teachers

were helpful and encouraging of students' questions. However, three students pointed out the difficulty of asking questions during a virtual class as they did not wish to interrupt the lesson. One of the students said that his teachers did not take any questions during their WhatsApp classes; rather, they had a weekly Zoom session after school for queries regarding particular subjects. While the students found the online classes manageable, some felt nervous during the tests. A parent expressed her concern regarding the effectiveness of the online classes by saying that the assessment modes made it challenging to perform well. She said that it was difficult for her child to complete a test and then take pictures, make a PDF and email it to the teacher within the given time (P3). Students reported similar concerns where they indicated that the internet or the electricity disruptions could delay the submission which could not be compensated through other assessments.

Return to Offline Classroom. Every parent interviewed wanted their child to be able to go back to the physical classroom on the condition that safety precautions were taken. A parent (P2) stated that "it might be difficult because of health concerns and maintaining safety guidelines. [But] they (students) want to go to school." Teachers and parents alike thought it would be better to keep some online practices continued. For example, a teacher (T4) suggested that "…some of the things can be continued like if for emergency reasons a student is absent for a long time, he/she can submit their work on Google Classroom so that he/she can be connected to regular lessons." Similarly, most students wanted to return to school with the exception of one student who had a long commute to school. A teacher (T5) expressed a concern that, after many months of studying from home, students might find it challenging to get back to a disciplined lifestyle.

Discussion

The objective of the study was to explore the alterations made to the two primary components of classroom activities, i.e. teaching and assessment, in the unforeseen situation of a pandemic in Bangladesh.

Teaching Practices

Based on the responses of the participants, it appeared that the academic activities continued in a re-designed framework during the pandemic. Classes were conducted on various online platforms such as Zoom, Facebook, Google Classroom, and Google Meet. Similar to the practices among the university students (Khan et al., 2021), the young children also did their regular assignments electronically via emails and Google Docs. However, as reported by the teachers, it took about a month or two to get everyone – including the students and the parents of younger students accustomed to using these new platforms.

Although the stakeholders worked towards the same academic goals, the classes became shorter, and the syllabus was curtailed. One of the most commonly identified changes to the online classes was the virtual atmosphere which affected the stakeholders in numerous ways. In line with their peers from other countries (Hu et al., 2021; Joshi et al., 2020), Bangladeshi teachers also reported a significantly lower level of motivation among the students. Most of the households were not prepared for managing extensive academic activities conducted in a synchronous virtual space. Therefore, the classes suffered from numerous distractions at home. Also, the attention spans are shorter for children, and monotonous activities do not hold their interest for long (Brown, 1994). The online environment severely restricted the interactive activities in the classroom. It appeared that, due to the academic pressure and the limitations of the virtual space, the teachers had to mostly concentrate on managing the content in terms of topics. Language being primarily a skill, therefore, is likely to have suffered in a significant manner.

Parents also expressed concerns regarding the quality and the outcome of the classes. Although they did not disapprove of the need for online classes in the given scenario, concerns were expressed citing students' low level of enthusiasm for the classes. A parent pointed out that the restricted environment for interaction in the class was likely to affect children's communication skills. Such worries were echoed globally with regard to children's learning outcomes of online education. Parents were often found to report that the online classes were not appropriate for children, the teaching was not effective, and the relatively unregulated virtual time could even be harmful to children (Dong et al., 2020). However, the parents in the present study saw the online classes as a necessity that emerged from the unique situation the pandemic has introduced, but given their concerns, all of them stated that they were eager for the schools to reopen.

Assessment

The assessment process changed significantly due to the forced shift to the virtual space. Take-home assignments and short quizzes replaced the previous assessment tools. Although the teachers reported having mid-term and final examinations, broad answer questions were kept to a minimum. Findings from the present study with regard to the variety employed in the assessment were in line with other research examining similar issues. Khan et al. (2021) reported that the pandemic severely restricted the choice of assessment tools even at the university level in Bangladesh. The limitation appeared to be more in the primary level given that the students could not be expected to manage the online platforms to achieve the requirements of the tasks. All three groups of participants in the present study reported experiencing issues with assessment online. In addition to the struggles of managing the tasks online, the students and the parents reported having anxiety because of the uncertainty of the internet, electricity, and the time limit.

Although a range of assessment techniques was employed globally, the choice of the techniques was determined by the contextual and the experiential factors (Zhang et al., 2021). New platforms were introduced and some training was given to the teachers, but the variety of resources used in the assessment was extremely limited. The unfamiliarity of the platforms among both teachers as well as students lead to a situation where there could only be a small set of test items that could be confidently conducted with both teacher and students. The lack of preparation to effectively shift the academic activities to virtual platforms was also reported commonly in a range of studies that explored the pandemic responses in academia (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020; Dias, et al., 2020). However, globally recommendations strongly centred around gearing up on training and resources to embrace online as well as alternative assessments. In a study conducted in the pre-pandemic scenario in Bangladesh, it was found that teachers were reluctant to incorporate the changes that alternative assessment would entail (Podder & Mizan. 2020). However, the pandemic has necessitated alternative assessment tools which are likely to stay on even when the schools are open. Therefore, it is imperative that alternative avenues to the traditional assessments are explored and established among the stakeholders. Another issue that emerged strongly in the findings of the study is that the online teaching-learning has had a negative washback effect on the students. Adverse washback effects have previously been reported in the assessment system in Bangladesh (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018). The findings of the present study suggest that the limited areas tested in assessments severely affected classroom practices of not only speaking and listening but also writing. To address this issue, teachers need to be familiarised with different ways in which all four skills can be incorporated in classroom activities as well as through summative and formative assessments. In the case of young students, the parents of the students will also need to be brought on board with the changes because primary school students need active participation and support from their parents in an online scenario.

Other Implications

The recent shift in the academic activities in Bangladesh was not driven by the benefits of technology in education; it was a decision enforced due to a global pandemic that led all educational institutions to completely shut down within a short period of time. Unequipped with much preparation and restricted by time, the teachers mainly did just so much to keep the system running. No teacher in the present study mentioned having received any training towards keeping students' spirits lifted, changing the teaching techniques, or using technology to their advantage to any significant degree. Some teachers did use YouTube and other websites during classes for a change of pace, but none of these mixed-media contents were used in graded assessments. Despite the opportunities of using various tools on the internet for interactive teaching, no school, as reported by the participants, attempted to explore the benefits of technology to reform the existing assessments. There is a widely-reported body of research that presents the benefits of incorporating technology in language classrooms (e.g. Parvin & Salam, 2015; Whyte & Schmid, 2018; Zheng, Yim, & Warschauer, 2018). If the schools do not push the boundaries to incorporate more technological tools in the pedagogy, there is likely to be irreparable harm with regards to student motivation and proficiency. Besides the obstacles, the pandemic has presented a breakthrough in the use of technology across countries. It is likely that some academic practices will continue to remain online even when the restrictions are lifted. Therefore, policymakers need to sincerely consider exploring the possibilities in which the virtual media can be utilized in the classrooms across all levels of education in Bangladesh.

Conclusion

One of the objectives of the study was to explore if the changes adopted in teaching and assessment were sufficient to support children's second language learning. The study found that although the classes continued in the virtual space, their effectiveness was questionable. The absence of interaction in the online platforms used by the schools raised serious concerns among the parents. Given that the exposure to the language shrank and the students did not have the opportunities to interact, a skill-oriented subject such as the English language was likely to be affected. The present study strongly recommends that the current academic practices cannot be adjusted with minor changes; the shift in the paradigm brought in by the pandemic needs to be addressed through educational reforms. Therefore, if we are to have a sustainable education system that cannot be overthrown by various calamities, the policymakers need to explore the possibilities of using technology effectively across all regions in Bangladesh, and allocate adequate resources in acquiring the technological facilities and preparing the stakeholders.

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