

East West Journal of Humanities

SPECIAL ISSUE

What Happens When an Exam-Oriented Country Announces Auto-Pass Grading: Impacts of the Exclusion of 2021 SSC English in Bangladesh

Digital Literacy: A Question of Capacity and Safety in the Post-Pandemic Networked World

Exploring Post-COVID-19 Challenges in Inclusive Classroom Interaction among Tertiary EFL Learners: A Narrative Inquiry

CLT in Online Classroom: A Post-pandemic Study on the Tertiary Level Practitioner & Participants of Bangladesh

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East West Journal of Humanities is published by East West University Center for Research and Training (EWUCRT).
Secretarial support for the journal is provided by the EWUCRT.

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East West Journal of Humanities

Special Issue VOLS. 9-12, 2025

Online – ISSN: 2790-2315



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Editorial

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has changed the world in an unprecedented way. It has impacted everyone and everything in varying degrees. This special issue of the East West Journal of Humanities (EWJH), volumes 9-12, focuses on how the humanities have been affected, impacted, and survived the crisis both locally and globally. With this objective, the Special Issue of the East West Journal of Humanities (EWJH), Volumes 9-12, 2025 invited original submissions on the theme of 'Surviving the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis' in the following categories: English language and literature, other literature, linguistics, applied linguistics/English language teaching, the history of ideas, philosophy, culture and society, film and media, photography, class, gender, race, as well as library and information studies. Out of 39 papers, only four made the final cut.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of EWUCRT for its relentless support towards achieving a sustainable research-oriented environment for East West University

Muhammed Shahriar Haque, Ph.D.

Editor

East West Journal of Humanities (EWJH)

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What Happens When an Exam-Oriented Country Announces Auto-Pass Grading: Impacts of the Exclusion of 2021 SSC English in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Though dedicated research on the impact of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams exists, a curveball was thrown into the situation in 2020 following COVID-19. Resultantly, 2020 and 2021 saw the removal of the SSC English paper exams, the consequences of which could be immediate and far-reaching simultaneously. In that light, this paper tries to fill the research gap by exploring how the exclusion of the SSC 2021 English exam has impacted the auto-passed students in terms of their learning (or lack thereof), the amount and quality of preparation, and the aftereffects they faced as college students. To explore this issue, this qualitative study uses semi-structured interviews with six SSC 2021 examinees. Results show a significant lack of English learning due to a lack of exam incentives. Next, those who received a lower grade were unhappy with their auto-pass grades. Finally, some examinees with less developed English skills had trouble understanding lectures at college. Implications of this study suggest teachers and the administration to be considerate towards SSC 2021 examinees, many of whom may require hands-on aid to cope with current studies after skipping the SSC 2021 English exam.

Keywords: High-stakes exam, auto-pass grades, SSC English, testing and assessment, impact of COVID-19 on learning English as a foreign language

Introduction

Like uncountable issues caused by COVID-19, the pandemic also wreaked havoc on the Bangladeshi education system. One particular educational issue was the lack of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams in 2020, and the subsequent trimming of it in 2021. In Bangladesh, the SSC exam is an extremely high-stakes exam as students' entire career trajectories depend on it (Sultana, 2018). Upon completing the SSC exam, Bangladeshi students enter college and prepare for the next big high-stakes exam, the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exam, which they typically take two years later. Needless to say, the exclusion of the SSC 2021 exam had drastic effects on HSC 2023 candidates. This study thus explores the impacts caused by the void of the canceled SSC English exam in the year 2021 in Bangladesh. In particular, the following two impacts will be examined: students' preparation, or lack thereof, for the canceled SSC exam in 2021, and how this exam void was affecting them in their college English classes—for their HSC 2023 preparation—afterward.

Academics and researchers are becoming increasingly concerned about the expanding influence of tests or assessments on stakeholders, society, and educational policy. Bangladesh in particular is an exam-oriented country, with several high-stakes exams at the secondary and higher secondary level. More burdens added to the situation came in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic which has had massive implications on education systems and pedagogical techniques around the globe, leading to the near-total shutdown of schools, colleges, and universities for months on end. To safeguard people from the spread of COVID-19, most countries opted for their educational institutes to be temporarily closed (Shohel et al., 2022). As a result, according to a report by UNICEF, (2021), the number of students affected by school closures were around 888 million. Thus, if the worldwide effect has been so drastic, one can only imagine what a developing nation like Bangladesh fared in the context of the lack of the high-stakes exam, SSC 2021, in the middle of the pandemic.

Literature Review

This section of the paper examines the role and significance of high-stakes English language testing in increasing learners' ability in using English. It discusses the impact of COVID-19 on language assessment in general. Furthermore, it discusses the changes that the Bangladesh curriculum made in the field of teaching and testing the English language during the pandemic. Overall, this section provides an overview of the implications of the online SSC English classes in Bangladesh, especially focusing on the lack of the SSC exam in assessment—which may have a significant impact on learners' perceptions of learning objectives, the auto-pass grade, and students' perspectives on their immediate future due to the novel situation.

High-Stakes Exams and English Subject Test Design of Bangladesh

High-stakes assessment, as defined by Nikmard et al. (2023), is a kind of evaluation that holds students, teachers, administrations, and the entire educational system responsible for a student's performance. These tests are sometimes referred to as standardized assessments since they serve as a tool for educational institutions to make high-stakes decisions (Islam et al., 2021). In particular, the high-stakes examinations in Bangladesh are the Primary Education Completion Certificate (PECE) at the end of the 5th grade, the Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) at the end of the 8th grade, the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) at the end of the 10th grade, and the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) at the end of the 12th grade. In this regard, the educational board's public examinations in Bangladesh are standardized high-stakes assessments, because the results of these tests determine which educational stream—among science, commerce, and humanities—the students will be selected in, during the commencement of their college years.

Despite the fact that language testing was once regarded to be secondary to teaching, many educators now regard language examinations as a medium for establishing pedagogy and its implications (Ali, et al., 2020). Alderson and Wall's (1993) research on test impacts established 15 hypotheses focusing on the influence of tests on teachers and students, the content, methods, degree, depth, and teaching and learning attitude. Essentially, more important examinations—for example, high stakes exams like the HSC exam—contain significant influence, while less importance is put on examinations with lower stakes like progress tests. In addition, Loughlin (2023) claims that instead of tests being a motivational element, it has become the principal of pedagogy. One can also relate this to the overwhelming focus on acing exams rather than genuine knowledge retention in the context of Bangladesh.

When it comes to the impact of tests, according to critical language testing scholars, high-stakes tests should be thoroughly investigated so that “the uses, misuses, and consequences of tests in education and society” (Shohamy, 2001) can be identified. Therefore, designing a language test is a complex task. When creating a language test, the purpose, goals, and objectives must be established so that the test is beneficial to the test takers (Owan et al., 2023). High-stakes assessments such as the JSC, SSC, and HSC—all of which incorporate English as a mandatory subject—have existed in Bangladesh for many years. Yet, no adequate study has been undertaken to investigate the test design, rationales, or interpretation of its validation (Ali et al., 2020). Regrettable indeed is the case that each year the authority's neglect and complacency are toying with the futures of millions of students in this country.

Not to mention, out of the four English language skills, only reading and writing are tested in the board examination. In addition, the question paper lacks content validity—some items

require memorization and also some questions are directly taken from the textbook or prescribed guidebooks—resulting in students not being required to read the passages and use reading sub-skills to answer them (Sultana, 2018). Thus, the reliance on memorization over communicative skill usage hampers content validity and lowers English standards (Das et al., 2014).

In particular, Smith and Rottenberg (1991) notice six negative outcomes of high-stakes exams: 1) completing the academic instruction in a short time; (2) shortening the curriculum while making a test; (3) restricting learners' learning scope; (4) influencing teacher morale; (5) evaluating lower-order skills; (6) pressuring students mentally. Moreover, Utami's (2022) findings imply that students' motivation, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes toward English language learning are influenced by exams. Furthermore, Dong's (2020) study indicates that students' test preparation and test performance affect their curiosity about learning. Finally, the findings of Desalegn et al. (2023) indicate a direct connection between the attitudes of students in terms of exam-related learning.

COVID-19 and Language Assessment Worldwide

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted educators and policymakers worldwide to bring fundamental changes. One such realm of change which is very much relevant to the exam-oriented Bangladeshi context as well as globally to some extent is language assessment. All of a sudden, students and teachers had to shift completely—or at least to a great extent—from the offline mode to an online one, resulting in sudden innovative assessment practices. Classes started being given via video conferencing software and facilities like Zoom and Google Meet, leading to an unforeseen but welcome rise in digital literacy (Yu, 2022).

In an international study on 250 universities and 310 teachers, Koris and Pál (2021) give a broad picture of the nature of online assessment during the pandemic. According to one participant, she quit being a policeman after being annoyed at proctoring online exams. This brought up the fallacy of online assessment trying to replicate traditional offline assessments by simply shifting the mode. As online proctored exams faced no end of issues like relentless cheating and unstable network connection, online assessments started becoming more formative than summative (Koris & Pál, 2021). The authors added that for conducting online tasks and instructing the learners to perform various tasks, language teachers used activities like breakout classrooms, online learning journals, open-book exams, e-portfolios, creative writing, and online presentations. However, the effectiveness of these online classroom activities has not been overall satisfactory (Afrin, 2020; Arora & Srinivasan, 2020). Finally,

there is a need to discuss what steps the Bangladeshi education system took during the pandemic.

Reformed Policy of High-Stakes Exams amidst the Pandemic in Bangladesh

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the whole education system in Bangladesh, besides some small reprieves in the middle, remained closed from March of 2020 to the beginning of 2022 (bdnews24.com, 2022). On top of that, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh decided that there would be no SSC exam in 2020. NCTB implemented online classes and alternative assessments for the SSC and HSC candidates, and as per subsection 2A of the alternative amendment of ordinance no. XXXIII of 1961¹, the syllabus was shortened and the English subject was on the whole exempted from the sit-in high-stakes test.

Thus, a state-mandated new syllabus of 60 days was prepared and published for the candidates. Additionally, the government declared a new Auto Pass Policy for the SSC examinees of 2021—including those of other high-stakes exams, PECE, JSC, and HSC—with the advice and suggestions of educational policymakers (Hassan, 2020). This decision was polarizing and attracted complaints from scholars and bureaucrats alike (Islam, 2021). Some experts recommended an alternative SSC exam which could be less rigorous than before, but still much better than the auto-promotion decision (“SSC, equivalent exams”, 2021). Other educational experts expressed concerns about how the students would cope with their studies after not being assessed for almost two years. Expectations thus were that students would face difficulty in upholding their English standards due to the auto-pass situation and therefore face barriers in transitioning into their next academic levels (Islam, 2021). As explained, the test impacts were debilitating and overwhelming prior to the pandemic, and so there could be even worse consequences for the auto-passed SSC 2021 students in their college life.

Research Gap

Regardless of the existence of some research studies conducted in Bangladesh on the impact of the SSC exams, there is a lack of research on the auto-pass SSC 2021 situation because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, in particular, the absence of English high-stakes

¹ “... if it is not possible to hold and conduct examinations at the end of the Intermediate and Secondary stage or any other stage thereof due to pandemic, epidemic, Act of God or for any other inevitable circumstances as determined by the government from time to time, the government may, by an order in the official Gazette, issue instructions for assessment and grant of certificates without holding and conducting examination or holding and conducting examination with short syllabus, in the manner prescribed in that Gazette, for the students in a particular year.” (Lodge of Bangladesh, 1961)

exams in the years 2020 and 2021 had certain impacts on the SSC candidates regarding their preparation and current problems in college—the impacts of which have not been delved into. Taking these into consideration, this paper explores the inevitable consequences that auto-grade students were facing regarding the amount and quality of preparation for the canceled exam, and the impacts experienced at the college level.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been made for the study:

1. To what extent did the SSC 2021 examinees prepare for their SSC English exam?
2. What academic challenges, if any, did the SSC 2021 examinees face after they entered college (11-12th grades)?

Methodology

Research Design

In order to explore the research question of this study, an inductive qualitative approach was chosen. As the purpose of this research study was to recount, gather, and perceive, semi-structured interviews were chosen to find out the original scenario in depth, which is the goal of qualitative research (Creswell, 2012).

Participants of the Study

There were six participants chosen for this study—one male and five female students from Bangla medium background. The researchers thought that small size participants might be a sensible choice to deal with as long as a good volume of data could be gathered, and subsequent analysis could be ensured. The other important reasons for choosing them as participants were (a) they took the SSC exam in 2021, meaning they auto passed the English board exam in 2020, and (b) they were currently studying in college during the data collection time. In other words, all the participants were former SSC examinees and they had already started experiencing the impact of the auto-pass situation, especially in the English subject. Moreover, the participants received auto-pass grades based on their JSC 2018 exam results which included the English exam. Therefore, the participants' sentiments to this grading phenomenon were also explored. When the data was being collected, the participants were partaking in regular offline English classes in college, which means that they were probably affected by the two-year gap of traditional face-to-face classes during the COVID-19

pandemic. Since the main goal of this study was to find out the impact of the auto-pass situation on the English subject, the researcher carefully selected the participants who had gone through the aforementioned two phases.

Table 3.2: Participant Profile

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Mainstream	Auto-Pass Grade in English
Mesba	Male	Humanities	A+
Peu	Female	Humanities	A+
Ikta	Female	Humanities	A-
Zavira	Female	Changed from Science to Commerce at HSC	A
Nafa	Female	Humanities	A+
Pitu	Female	Humanities	A

Data Collection Procedure

The interview questions were designed according to the two research questions. Specifically, 10 interview questions—besides elicitations of background information—were constructed with the aim of fully fleshing out the responses of the participants (see Appendix for the list of the interview questions). The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews and recorded the interview sessions through a video conferencing software called Zoom, which is a recorder software with the ability to keep the data impartial and objective (Ritchie et al., 2013). The entire interview taking process took approximately four days and each session took around fifteen minutes.

Data Analysis

This paper adapted Braun and Clarke’s (2006) data analysis framework which consists of five stages: first, familiarization with the data by transcribing and checking the data again and again. It is important to sincerely reread the entire data to generate coding and search for meanings and patterns (Sgier, 2012). In the next three stages—generating the initial coding stage, defining and naming themes, and reviewing themes—the researcher proceeded with labeling

and organizing the qualitative data to identify and illustrate different themes and the relationships between them (Chamberlain, 2015). The final phase—producing the report which required roughly one week to complete—began with the researcher fully establishing the themes and subsequently writing the final analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

All the participants were well informed about the research purpose and they gave their consent to the researcher for their contribution to this research study. Every participant has been given pseudonyms so that their privacy is maintained. Additionally, the participants were allowed the privilege of keeping some information in the interview sessions discrete, such as sensitive or controversial opinions. However, this non-disclosure privilege was not used by any participant.

Findings

This section reflects and reviews the findings that had been extracted from the six interviews upon data analysis. The four subheadings below emerged from the themes produced from coding the interview data.

The More the Exam Preparation, the More the Improvement, the More the Satisfaction

In response to the first research question, almost all the participants, except for two, stated that they took preparation for the SSC exam for no less than 6 months. Especially for the English subject, three out of six did not stop their preparation even after the announcement of its exclusion from the SSC Syllabus. According to Ikta, she “took quite a good time to prepare for the English exam” before the announcement. Nafa claimed that even after the removal of the English subject, she “did not stop learning grammar.” She further emphasized that the preparation “absolutely” improved her English language skills. Not only Nafa but also the other participants who took at least some preparation agreed in the statement that the English exam preparation had improved their English language skills. Thus, it was evident that, although the English papers were removed for the SSC 2021 examinees, some of the students did not stop their practice in English, and these students experienced perceived positive outcomes as discussed below.

In answer to the second research question—whether the discontinued English practice because of COVID-19 decreased their English language proficiency or not—those who received an A+ were quite positive. Peu asserted that her foundation in English was “quite good” and therefore “the auto-pass did not stop the development of the English proficiency level.” Mesba agreed with Peu’s statement and Nafa also claimed that as she persisted in English language learning throughout the pandemic, she stated that her “English is becoming stronger with regular practice.” On the flip side, Zavira, Ikta, and Pitu—the three participants who did not receive an A+ in the English subject—felt that their English proficiency was lessening because of the lack of English practice for a long time. Pitu shared her experience regarding her deteriorating English skills: after about nine months of discontinued language classes, she felt she was “drowning in the ocean of frustration” as she was clueless without a guiding voice telling her what to study. Moreover, she realized she was unable to answer queries in English from juniors, and so she had to resort to browsing the internet and checking books and supplementary materials for solving the problems. This habit of looking elsewhere for a readymade answer had infiltrated her study pattern, as she tended to “[look] for solutions in the books or test papers and asked elder brothers which [she] did not normally face in regular offline classes.”

Regarding the question of facing any trouble while doing English classes in college, the majority of the participants answered that they were not experiencing any problems. Peu revealed an interesting observation. She claimed that she used to face some problems at school due to some teachers’ inadequate teaching skills, overall, less knowledge of the content, and lack of a charismatic teaching style of grabbing students’ attention. However, according to her, she still had not faced any problems at the college level. In other words, rather than being negatively affected by the auto-pass situation, Peu was faring even better in her college English lessons due to the teachers’ overall teaching skills and knowledge, as per her perception. However, Pitu lamented that they were having difficulties in “catching and keeping up with” the class lectures. Zavira also shared this sentiment. As for what steps the participants were taking nowadays to make up for their lack of exam preparation, all but one participant reported that they were doing coaching classes besides their regular college lessons. Only Ikta had not yet admitted herself to any coaching center, but even she expressed interest to join one, claiming she would likely do so soon.

Thus, the above findings clearly show that some students were victims of the auto-pass English result, and these students experienced academic problems because of a lack of proper preparation and influence.

Satisfaction Dependent on Auto-Pass Grades Based on Previous Grades

However, when the participants were asked whether they were satisfied with their auto-pass English grade or not, the researcher noticed that those who received A+ were satisfied and those who failed to obtain A+ were disappointed with their results. One of the main reasons behind it was that the English auto-pass result was based on their JSC 2018 English subject result. In other words, those who could not achieve A+ on JSC English did not receive A+ in the SSC no matter what was their preparation and perceived language development for the SSC.

Respectively, Zavira, Ikta, and Pitu—the three participants who did not secure A+ in English—claimed that as their JSC English subject results were not up to the mark, they put massive effort into the SSC English examination to do better. So, they believed they “could get an A+ if the exam was conducted on time” (Zavira). Unfortunately, redemption was not possible due to the auto-pass scenario.

Extensive Use of Supplementary Materials Prior to the Lockdown

Two interview questions were dedicated to determining whether the participants used supplementary materials or not when classes were still going on until the lockdown in March 2020, and whether they solely followed the teacher’s instructions or also did self-study. All the participants said that they “extensively” (Zavira) used supplementary materials to perform well in the exam. According to Peu, she used supplements such as guides, test papers, suggestions, and also “the ones which were chosen by [her] home tutor and class teacher.” Besides using supplementary materials, two participants—Mesba and Pitu—mentioned that they liked to do self-study. Mesba expressed that he could not but use supplements for practice as “they are instructed by the teachers,” but “other than that, [he] like[d] to write things on [his] own.”

Apart from the heavy usage of supplementary materials, the participants also stated that they had to follow teachers’ instructions before they took any English examination. Peu gave a detailed example of how they were told to follow the guidance of their English teacher. She said that her teacher instructed some “specific model questions including paragraphs, dialogues, short stories, essays, grammar sections, broad questions to memorize, and also gave many handouts.” The researcher observed that when answering the question all the participants had a matter-of-fact tone, as if it was normal for them to follow the teacher’s guidance. Moreover, Zavira also thought that the handouts that the teacher provided “were easier and the grammatical rules were presented in shortcut ways.”

However, both Peu and Mesba informed an interesting yet unusual matter which was that their home English tutors were already privy to the fact that the English subject was likely to be excluded from the SSC examination. This awareness of no English SSC exams prior to the government announcement resulted in Peu and Mesba not indulging in as much practice as they would if exams took place. In other words, though Peu practiced solving past question papers, the intensity and rigor were quite tame due to this awareness. More importantly, the earlier the participants knew that they would not have to give their SSC 2021 English exam, the earlier did their preparation for the exam stop.

Incentive for Learning Versus Grades

Whether or not the participants considered the SSC simply an ordeal for getting a certificate, regardless of the learning outcomes, was important. Thus, their views of the relative significance of learning and grades were taken in this study. When the participants were asked whether getting a higher grade in the English subject was more important than developing skills, the majority claimed that improving language skills was more important. Some participants stressed the importance of both skill learning and grades. Ikta expressed that “grades are not everything.” According to her, if her skills are not up to the mark, then grades alone cannot do anything for her. She continued that, for her, an adequate skill in English and getting good grades were on equal levels of importance. Peu also viewed both grades and learning to be important for conforming to the expectations of parents, societal pressure, and the job sector. She also added that developing English skills as well as attaining good grades was important for the dual needs of communication and pursuing higher degrees abroad.

One intriguing opinion was shared by Pitu, whose answer was partially different from the other participants. Pitu also favored the importance of leaning over grades. However, she also felt that learning is boosted when there were grades involved. In other words, she thought if she studied only for learning, she would forget what she had learned. Unless it was a high-stakes test, Pitu believed that students might indeed learn and remember the content but would not thoroughly practice it enough for being able to perform exceedingly well in exams. Thus, according to her, a balanced motivation between developing English skills and simultaneously pursuing high grades not only ensures better grades but also leads to better knowledge retention. Learning, she added, only for getting good marks was also not a good practice. Many might suffer in the future as they would not remember what they had learned. That is why learning for gathering knowledge, and also for garnering good marks, is dually important in order to become “ideal language users in society” (Pitu).

Discussion

The previous section has presented and analyzed the results of the study. This present section provides a holistic discussion of the results and relates them to the research questions.

Quantity and Quality of Preparation Linked to Language Development

In answer to the first research question—to what amount the SSC 2021 examinees prepared for their SSC English exam—the findings of this study illustrated that apart from two participants, all the other respondents took preparation for the SSC exam for at least 6 months. Even after the cancellation of the English subject exam, three participants kept on practicing English. These students who kept on studying were experiencing positive outcomes because of their continuous practice. These findings are similar to Hounscome's (2023) findings. However, research conducted by Utami (2022) and Desalegn et al. (2023) portray different results compared to the present one. Their findings specify that students' test preparation and purpose influenced their learning; but the current study shows that half of the SSC 2021 examinees did not take preparation at all after the removal of the English subject from their syllabus. However, for those students who did not study, the blame is not entirely theirs but the closure of the school because of COVID-19. In fact, Mesba's language tutor informed him that there would likely be no English exam in 2021 prior to the official announcement. Thus, the fault for less preparation lies not wholly on the students. As Loughlin (2023) says, instead of being a motivational element, tests had become the primary principle of pedagogy, and so with the removal of the SSC exam, even some teachers stopped encouraging students to study.

Now that the quantity of SSC 2021 preparation has been discussed, it is also pertinent to discuss how the preparation was done. Apart from the English textbook, *English for Today*, common supplementary materials included past question papers and suggestions from teachers. In fact, no participant hesitated when revealing that their English teacher and tutor provided specific essays, paragraphs, grammatical rules, and other topic suggestions. Only one participant, Ikta, said that her English teacher tried teaching her all the syllabus topics. This reliance on exam paper suggestions is characteristic of the exam-obsessed country of Bangladesh. For instance, Al Amin and Greenwood's (2018) survey on 216 secondary school English teachers in Bangladesh expose the fact that 10% of teachers have the tendency to teach only the things likely to come in the exam and 30% of them do not even touch the rest of the less necessary portion. Furthermore, research in the same field conducted by a number of researchers (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2023; Alderson & Wall, 1993; Maniruzzaman & Hoque, 2010; Tzagari, 2011; Smith & Rottenberg, 1991) show that English teachers are

responsible for the students' inadequate proficiency over English as they heavily rely on supplements and instructions that are given to students for practicing purposes only. Moreover, students are taught lessons that are important only for examinations instead of improving their communicative competence.

As for the purpose of preparation, most students did not study extensively, at least after the announcement of the auto-pass situation was made. However, not all of them admitted that they only regarded grades more important than learning. This can be related to the fact that interviews cannot always extract true feelings from individuals if those feelings are matters that they do not want to acknowledge to strangers (Randall et al., 2009). Alternatively, it may indeed be true that most SSC 2021 examinees had ethical interests at heart of studying for increasing their English skills instead of simply toiling for grades. Yet another intriguing finding pointed to the fact that despite the participants' insistence on the value of learning, it was seen that only those students who score high in English anyway were more focused on learning, whereas students with generally poor English grades were more concerned about attaining good grades (Grades vs Learning, 2022).

Impacts of the Auto-Pass Situation

Regarding the second research question—the impacts of the auto-pass situation in the immediate future—a variety of responses were found, and the impacts are closely aligned to the answer to the first research question about the quantity and quality of preparation.

First, all the participants agreed that long-time discontinuation from studies can cause low proficiency in English. Those who were concerned about this maintained English practice while others did not. Resultantly, after admitting into college, those who regularly did English exercises were not facing any obstacles in understanding the teachers' lectures. On the other hand, those who did not practice much were having a harder time dealing with class lectures and understanding the overall lesson. The sole outlier, Peu, does not face any problems because of her already developed command of English. Other than that, the study supports the notion that if the students do not engage in regular English practice, their proficiency level will be comparatively low from the active ones (Hounscome, 2023).

One hypothesis, out of 15, mentioned by Alderson and Wall (1993) includes the notion that a test will impact the way students learn. However, besides the test, students' own language skills also play an important factor in their preparation, as this study found that for those who had the tendency to score high in English, the quantity and quality of preparation did not matter much when compared to struggling students for whom preparation was essential. The case in

point was Peu who did not take much preparation but who is not currently facing any issues in English classes. However, Pitu, Ikta, and Zavira were struggling students in English, and despite their preparation, they continue to face difficulties at college even until now. Pitu specifically mentioned that she faced confidence issues due to not being able to keep up with college lectures. She also had to resort to referring to textbooks and other sources when doing her English lessons, a phenomenon explored in the literature on Bangladeshi education (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; 2023).

A final point to add is that all the examinees were either already enrolled at English coaching centers or were at least planning on joining one soon. This supports Al Amin and Greenwood's (2018; 2023) finding about Bangladeshi students flocking to coaching centers to ensure an enhanced grade. With the onset of the pandemic and nearly two years of no in-person classes and the SSC 2021 English exam void, it comes as no surprise that coaching centers are now such increasingly popular avenues. Evidently, this may be genuinely helpful to close the distance between the auto-pass students and those who had to sit for the SSC English exam in prior years.

Conclusion

In conclusion, despite the absence of the SSC 2021 English exam, many examinees studied as the auto-pass declaration came late. As most students did not study English after the exam cancellation notice, those who had already taken preparation for their exam by then experienced positive washback, whereas those who did not take much preparation experienced negative washback. Moreover, the purpose of the preparation was connected to the English proficiency level of the students. Due to the long-term break from their studies, students tended to forget things they learned. Subsequently, students' language development, even as basic as comprehension skills, was prone to fade over the lack of the high-stakes exam. In this context, the statement made by the educational policy of Bangladesh was one of the reasons for the shortcoming of the SSC results. The education system received particularly severe backlash because of the auto-pass situation that they imposed on the candidates. Indeed, Ikta, one of the participants, claimed that she could have secured a good grade if the exam was taken following the usual syllabus at the usual time. The impact of this exam void is specifically significant for struggling students and those who sought redemption from their JSC English results. Even now, some of these students are in precarious conditions at college as their low comprehension levels are hampering them in understanding class lectures.

One limitation of this study is the lack of data triangulation. Other data collection sources such as pre- and post-tests could have been taken to gauge the actual impact of the lack of the SSC English exam in 2021. However, pre-tests were impossible as the study was conceptualized following the SSC 2021 exam. Indeed, as the auto-pass situation is an event of the past, little can be done besides ensuring that these auto-pass students receive special attention from college teachers and others so that whatever lacking incurred due to the washback is alleviated soon. If nothing else, at least awareness of this auto-pass condition and realization of its folly should be kept in mind by the education policymakers and also the general public so that any potential future policy for crisis learning is more well-informed and better implemented. Another shortcoming is that the sample size was small. Yet, this study being qualitative by nature, participants' in-depth responses and following analytical discussion could perhaps shed some light on the issue. Future researchers are encouraged to delve deeper with a bigger sample and data to reveal more insightful findings.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Background Questions:

Name:

School:

Stream: Science/Commerce/Humanities

Educational Background:

No	RQ 1 (To what extent did the SSC 2021 examinees prepare for their SSC English exam)	RQ 2 (What impacts do the SSC 2021 examinees think the auto-pass situation will have regarding their English language skills in the immediate future?)
1	For how long did you take preparation for the SSC exam? I mean, for all subjects, not only English.	
2	Did you take any preparation on the English subject before its exclusion from the syllabus? If yes, then how long did you prepare yourself for the English exam?	
3	[To those who took some preparation at least] Do you think taking preparation on the English subject has improved your English skill?	
4	Did you use supplementary materials (such as test papers, guide etc.) other than the textbook for preparation?	
5	Did your English teacher give any suggestion before any English examinations? Please give a detailed answer about any suggestions that your teacher gave you.	
6		Since you as well as other candidates of 2021 SSC 2021 have auto-passed, are you worried that your English skills have decreased due to lack of regular practice?

7		After getting admitted into the college, do you take additional tutoring/coaching classes for taking preparation for English tests?
8		Are you satisfied with your auto-pass grade on English subject? Why or why not?
9		Do you face any trouble while going English classes in your college? If yes, then please elaborate what the difficulties are that you face in the class. And if not, then why not?
10		Do you think getting a higher grade in the English subject is more important than developing your skill in English? Why or why not?

Digital Literacy: A Question of Capacity and Safety in the Post-Pandemic Networked World

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Abstract

In this paper, I will address the need to get accustomed to digital literacy in the post-pandemic networked world in the Bangladeshi context. The unanticipated arrival of the deadly coronavirus radically changed the traditional learning zone by shifting it to digital platforms. As a result of this drastic change, in the post-pandemic era, many parts of education still use digital tools to sustain effective modes of knowledge production and transfer. However, digital forums are technology-driven, and the websites contain various unreliable texts. Using these digital tools and utilizing the knowledge effectively and ethically requires an inevitable enhancement of digital literacy among Bangladeshi students (and teachers) at the tertiary level. In this paper, I investigate the challenges related to the capacity and safety of digital literacy and offer recommendations to overcome possible hurdles. I have used the autoethnographic qualitative research method to establish my claim. Secondary data are collected from existing relevant literature to strengthen the research findings and offer a comprehensive analysis. Through this article, my targeted readers, primarily teachers and students at Bangladeshi universities, will get into a dialog and negotiate their positions to navigate digital literacy in their academic and professional areas of study.

Keywords: Digital literacy, capacity, safety, post-pandemic, distance learning.

Introduction

Before the sudden upsurge of Covid-19, teaching and learning in Bangladesh were mostly classroom-based. Although using digital tools has become one of the popular pedagogical strategies for many educators, a significant proportion of educational practitioners still prefer the traditional mode of instruction. We still believe a classroom can be interactive and engaging without using any digital tool. The reason behind this optimistic belief is not ominous. We have been digitally equipped but ignorant. The onset of the pandemic made us cognizant of our lack of digital literacy because “The field of education has also been one of the areas that has been rapidly and significantly affected by the pandemic” (Kasimoglu et al., 2022). The mode of education essentially switched to distance learning which we have still sustained for various educational purposes, especially in hybrid modes. This paper aims to investigate the challenges related to digital literacy in the Bangladeshi context in the post-pandemic era and provide recommendations for enhancing digital literacy among students and teachers at the tertiary level.

Literature Review

Distance learning is not a new concept. It dates to the 18th century when distance education “began in the form of education by letter, continued with radio, television, teleconferences, cassettes, faxes, video conferences, and finally, the internet” (Kasimoglu et al., 2022). With the emergence and usage of the internet across the world, the teaching style, defined as “teaching by letters,” has started to be recognized by many different names such as “learning at home,” “open education,” and “distance education” (Kasimoglu et al., 2022). Due to distance learning, knowledge “is no longer stored in deposits (libraries, archives) where it is necessary to go to keep it but is accessible through those same screens which are increasing its diffusion” (Rivoltella, 2008, p. 219). As a result, educators, learners, and researchers now get more opportunities to work in collaboration. Where traditional education offers teachers and students a chance to interact face-to-face, distance learning provides a newer and more innovative opportunity to communicate via technological tools and devices. To use these technological and digital tools for educational purposes requires a certain degree of literacy: digital literacy.

Literacy generally refers to one’s ability to read and write in different situations and contexts. In contrast, digital literacy refers to the capacity to use digital tools and platforms for seeking and offering knowledge. Wei defines *digital literacy* as “the ability to search, evaluate, and compose information and do tasks through digital equipment and internet in study, work and social life” (Wei, 2022, p. 2726). The idea of digital literacy was first defined by Paul Gilster

(1997), who claimed that digital literacy is “the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide variety of sources when it is presented via computers” (Lankshear, 2015, p. 9).

However, Gilster, in his 1997 book *Digital Literacy*, elaborately discusses the importance of knowing how to use digital websites and tools effectively and ethically. USAID shares “two pillars of digital literacy: capacity and safety. Capacity is the hard skills people need to access the internet and utilize variety of digital platforms,” whereas “Safety encompasses the soft skills of using digital tools safely” (USAID, 2022, p. 9). Capacity comes with a few challenges in possessing well-configured digital equipment, whereas safety issues arise concerning the ethical considerations involved. A multitude of web sources disseminates misinformation and misleading, unethical content. As a result, ensuring these sources’ credibility, reliability, and trustworthiness becomes challenging. Lankshear states that “Digital literacy involves interacting with information and interacting with information is about assessing its truth (or validity), credibility, reliability and so on” (Lankshear, 2015, p. 11). Therefore, it is crucial to be ethical and digitally literate when employing digital tools for educational objectives.

Emergence of Digital Literacy During COVID-19 Pandemic

The transition of the education system to online digital platforms resulted in a significant digital divide among teachers and primarily students. Half of the students needed digital tools. Also, the inadequate internet connection played a vital role in impeding learners' progress. The frequent interruptions of internet connectivity from both ends led to significant issues and disruptions. To overcome this challenge, many mobile phone companies, as we witnessed, offered a bundle of internet packages at low cost. Smartphones have become more affordable. Even to tackle the issue, universities like Brac University “built an e-learning platform of its own” (Iqbal, 2021). It temporarily built capacity among digital users and gradually came to a sustainable point.

The emergence of the pandemic has accelerated awareness in third world developing countries like Bangladesh regarding the importance of digital literacy like never before. COVID-19 catapulted the entire education system into remote learning. It is great that education systems swiftly decided to shift the traditional mode of learning to virtual and digital platforms to sustain the knowledge transfer process. Hobbs writes, “Participating in an online community provides a means to cultivate transfer of learning.” (Hobbs, 2008, p. 237). To ensure effective learning, universities, colleges, schools, UGC, and the government offered various trainings to empower best and inform teachers to use technology and digital media. Free or funded computer classes were offered to primary-level teachers. We, university teachers, also did

workshops on using Google Classroom and Zoom to conduct and record our live lectures. Although there were challenges in building capacity among the users, “there is satisfactory interaction in distance education among instructors and learners; the content is well-designed, and up to date, the instructors are committed, and trained with the skills and possess the required knowledge. (Adnan and Anwar, 2020, p. 46).

Even in the post-pandemic era, when many learners and students dealing with disability, mental and traumatic issues still prefer enhancing their knowledge through digital and virtual media, digital literacy becomes a means of education as a complement to the traditional mode of teaching and learning. For example, in all my Ph.D. courses at North Dakota State University, teachers have retained the option of Zoom classes for the students who cannot attend the classes in person. The university system ensures that the classrooms are well-equipped with digital multimedia support and that the educators are digitally well-literate. When the graduate students joined the department as graduate teaching assistants, the NDSU IT section offered thorough training on using classroom equipment to stay digitally sound. Both teachers and students, by the course of the pandemic period, have become digitally literate. Even in the post-pandemic era, submissions are still paperless for most cases. The university uses online platforms like Blackboard, TopHat, and Jamboard to help learners with online submissions and make their academic lives easier.

Given the substantial increase and widespread adoption of digital literacy, writing instructors and other teachers have embraced multimodal pedagogical approaches to accommodate students with various forms of impairment. In Bangladesh, when we first started teaching online courses due to the pandemic, we had to work almost double our office time. We were digitally equipped but needed to be literate. Everything was new to us. We prepared PowerPoint slides for conducting in-person classes during pre-pandemic slides. However, it was a whole new experience when we had to prepare an online class-based PPT lecture. I opted for the multimodal teaching style, which, as Pérez-Marín et al. define, “is the combination of multiple modes of knowledge representation such as oral and written language, visual, gestural, tactile, and spatial representations” (Pérez-Marín et al., 2022, p. 79). Many students lacked well-configured digital devices to participate in live online classes. Even when they possessed such devices, the internet connection was often insufficient to sustain a one-and-a-half-hour live-streaming Zoom class. Consequently, I prepared a thorough and precise PowerPoint presentation for each class.

However, creating PowerPoint documents may seem straightforward, but when used as teaching tools, numerous sensitive issues must be carefully considered. Individuals from the Arts and Humanities faculty were not previously exposed to “text design,” which encompasses

more than just knowing how to use MS Word for specific purposes. To create an inclusive and equitable learning zone for my students, I integrated diverse modes of texts, including audio and visual. I had to independently determine the visual layout of my PowerPoint slides and carefully consider how I should present myself in tone and delivery during my audio lecture. I knew that “The effective use of digital technology in schools also requires profound changes in teachers’ digital literacy” (Li & Yo, 2022, p. 3). Therefore, I remained teachable and worked hard to first literate myself digitally.

To prepare a PowerPoint document, we first consider its design. MS Office offers quite a good number of simple and eye-catching designs. Google has even many more. However, when choosing a design for a specific topic, the colors—the background and text—play a vital role. The choice of color depends on the genre, audience, purpose, and situation. As the presentation catered to an academic genre and targeted undergraduate learners as the audience, I opted for a predominantly light background in the slides. Robin Williams, in the seventh chapter of his book *The Non-designer’s Design Book* (1994), suggests, “colors tend to be either on the warm side (which means they have some yellow or red in them) or on the cool side (which means they have some blue in them) ... cool colors recede into the background and warm colors come to the front” (Williams, 1994, p. 103). By using appropriate colors and images, I did not only prepare study material for, let’s say, the Glorious Revolution, I understood and applied “basic principles of visual communication in order to design documents that are effective for their intended users” (Brumberger, 2018, p. 112). I felt glad that my students found those materials helpful. I may not use the same PPT lecture for classroom teaching because the situation is different. All situational awareness results from getting accustomed to the idea of digital literacy.

Concerns About Digital Safely

Digital literacy is a boon for aspiring researchers due to its vast potential and abundant opportunities for open and collaborative work. However, it can also become a bane if not used ethically and responsibly. Digital safety is a longstanding unresolved riddle in the networked world. When our education system adopted remote learning methods to sustain the progress of the students, learners in huge numbers took its disadvantage and used the tools unethically. We encountered and had to examine plagiarized manuscripts directly copied from many online sources. The teachers endeavored to humanize digital education by crafting creative questions. Despite these efforts, learners still resorted to copying answers from various websites. Kasimoglu et al. point out, “the rapid access to information leads distracts them from creativity causing individuals to be lazy as everything is prepared for them”

(Kasimoglu et al., 2022). Due to indolence and lack of proficiency in digital literacy, students inadvertently and, sometimes, intentionally commit this serious error.

Those periods evoke a sense of nostalgia! Nonetheless, after the global pandemic that profoundly disrupted societal norms, we have transformed a digitalized way of life, particularly in education. There are challenges to remaining safe and ethical while voraciously consuming digital materials. However, by actively seeking opportunities to recover from setbacks and reevaluating digital literacy as a valuable learning area, we can effectively harness digital tools to enhance our knowledge and skills to their fullest potential.

Concerns about Capacity

Adnan and Anwar suggest, “Online courses are provided by hundreds of institutions, but two problems exist. First, from a macro viewpoint, very little is established regarding the effects and efficacy of online education. Second, the capacity to successfully teach digitally is likely to differ based on the wide range of learning goals that guide our instructional and educational priorities” (Adnan & Anwar, 2020, p. 45). In that case, CCCC’s Position Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in a Digital Environment, which published assumptions and challenges in 2004—long before the pandemic hit the world—shows a few useful directives. The importance of becoming digitally literate is a vital concept in this statement. It guides educators to design courses that would “introduce students to the epistemic (knowledge- constructing) characteristics of information technology” and “provide students with opportunities to apply digital technologies to solve substantial problems common to the academic, professional, civic, and/or personal realm of their lives” (CCCC Position Statement 2004).

Moreover, first-year students in many Bangladeshi universities must take a core course in the Computer Science department. Unfortunately, it is not the same for every university in the country. Many English departments need to offer fundamental computer classes to English majors. I did the first year of my undergraduate program at East West University in 2011. I am glad I took the Basic Computer Skills course in my first semester there. The young faculty from the computer science department taught us basic computer skills. In the second year, I transferred my credits to ULAB, where I found students doing their computer classes in their first semester. Both universities’ English departments are undoubtedly, well-structured and outcome based. The foundation or core courses can build capacity among the learners.

However, many other universities do not offer general education courses, including Basic Computer Skills, to the students. As a result, students lack basic computer literacy, which also

creates a significant gap in their digital literacy. Thanks to the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh for taking measures and making many universities work on their syllabi following an outcome-based education system. As soon as these English departments implement a new syllabus, students will start to know, learn, and understand computer literacy. At least, the capacity to use digital devices for educational purposes will be ensured.

The aforementioned way is a lengthy process as it takes some time for the universities to implement the outcome-based syllabus and make the students better users of technological devices such as laptops, computers, and smartphones. Even for smartphones, it took a whole pandemic to make many users of smartphones understand and confess that smartphones can be a useful educational tool. Moreover, there has been a negative mindset among students, which is mostly caused by the generation gap between teachers and students. Many students considered their instructors inefficient and incapable of using digital tools in online classes. A Bangladeshi columnist Faisal Bin Iqbal published an article in *The Daily Star* in 2021 in which he mentions that the students “say most instructors do not know how to make use of the technology to conduct these classes. However, these students often forget that many of these teachers did not grow up surrounded by such technology” (Iqbal, 2021). Still, teachers did and still do what the CCCC statement (2004) suggests, that is to “provide for the needs of students who are place-bound and time-bound.”

Bridging the Gap

It is now a vital responsibility of the students to learn and the institutions to create appropriate learning zones to discuss, know and understand digital literacy to enhance their hard skills and soft skills digital literacy. Nonetheless, in the post-pandemic era, when some portions of education like thesis and dissertation are permanently shifted to digital media, understanding digital literacy becomes a pivotal issue. Students need to know how to participate effectively and critically in a networked world because only capacity is not enough as it does not ensure safety. NCTE's position statement, “Definition of Literacy in a Digital Age” (2019), raises a set of questions to evaluate and assess learners' capacity and sense of safety of using digital platforms as educational tools. A few of the questions are as follows:

- Do learners select, evaluate, and use digital tools and resources that match the work they are doing?
- Do learners analyze information for authorial intent, positioning, and how language, visuals, and audio are being used?
- Do learners find relevant and reliable sources that meet their needs?
- Do learners select and use appropriate tools and modalities for audience and purpose?

- Do learners take responsibility for communicating their ideas in a variety of ways with different modalities and clear intentions? (NCTE, 2019, para 6)

All these questions indicate that users' sense of ethics and responsibility are vital to learning and mastering digital literacy. When the question of ethics comes, consulting with ethically produced digital texts becomes essential. In the age of misinformation, a text's credibility matters as much as its existence. Teachers, while doing their research work, and students, while working on their educational project, must think of the ethical aspects of digital literacy more. Frank Baker comments in one of the NCTE position statements, "Understanding how to identify credible sources is a critical skill and an important step toward full digital citizenship" (Baker, 2021, para 23).

Understanding Digital Contents

Now the crucial questions are: How can we determine the credibility of a digital text? How can we know whether the source is credible and trustworthy or not? Many researchers have already worked on the credibility of online sources. For the students and young researchers, I may refer to the University of Texas-El Paso website, in which UTEP Connect publishes "4 ways to differentiate a good source from a bad source". It suggests that students should check the domain name of a website first. Among the three letter suffixes like -edu, -com, -gov, and -org, ".edu and .gov websites are credible," but it also asks students to "beware of sites that use these suffixes in an attempt to mislead" (UTEP Connect, para 2). Having a close look at the text and finding the author's information and date of publication is also important to determine its credibility. Students read and refer to websites like Wikipedia, Sparks Notes, personal blogs, social media posts, etc. UTEP suggests that these websites "can be used to fuel further research but shouldn't be relied upon as sources of dependable information" (UTEP Connect, para 7).

Purdue Online Writing Lab can be a great source of looking for citations and guidance. It also suggests that "While there is no universal rule for whether a website's domain extension makes it credible, it's important to know that .com, .org, and .net domain extensions can be purchased and used by anyone. However, the .edu domain extension is reserved only for educational institutions, and the .gov domain extension is only used by governmental institutions." (Purdue OWL, para 5). However, many websites have .org and still can be reliable as they are parts of government and educational affiliations. Now learners may know where to get the study materials for ethical research and which websites they might ignore.

Also, online databases can be confusing. However, sources like JSTOR are great for consulting and referring to secondary materials for supporting the research argument of a primary text. Students at ULAB, like students at a few other good-ranked Bangladeshi private universities, have access to JSTOR, which helps them emerge as aspiring researchers. JSTOR offers citations too, so it becomes easier for the learners to cite the source effectively. However, it is always important to double-check the citation style from digital guidebooks like Purdue OWL, which is a reliable source to consult APA, Chicago, or MLA citations.

All these practices make a learner a better and more ethical user of digital tools. These are part of digital literacy to be addressed by our students. Moreover, students' rhetorical awareness helps them opt for safer digital options as "Rhetorical invention in networked digital contexts arises from user interaction both with archives and with other users" (Eyman, 2015, p. 67). In dealing with a text digitally, students make the best choice when they are rhetorically aware of the text's source, author, purpose, and credibility. It is the teachers' job to make them aware of digital rhetoric, which is way beyond the classical idea of Cicero or Aristotle's rhetoric concept (incorporating Kairos, logos, ethos, and pathos). Making explicit links to e-safety is beneficial for the researchers' ethics and for ensuring a strong position against plagiarism.

Although terms like "digital" or "technology" do not sound like they belong to the Arts and Humanities faculty, it is high time we thought of including them in our discipline and across the conventional curriculum. Like Rhetoric, which has long been a subject of communication studies and later included in English studies, digital literacy deserves to be read, understood and taught in the discipline. Besides offering an introduction to basic computer skills course, universities can offer a course entirely on digital literacy to the students of all departments. Research is not department-bound. It is for all students. Therefore, a full-fledged course can be offered to the students.

Conclusion

When new teachers are recruited, they are offered various pedagogical training and workshops. In the post-pandemic era, knowing and understanding digital literacy and spreading knowledge among students must be a part of the job responsibility. Before informing the students about the safety concerns of digital literacy, we must expect a better result from their online research. Many techs savvy people need to be made aware of e-safety because this issue is not much discussed in the academic and professional spheres. Digital literacy, like writing, is a process and a collaborative work that requires the active involvement of the stakeholders who supply digital devices, the authorities who offer effective training and workshops on capacity building, teachers who would learn and then inform the students about it and students who would

finally implement the knowledge of digital literacy and emerge as efficient self-directed learners and researchers.

To conclude, enhancing digital literacy among teachers and learners goes beyond providing access to and training in building the capacity to use digital devices. It is no longer a sectoral issue in the post-pandemic era. While bringing unimaginable and unfathomable losses, the pandemic comes up with this blessing in disguise, for which now the learners can avail opportunities and acquire knowledge from many digital sources. It is indeed a global issue, but it is to be handled and tailored based on local needs, demands, and supplies. The public and private sectors must work collaboratively to ensure digital literacy among educators and learners. There is a proverb, "When you walk alone, you walk fast. When you walk together, you walk far". So, a collaborative march towards the way of digital literacy while ensuring its capacity and safety can make us, as a nation, go a long way and help us contribute our ideas and knowledge in the world forum that is also digitalized.

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Exploring Post-COVID-19 Challenges in Inclusive Classroom Interaction among Tertiary EFL Learners: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

The global pandemic has greatly affected tertiary EFL learners due to the emergency online shifts from the face-to-face (F2F) learning mode. The fever, trauma, anxiety, social distance, masking, global shutdown, freeze, digital divide, and augmented reality created through video conferencing have caused several psychological issues among learners. The post-pandemic uneasiness extended from the pandemic tenure among the learners has received less attention in the popular pandemic literature. So, a research has been conducted to explore the issues that EFL learners still struggle with managing themselves in inclusive classroom interaction. Through the lenses of critical pedagogy and social justice, the study has tried to concentrate on the post-COVID-19 challenges that obstruct learners' performance inside the classroom. These led them to perform unprecedented roles, making the inclusive classroom larger than during pre-pandemic times. This narrative inquiry as research design tries to delve into the inner struggles of five learners during the post-COVID-19 transitions from online to F2F classroom interactions. The study recommends solutions focusing on the L2 learners as essential stakeholders for their sustainable growth in higher education.

Keywords: post-pandemic challenges, new inclusive principles, classroom interaction, educational inequity, social justice

Introduction

The pandemic outbreak of COVID-19 has created disruptions in academia. But its after-effect is more disruptive than the visible attack of the SARS-COV-2 virus (WHO, 2020) among tertiary-level EFL learners. Experts have anticipated a 'tsunami of psychiatric illnesses' in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Tandon, 2020). According to them this large-scale event and its impact on mental health can create long term effects among these learners (see Galea et al., 2020). Extended imposed social isolation from outside stretches the avoidance behavior from inside of an individual for safety reasons. Along with other pandemic attributes, this leads to social withdrawal, lack of compassion, personal disconnection, and a sense of isolation and stratification. These make one suffer from anxiety and lead to more seclusion. COVID-19 has created all these for learners, especially at the tertiary level, who have suffered greatly as they missed their parents, mentors, peers, assessments, classrooms, and campuses during their maturation age (Kato et al., 2020; Nash, 2021).

This large-scale pandemic freeze, lockdown, social distance, sanitization, and augmented reality generated through the emergency shift to carry out new learning and teaching in distant mode has created several issues for learners in a higher education EFL context. Moreover, constraints on the ability to interact with peers and teachers have imposed segregation and thus have led to an extensive increase in feelings of isolation, loneliness, and the sense of division between the self and the other learners. Constant virtual presence through videoconferencing learning sessions, mask-wearing, and social distancing at home and from peers have augmented the learners' self into others, making them suffer from exclusion in many ways. Researchers have argued on the issues of sociality, mental health, new normal socio-cultural formations, interconnectivity, and interdependence:

... issues of sociality – how, under the new conditions, might people within and across communities relate to each other, and what new cultural and social formations might emerge in their aftermath. ... How might they lead to the emergence of a new kind of world society? (Peters et al., 2020)

In the wake of COVID-19's 'go viral' for safety reasons, learners suffered immensely from the pandemic's digital adaptation through virtual extension, isolation, and protection (Shrestha et al., 2022; Nash, 2021). Again, after the subsequent shifts, transitioning from online to face-to-face, learners face social, physiological, and psychological challenges in their post-pandemic new regular alteration. The digital and other 'divides' have developed a sense of exclusion among themselves, which still resists them from participating in classroom interaction that they used to have in the pre-pandemic time. Nevertheless, they are afraid of the risk of the

new possibilities of changes, insecurity, and a new dimension of adaptation even after the pandemic term is over.

Facing the new normal in place of the pre-COVID-19 background has made the mind ‘racing back and forth’ and long to return to ‘normality.’ Since turning around to the pre-pandemic ‘normality’ seems impossible (Roy, 2020; Neuwirth et al., 2020), it gives rise to many challenges for learning and teaching to accommodate the novel, during, and after situations that affected higher education with the post-pandemic attributes. Learners suffer from inertia, withdrawal, lack of confidence, attention, and interest after the closures are withdrawn. These, significantly evident among pandemic-affected learners’ classroom interactions, assessments, and even participation in classroom activities, have made EFL classrooms more inclusive and diversified. So, the post-pandemic classes have become full of challenges for the teachers and the learners to make classroom interactions more inclusive and participatory. However, details of these accounts of learners’ and teachers’ experiences of post-pandemic challenges are noticeably less evident in the available literature. Therefore, this study attempted to explore the challenges that learners and teachers are suffering from during this post-COVID-19 era. The study also made a journey on the possible way-outs regarding maintaining classroom interactions and inclusivity for the pandemic-affected learners. So, this research reports the findings of a study that explored EFL learners’ epistemic shifts and their challenges from online to FTF after the pandemic in the context of higher education in Bangladesh. The following section details the broader landscape of the context of this research—challenges of the post-COVID-19 in an inclusive EFL classroom interaction.

Post COVID-19 Landscape: Challenges of the Learners

According to UNESCO (2021), pandemic school closures have affected 94% of the world’s learner population. The limitations regarding movement and the imposed constraints on the physical-mental-social-self imposed by COVID-19 redefined the identity of the HE learners in a new way. Despite facing the physical and visible technological and viral barriers, the struggle to configure self-esteem and self-efficacy during the crisis moments of the pandemic and isolation made HE learners lose the ‘I’ in the social group of ‘We.’ This loss of the self-continued with the fear and trauma that COVID-19 brought to the human body. Learners suffered from detachment, and isolation in video conferencing sessions that obstructed them from flourishing and grow through the tangible and intangible resources of campus life:

In the online teaching and learning space we have already experienced the death of the vitality and vibrancy of the teacher’s body and students’ laughter; no longer shall a transgression happen between two students while the professor lectures. While the

virus has become mundane, the everyday, so have we all become barricading ourselves at homes, and not at the universities as the resistance used to (Peters et al., 2022).

The changes caused from 'zoomed in' and 'zoomed out' significantly affected the interaction that learners experienced in the pre-pandemic classroom. The movement of the body and the mind of the learners inside the four walls of the classroom, the campus, and the world beyond suffered from several interventions of social distancing and isolation. Moreover, the resistance and the anxiety of their caregivers they have experienced about this unknown has influenced their behavior in the most detrimental ways.

Social distancing in the social space was the most injurious experience for the learners. Living in the family as the member, learner, and test taker, many in one, made the learners unable to compare their capacity and potentiality with others. These overwhelmed/underwhelmed learners suffered from the lack of chances of using and exercising their social power to influence others or being influenced by others in their social interaction. This social stress and anxiety among HE learners are already a public health concern. Social disconnectedness created emotional disconnection during COVID-19, leading the learners to suffer from social and emotional anxieties. Scholars worldwide discovered the same experience among HE learners who still feel challenges getting back to the pre-pandemic era of co-existence (Drubas et al., 2021).

Academic stress is another area where learners face challenges 'as human encounters had decreased and negative academic behaviors had increased.' Learners had a relieving and curious encounter with online education at the initial stage of the pandemic closure compared to the situations of the pre-pandemic time. However, that effect brought disappointment and certain deficiencies among the learners due to the lack of interactions (Moralista, 2020; Karalis, 2020). In addition, learners suffer from academic stress as the changes in the HE environments and practices increased academic burden and expectation after the pandemic and the separation from school after the massive attack of the virus. Researchers emphasized that stress before and after the pandemic differs as classes and academic environments fundamentally change. This needs consideration to deal with this novel academic stress (Kim et al., 2023)

Inclusive Principles at Present

Inclusion refers to real learning opportunities and systems that value the equal access, participation, and contribution of students of all backgrounds, disregarding the abled and

disabled, race, color, and gender (UNICEF, 2021). Previously it referred to the inclusion of people with disabilities who could not receive equal quality education due to several obstacles in a normal classroom. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the inclusive classroom became bigger (Chua & Bong, 2022). During the pandemic and emergency remote teaching, many learners with or without disabilities could not receive equal quality teaching for several reasons. All learners lived in different geographic areas where internet connections worked equally. Access to the internet and connectivity was a privilege many learners missed during the pandemic term. Other factors, such as lack of electronic devices, spatial arrangements to follow virtual learning in their own spaces, and digital competence, also affected the inclusive classroom during the pandemic.

Furthermore, demographic factors, i.e., age, gender, income, race, location, and education, made variations among learners to adopt virtual classrooms among themselves. Also, teachers' choice of digital platforms to conduct classes often excluded learners from participating in the lesson. Several studies found that the measures of inclusivity—*affective, cognitive, behavioral, competence, and awareness*- were not maintained in many cases as teachers expected to do. To many, “digital language with which remote teaching actualizes, is by itself a decoding of the signifying language and produces ‘dividuals’ rather than individuals” (Deleuze, 1992, in Peters et al., 2022). That remote learning has made divides among learners was the concern of many researchers in pandemic and post-pandemic scenarios. They proposed that this pandemic has pushed the inclusion agenda even more strongly because marginalization happened in many ways during the pandemic term (Acharja, 2021).

To minimize the learning and achievement gaps due to several divides and obstructions and social-psychological marginalization of all types of learners, this post-pandemic large inclusive classroom needs to address environmental, structural, and attitudinal challenges to ensure the cycle of presence- acceptance-participation-achievement (Acharja, 2021).

Classroom Interaction

Regarding classroom interaction during the pandemic, researchers have found that learners were less willing to interact during online classes. However, online classes are more interaction convenient for many teachers than the face-to-face ones. According to Khan and Hasan (2020), interaction among learners, teachers, peers, technical support, teaching method, material, and support service facilitate learners' satisfaction with online learning. In contrast to face-to-face interaction, online classes are more supportive for learners to develop closeness among peers and teachers. However, during the pandemic lockdown time, learners' lack of interest to make interacting in online classes and their preference to face to face classes have

made the teaching-learning sessions more taxing and less attractive (Febrianto et al., 2020; Al-Tammemi et al., 2020).

The pandemic, the first massive global disruption in recent times, has made challenging experiences for academics and learners. Studying learner experiences during the pandemic is essential to be appropriately prepared for future disruptions in higher education (Bashir et al., 2021). Also, it is necessary to understand how the pandemic has shaped our learners, mainly how it affected their mental health and wellbeing across the general population (White & Van Der Boor, 2020).

Research Gap

While pandemic closure has given attention to the pedagogical and other shifts, it has bypassed learners' needs and training to address the Pandemic and post-pandemic changes. Few attempts have been made to facilitate learners and their spontaneous shift to virtual classrooms, managing appropriate online learning behavior and etiquette (Neuwirth et al., 2020; Bashir et al., 2021). Even after this ambiguous, complex, volatile, uncertain, unpredictable, 'the ever-present possibilities of insecurity, risk and relentless change,' four million learners from tertiary institutions in Bangladesh have had no direction on how to manage the post-pandemic disruption with their affected mental health and psychological unwellbeing, economic, digital and other segregation. Also, there is very little available literature on these post-pandemic challenges causing a silent 'tsunami' in the Bangladeshi tertiary EFL context. However, the Pandemic and its aftermath effects have already created a critical incident, and it needs to be handled critically by empowering learners and providing social justice. Hence the study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) How do tertiary learners narrate their experiences of the post COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2) Why do they feel challenges in classroom interaction after the pandemic?
- 3) How can these challenges be addressed in the light of social justice to maintain inclusivity in EFL classroom?

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two theories-- critical pedagogy (CP), where the emancipation of the disempowered, underprivileged, and oppressed is highlighted (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1989). This theory emphasizes individual and collective efforts. Participation seeks to bring changes, development, and improvements in every social member's individual and collective lives. The researcher has taken the learners as the participants to make the dialogues between the issues of during and post-COVID situations, and the oppressions of trauma, anxiety, social distance in a social setting, augmentation of reality created through virtual reality and thus struggling

now to manage with the transition to the post-pandemic that the global pandemic has brought to them and the world. CP allows teachers to critically analyze the existing practices and ideologies of second language teaching to develop alternative consciousness. This consciousness considers language teaching a critical socio-political process (Pennycook, 1999; Sharma & Phyak, 2017).

Another one employed here is the theory of social justice by Fraser (2009; 2012), which appeared in contrast to the conceptualization of what is mainly known as universal principles of fairness and equality after World War II (Rawls, 1972). Fraser's concepts of social justice circles around recognition, redistribution, and representation — 'Overcoming injustice, then, means dismantling the obstacles that "prevent people from participating on a par with others, as full partners of social interactions"' (Fraser, 2008). The social justice framework can be applied in the post-pandemic new normal education (Xiao, 2021) by redistributing or allocating resources to those with less. Recognition of justice by recognizing diversity and representational justice by empowering the learners to participate in education as active contributors can pave the course to justice. Although it is not possible to respond to everyone's needs, and also, as Fraser (2012) remarks, that ideal definition of social justice is not possible, one can, at least in theory, try to create access to resources, recognition for diversity, and empowerment of learners to have their voices heard. When their voices, causes, and concerns are addressed, the barriers of misrecognition, misrepresentation, and maldistribution of rights, opportunities, and resources will be gone. Moreover, social justice can be exercised in reality.

Research Design

This study uses narrative inquiry as the research method. Barkhuizen et al. (2014) state that narrative inquiry helps us understand language teaching and learning from the perspectives of teachers and students. Understanding human perspectives is now at the center stage of any participatory research that assembles the participants' personal experiences, beliefs, views, and attitudes through a moderated interaction (Kitzinger, 1994; Morgan, 1996).

Narrative inquiry studies an individual's experience in the social, cultural, and institutional setting where individuals' stories are generated, shaped, shared, and enacted with its three dimensions: spatiality, temporality, and sociality (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006). This inquiry space sheds light on the relational aspects to delve into participants' own and co-constructed experiences developed in a social setting. The stories of during and post-pandemic situations highlight the learners' experiences of the lived and the living time. Through inquiries, in collaboration with that of the researcher, the EFL learners' experiences and challenges have been better explored through the participants' stories. It has opened the inner world and the

struggles that they are facing now. These inquiries helped the participants retell and negotiate their position in the changed landscape to enrich and transform themselves and others. Thus, it is aptly called the 'pragmatic ontology of experience.'

Research Setting and the Participants

A private university in the port city of Bangladesh is the research setting. The participants, who first came to share their challenges, are five (one boy and four girls) learners from advanced semesters and two teachers of this university. The reasons behind selecting them are their availability and the chances of observing and interacting with them.

Data Generation

The researcher has used three data generation tools— written narratives, focus group discussion, and close observation of the participants. Discussions are the familiar sources to collect narrative data for a detailed exploration of an issue (Murray, 2018; Newby, 2014). As participants were the learners of the course the researcher conducted, they supported the study with close observation of them to generate data. A written narrative that learners share is the best record to explore the inner world of the participants. The researcher-directed narrative made learner participants inquire by themselves about the pre- and post-pandemic changes. It is different from regular dairy writing as it is produced for research on a particular problem and time (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Diary writing empowers the participants as they get a chance to edit and control what they narrate (Holliday, 1999). This study used structured diary writing that reported specific information, perceptions, and accounts that influenced factors and constructions of the challenges of their post-pandemic days.

Data Analysis

As data analysis tools, narratives analysis (Polkingthorne, 1995) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) are used. Narrative analysis (NA) chronicles personal experiences and observations and transports fresh insights to often familiar situations. Polkingthorne (1995) labels a narrative as a type of discourse composition that combines diverse elements, incidents, and actions of human lives 'into a thematically unified goal directed process'. They are highly interpretative construction narrating the subjective reality of an individual. Here the researcher analyses the data produced through the participants' narratives as they lived the phases and experienced the events of the COVID-19 pandemic. In thematic analysis, the researcher explored the data from experiential to critical dimensions through observing some aspects of a phenomenon (learners' lack of interest to study, lack of attendance). It helped the researcher develop a detailed picture of the phenomenon of the post-COVID situation generated

through the participants' narratives and their shedding light on those in the data analysis phase. It also supported the development of a critical and constructionist data analysis to identify the concepts, ideas, meanings, and assumptions that reinforce the explicit data content.

Findings

The findings of the study have been arranged into four major themes that describe how EFL learners suffer from anxiety and trauma, lack of interest and confidence to participate in classroom interaction. Also, the findings reflect on the teacher participants' observation on the learners' facing challenges to interact in onsite classroom environment that has made the post pandemic classroom more inclusive and accommodating one on their part.

Challenges of Interaction of Post-pandemic Time: Trauma and Anxiety

I want to let you know that I am a slow learner and it happened after pandemic and lock down. I am losing my memory; I slowly forget everyday incidents. There is a history of losing my memory. The main reason is my mental trauma I have been suffering for 2.5 years. So, I have a hesitation issue, I could not express it to others. I am noticing another problem in my mind—anxiety and overthinking. I could not concentrate on my study or any conversation. I shared it with my friends but got no solution. (Participant 3)

This learner suffered a lot while passing her locked-down days at home. Her prolonged social isolation has caused her to suffer from her physical and mental sickness. Also, her lack of training in handling online classes affected her learning and joining the classes. It was very much troublesome joining the online classes, and when the network was volatile, joining and leaving the classes was happening, and 'I was feeling like destroying the harmony of the classes. I felt ashamed of for this and said sorry every time.' This learner suffered from a fever and discovered that she had lost the capacity for memorization. This makes her very stressed now and anxious about her successful completion of graduation with a good grade.

Post-COVID Challenges: Attention and Memory Problem (from Teacher-Participants)

During those happy days when everything turned normal at the beginning of this year, 2022, some male-female learners shared their problems inside the classroom. They were not showing

any physical disability or any mental disorder in any way. One shared his reading comprehension problem, which was a problem for him before the pandemic. After the pandemic closures, he found it more severe and struggled to interact with peers, lessons, and teachers and follow teachers' instructions during the F2F (face-to-face) classroom. He felt concerned that it continued for a long time and hindered his participation in the final exam.

Another sixth-semester female student found her ADHD problem increasing after the pandemic. For this, she wanted to drop the course. However, it changes when she comes to the class and tries to continue her study. During the same semester, another student was trying to chase me after the class requesting me to upload lessons in Google Classroom as I did during pandemic closures. Her preference for those study materials was to help her learn easily for the preparation for the final term, as those materials were prepared in a bit easy way addressing the pandemic crisis the learners were facing during the school closures.

Related to attention and memory problems, some other learners voluntarily reported their challenges inside the classroom. Some learners reported that many classmates needed to attend classes, examinations and drop courses. Some of them who joined the class sometimes suffered from mood-switching that was not usual earlier.

These made the teacher think about the issues of whether pandemic closures, social distancing, the fever have made these changes or other issues are there. After a few months, when learners were having offline exams in the classrooms were suffering from the same problems and gradually lacked confidence and interest in participating in the test. This led them to use unfair means in the exam hall or drop the semester's final exam. Learners suffering from a lack of confidence, anxiety, stress, depression, and anger show behavioral changes due to the virtual classroom's social distancing and interactional constraints and the pandemic stresses.

Lack of Confidence and lack of Participation during the Onsite Shift

At first, it was like a stigma, a very dark, bad thing for the infected person and the family. I don't know how to describe those days of helplessness. We were treated as the aliens living in the human society. When one member was attacked with the fever other members had to keep that person in isolation. As an affected one, I know how much I suffered physically and mentally. The matter of study had become less important issue to me. (Participants 3, 5)

The pandemic took all learners' attention, from studying to living a life of uneasiness and discomfort to readjusting to the continuously changing mutation of the new normal. They could not give proper attention to their study. This learning gap creates challenges for them to participate in offline classroom discussions.

Participants reported that they did not enjoy the online classes, nor did they like to participate in the classes, for they did not have any physical presence of their friends in front of them, no interaction as before the pandemic. Their online class time is mainly passed with troubleshooting joining, and disconnecting matters. Since they had no experience of having those classes before time, they could not follow or enjoy the classes as the teacher had taken and wanted. This realization, along with other post-pandemic physical, mental, and situational changes, has made learners very much depressed and anxious about their study and their future. These have made them suffer from a lack of confidence when returning to offline classes.

Post-pandemic EFL Classroom: A More Inclusive and Accommodating One

COVID-19 and its disruptive effects on education could not provide learners with equal opportunity to join online classes. Anxieties were created due to the lack of resources to join the classes, lack of interaction among peers and the outside world, lack or gap of communication, lack of moral and psychological support, lack of basic training for facing the pandemic's technicality and severity, lack of mental ventilation hours or talk time apart from class-hours have made learners suffer a lot both physically and mentally. From two teacher participants' perspectives:

Yes, we made no or a very little space for our learners' ventilation during the pandemic time. They wanted a lot to discuss inside classroom, and I can remember when asked about the fever and their isolation, about other family members they felt tempted to start talking on the issues. But that was not all, they should have been given more time to talk so that they could open their minds to us and could get some relief. (Teacher-participant 1)

You know, pandemic was a new experience for us also. We did not even have, apart from training for conducting online classes, any exposure for managing our learners' mental health during the sudden attack of COVID-19 time. This limitation has made our present time after pandemic a challenging one and we should think for alternative, post pandemic pedagogy as we did during pandemic time. (Teacher-participant 2)

Assisting learners psychologically through a short, introductory training session to manage online resources and classes to pass the pandemic days with positive thinking could have been done by providing teachers with training and workshops for counseling learners to boost their mental health, morality, and active participation. Arranging workshops with psychological experts could have made the pandemic more psychologically sound both for the learners and the teachers. Issues relating to joining online classes and learners' keeping the microphone and video camera off despite asking them to open those several times during pandemic class time have made teachers concerned about learners' interactional and attitudinal matters. Primarily during exam time (oral test), learners used to keep their camera off for their internet issues that, according to them, were lagging for opening the camera. During the pandemic, these vexed teachers a lot and made them think of learners' incapability or immorality in managing online platforms as learning management systems (LMS). This emerging situation demands that the post-pandemic classroom be more accommodating, diversified, considerate, and caring. Since learners had no training to face the pandemic and its effects as the new normal, it is necessary to support them to get into the new classroom with adequate welcoming gestures.

Discussion

This study explored how the pandemic affects the post-pandemic EFL inclusive classroom interaction in higher education in a low or under-resourced country like Bangladesh. Guided by the critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1989) and social justice theory (Fraser, 2009; 2012), this study has found that during the pandemic, online classes, equity, fairness, and thus social justice was seriously affected (Rashid et al., 2022). It happened due to the abruptness of the situation, technical issues regarding accessibility to online learning and teaching, and learners' physical –mental health conditions for COVID-19 affected both physical and mental health, wellness, and behavioral aspects of the learners.

These marginalized EFL learners need to be accommodated in the post-pandemic inclusive classroom interaction to empower them with the awareness that can transform them to raise their voices against the web of misframing, misrecognition, and misunderstanding. So, 'participatory parity' and social justice can be achieved by redistributing equal rights, opportunities, and resources of recognition and representation of equal participation (Fraser, 2009; 1977).

Post-COVID-19 Inclusive Classes in the Light of Social Justice

In a focus group discussion (FGD) with the teachers— ‘How can the post pandemic challenges be overcome in the light of social justice?’ — it came out that they are trying to support learners in the domains of affective, behavioral, cognitive, competence, and awareness:

When my learners are back in F2F classroom, I am trying to manage and accommodate my learners in the most positive ways. So that they would not feel that last two and half years were fruitless. With the positive vibe, I am conducting the classes and taking care of my learners’ wellbeing inside classroom. Now I have increased the interaction turns with them although they can’t make a total delete of the pandemic days’ memories. (Teacher-participant 1)

Teachers are trying to support their learners to meet the five domains of an inclusive classroom—affective, cognitive, behavioral, competence, and awareness (Mahat, 2008; Gilligan, 2020; Green et al., 2020). Although they lack training on managing the learners’ affective factors, they are trying to maintain those from their common sense and social responsibilities as a teacher. I can manage it to the level when I think situation is under control. Since teachers underwent similar experiences regarding the fever and the trauma that it brought for an individual, they can think of the learners by putting them in their shoes. The memories of the pandemic days are still fresh in the learners’ minds what they feel is difficult to erase. In the post-pandemic inclusive classroom, this mental health issue of the learners needs to be addressed with equal care and sensitivity (Durbas et al., 2021) since ‘University students are a risk group for mental health disorders with high rates of psychiatric morbidity, primarily depression, and anxiety’— (Stewart-Brown, 2000). To ensure and support better community health, prevention and reduction of mental health problems are essential since HE learners at this point of time pass a sensitive time regarding psychosocial development and maturation. Regarding mental health, researchers claim that HE learners show a certain amount of stress. However, this factor is found to be highest during and after COVID-19 periods and the disruption it brought to the mental and academic health of the learners.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Creating equal opportunity inside the classroom during this post-pandemic time requires multiple means of engagement, representation, action, expression, and assessment. Experts recommend a universal design for learning (UDL) in education. The design ‘is based on the architectural concept of Universal Design in which spaces are built to be as accessible as

possible by everyone, regardless of disability, age, or any other factors' (Swell & Sugisaki, 2021). This addresses the variability of learners and their needs—

- Offering variety of engagement technique—listening to or reading a passage in a group-whole class-individual work, variety of interactions allows learners to be engaged in the lessons.
- Providing inputs in multiple forms—listening to the dialogues instead of reading, writing new words in vocabulary notebook, role play, adding definitions or simple drawing/ framework/charting can offer learners multiple ways to create inputs.
- Allowing learners to multiple choices to make the outputs—Learners need to choose tasks among several assignments i.e., writing and commenting on a research report, making a podcast, compiling a photo essay, poster presentation, making video on learners' local delicacies, poets or historical events.
- Providing multiple avenues of assessment—To evaluate learners multiple modes can be used by providing formative for learning, summative of learning and alternative assessments—portfolios/processfolios, project work for lifelong learning (Rapp, 2014; Rapp & Arndt, 2012).

Recommendation and Future Direction

In the daily Prothom Alo, a popular newspaper in Bangladesh, on October 9, 2022, published a survey that reported 76% of learners suffer from depression and lack of confidence due to the pressure they feel during this post-pandemic time. The report says, as the finding of the study remarks, that long gaps in studies, digital divides, low achievement during the pandemic time, high expectations from teachers and other stakeholders to fill the gaps caused by the pandemic, and several technical and non-technical issues have made learners feel less interested in continuing study. After the pandemic, the situation seems more challenging for them as they cannot or feel shaky about sharing their mental conditions and un-wellbeing with teachers and others concerned. Several shifts from F2F to online from offline have caused critical situations for learners to manage this post-COVID-19 situation. These led many of them to the path of self-destruction or suicidal attempts that requires some emergency initiatives to face the situation from different perspectives.

Additionally, this report suggests following a few steps, the same as what came out from the study in the newspaper, to stop the negative attitudes of the learners and the teachers in this

novel disruption of time. Among them, it recommends ensuring a proper learning environment, counseling learners about positive aspects of life, less pressure to cover the gap in studies and every human solution to the learners' problems as human beings. Learners recommend the blending and hybrid mode of learning even after the COVID-19 pandemic. They want to continue using digital artifacts as they received training during the pandemic. Also, they have understood the usefulness of those amenities in real life that causes satisfaction of learners to adopt technologies in higher education (Shreshtha et al., 2020).

COVID-19 has allowed the world to use and rethink the new digital, online, and pedagogical possibilities. At the same time, it has given opportunities to rethink education's primary purposes and to renew the vision of education that can harness the development of democratic and just societies. So that EFL classroom can accommodate all learners and their needs.

Inclusion is the foundation of social justice. Without an inclusive mindset, one is likely to, for example, turn a blind eye to inequality in access to resources (redistributive justice), impose uniformity and standardization in the curriculum at the sacrifice of socio-cultural diversity, with mainstream stories prioritized over marginalized views and experiences (recognitive justice) and discourage full and equal participation of all in co-creating learning and teaching (representational justice) (Xiao, 2021).

Social justice and critical pedagogy can be taken not as theories but as pedagogical practices to allow learners to join the dialogues that allow them to be recognized, represented, and redistributed equally (Phyak & Sharma, 2017). This global pandemic has been a portal, a gateway from one world to the next, offering options to return to the past of the carcasses of prejudice, hatred, avarice, data banks, dead ideas, rivers, and smoky skies. On the other point, it offers one to move forward with a light little luggage to an imagined changed world of more possibilities and opportunities for democracy, justice, and assurance of inclusivity of all.

Implication and Future Direction

The study explored the challenges of EFL learners in post-COVID-19 settings in the HE context in Bangladesh. The study implies that attending to the psychological challenges of the learners is essential to make a healthy growth of the nation. Along with this, the study also recommends further research on the challenges of the post-pandemic demographic-gender context. Also, the study can be done exclusively on the teachers to explore other perspectives on the post-pandemic challenges.

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CLT in Online Classroom: A Post-pandemic Study on the Tertiary Level Practitioner & Participants of Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the feasibility of implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the context of online classrooms. It examines how classroom activities and available resources can be utilized within an existing online platform to meet predefined objectives while defining the roles of both educators and learners. Employing a blend of quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study evaluates its findings in the context of existing literature and the recent shift towards online education, caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Amidst this educational transformation, CLT, with its focus on fostering communicative skills, takes center stage. The study aims to determine the effective implementation of CLT in online classrooms, probing its suitability within this evolving educational context.

Keywords: CLT, communicative competence, online teaching-learning, classroom interaction, teacher's role, student's role

Introduction

It goes without saying that the recent pandemic has physically divided individuals while virtually bringing them closer together. More than other professionals, the virtual world has helped students and instructors to connect throughout this crisis. Thus, most of the institutions of tertiary level concentrated on online class using different kind of platforms and apps like Zoom, Google Classroom, Meet, Facebook and Messenger (Agarwel, 2020). According to the direction of UGC, most of the private universities in Bangladesh started online classes to continue the academic activities during Covid 19 pandemic from March 26, 2020. Traditionally, on campus class was the only way of teaching learning in Bangladesh over the decades. With the restrictions and lockdown, all universities and colleges focused on virtual teaching and learning system that was very new experience for the practitioners and the participants in Bangladesh. As a result, both the practitioners and the participants in online class tried hard to get accustomed to this new trend. While the majority of university students and teachers in Digital Bangladesh swiftly embraced digital technologies, the journey was not without its share of challenges in ensuring widespread successful utilization. So, there was a mixed reaction from students and teachers (Sarker, 2021). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerges as an effective approach in this context, as it aptly addresses essential communication objectives. Educators commonly aspire to create truly “communicative” classrooms where students engage in cooperative tasks and activities, often referred to as classroom activities. These activities often necessitate extensive use of pair work, group work, and foster collaborative problem-solving rather than a rigid focus on linguistic form. Within these activities, the teacher’s role evolves to that of a facilitator and a continuous monitor, intervening only as necessary, and subsequently offering feedback on the outcomes of communication, including potential post-activity language performance improvements through error correction. During the adaption of CLT in an online class room teachers cannot make sure of the fact that all students have understood the entire discussed topic properly (Amir, 2022). To get maximum benefits from CLT in online class, social interaction can be created by situational conversation, public speaking, discussion, role play, pair work etc. Therefore, teacher must take several effective measures to make students motivated in learning (Amir, 2022). In the swift transition during the COVID-19 pandemic, electronic resources and apps that were utilized by tertiary-level students and teachers in Bangladesh's classrooms proved to be adaptable and numerous. Consequently, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) became an integral part of online education at the tertiary level, emerging as a new trend and method. This paper seeks to investigate how CLT in the online classroom context facilitates learners in adopting a communicative approach to achieve the desired objectives of communicative competence and skills.

Research Questions

This paper mainly examines and investigates the following questions.

1. To what extent a teacher's role can be fulfilled in an online classroom?
2. To what extent a student's role can be fulfilled in an online classroom?
3. To what extent, the available online materials, technology and the classroom context contribute to the fulfillment of achieving the objectives of communicative Language Teaching (CLT)?

Literature Review

The COVID-19 pandemic unleashed an unparalleled wave of disruption across all facets of human existence. It upended our daily routines and ushered in new norms, including lockdowns and quarantine measures. Notably, by April 2020, as reported by UNESCO, 186 countries had implemented nationwide lockdowns, impacting approximately 73.3% of the global student population (UNESCO, 2020). UNESCO recommended distance learning and open educational application during the closure caused by Covid -19 to eradicate the interruption of education and as a result many institutions especially all universities went for online class (Shezadi, 2020). Likewise, Bangladesh imposed closure of educational institution from 17 March, 2020 and continued to 2021 affecting 38 million students and about 1 million teachers (Bank, 2021). Most of the universities in Bangladesh shifted to online class during the nationwide closure using available platforms like Google classroom, Zoom, Face book Live, Google Meet and recorded video and audio (Matus, 2020). Hence, a significant pedagogical shift transpired, transitioning from the traditional offline mode to the online realm, from physical classrooms to virtual platforms, and from face-to-face meetings to the virtual arena of webinars for teaching and learning. (Mishra, 2020).

Generally, online class is a method of education that is delivered and administered using internet and technological device. Online learning can be distributed in numerous groups on the basis of the quantity of students who can learn in synchronous and asynchronous ways (Bao, 2020). Traditionally online classes are considered an alternative to on campus classes in tertiary level but it has been highly adopted in Covid-19 pandemic period. The constraints of pandemic opened a window for the educators to teach targeted concepts as a new strategy (Lockee, 2021). Students and educators from various universities in Bangladesh encountered fresh challenges in adapting to and participating in online classes. The principal impediments revolved around the unreliable availability of internet and electricity, making it difficult to sustain consistent connectivity and focus on comprehending lessons, which emerged as significant obstacles in the context of online education in Bangladesh (Al-Amin M, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), renowned for its popularity and inclusivity in education, evolved into an intriguing and innovative process when integrated with technology, marking a noteworthy development in teaching and learning practices.(Rouf, 2022). Communicative Language Teaching is considered as an approach rather than a method. It refers divers set of principles that reflect a communicative view of language and language learning and that can be used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures (Rodgers, 2001). For CLT, the goal of learning a language is using it effectively for “real communicative needs, rather than simply to provide learners with the knowledge about the grammar system of language” (Pham, 2007).CLT places emphasis on collaborative classroom activities, shifting away from individualistic learning approaches. In this method, the teacher's role transforms into that of a facilitator, guiding students to develop fluency in language use. Learners actively participate in interactions through classroom activities where they negotiate meaning, employ communicative strategies, rectify misunderstandings, and endeavor to prevent communication breakdowns, fostering a dynamic and engaging language learning environment (Richards, 2006). In this approach, classroom tasks are designed in such a way that they can be practiced in pair or groups. It encourages learners to be familiar with the “creative, unpredictable and purposeful use of language in communication...to help the learners get ready for so-called real-world communication” outside the classroom using information gap activities, drama techniques, games, role play and scenarios to sustain the learner’s motivation and interaction (Kumaravadiévelu, 2006).

Even, this technique has been used worldwide for four decades since 1970s (Brown, 2007). It has been proposed that communicative aptitude embraces the linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic and strategic competence of an individual’s need for effective communication (Hymes, 1972). According to Van Nguyen (2010) CLT in online class provides an “environment in which a student interacts one or more collaborating peers to solve a given problem, mediated by computer or internet including of its communicative facilities by using zoom and discord to conduct synchronous online learning” (Van Nguyen, 2010). Using CLT in foreign language class is also a difficult task especially when the class is online because it is very difficult to integrate all the relevant things like real classes such as life, culture, history intending to develop teaching skill and foreign language skill (Savignon, 2007). Despite these difficulties, CLT in online class appeared as paramount importance in Covid-19 pandemic time not to halt the normal flow of interaction between teachers and students rather than to mimic the real-life communication with the engagement of technological tools such as Zoom, Google Meet and Discord (Teh, 2021). Interestingly, it is found in a study of Vurdien (2019) that CLT approach can bring positive result and attitude from learners through videoconferencing though it appeared somewhat cold because of lack of face-to-face interview and personal contact (Ng, 2020). In this approach, teachers work as a guide and motivate

students to acquire academic knowledge as well as the communicative skills. Teacher is mainly responsible for creating a better environment to engage and participate in classroom (Paul, 2022).

Another point is that Implementation of CLT in online classroom is quite a challenging task, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh. During the pandemic, there was a situation where teachers and students started their online teaching without any preparation following the direction of Ministry of Education and University Grants Commission as an alternative way of imparting education (Hossain, 2021). Challenges of adapting CLT in online classroom have become acute because of the “lack of trained and competent teachers, faulty assessment system and shortage of supplementary and bridging materials” (Rasul, 2019). In Bangladesh, conducting online classes during the pandemic presented greater challenges compared to traditional classrooms, primarily due to technological constraints, limited internet accessibility, the digital divide, technophobia, and the absence of conducive learning environments (Rouf M. A., 2022). Except proper management, “computer technologies do not foster two-way interaction” between the students in Bangladesh. This problem is very common here in learning English language skills for some crucial issues like lack of proper assessment or test, effective course design, teaching approach, dedication and feedback session (Haque, 2022). Despite these challenges, students and teachers in Bangladesh took CLT as an appropriate and effective approach that is also found in a study of Pamela Gloriez who supported CLT in online class with sufficient platform media and internet (Gloriez, 2022).

During post pandemic period it works as one of the alternatives to offline class or on campus class. For CLT, online classroom can improve education equity by providing learning opportunity to wider population at a lower cost by ensuring a good interaction for learners (Erwani, 2022). It is also true that online teaching is mostly teacher oriented which is contrastive to CLT because of the lack of in-depth study and practical activities (Yang, 2020).

The literature has emphasized different factors which provide the basic framework to realize the perception regarding CLT in online classroom. Researchers have also focused on potential impediments for getting maximum benefits from online education, though many studies have not intended to trace reaction of the application of CLT in online class from different respondents’ groups of university students and faculty members in the Bangladeshi context. This paper will fill this gap drawing insights from the literature in hypothesizing the problem, exclusively concentrating on the opinion of two respondents’ groups on the use of CLT in the online classes for higher education in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, the study has used the following factors that are affecting the online classes based on the perception of CLT for tertiary level in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study were the undergraduate students of Bangladesh. It also included the teachers from the different universities of Bangladesh. In total 15 teachers and 146 students were presented to give responses to the questionnaire. Participants were selected randomly based on convenience and purposeful sampling. Two FGDs (focus group discussion) have been conducted involving the students from different semesters. The reason behind this is that both the teachers and the students were the core of the whole process and their real-life experiences and perceptions will be much more accurate and will be much more needed to evaluate the effectiveness of CLT in online classroom. So, this selection of participants provided a fair representation of the target group.

Instruments

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used in this study. To assess the effectiveness of CLT in the online classroom and to gauge the attitudes of both teachers and students toward this virtual learning environment, a dedicated questionnaire was meticulously developed. A five-point Likert scale was used ranging from very to not at all. The responses were rated as very =5, moderately =4, normal/neutral=3, slightly=2, and not at all/never =1. A unique technique was developed from Icy Lee's (2008) instrument but did not blindly follow Lee's (2008) instrument rather a modified questionnaire was used to make it more appropriate. First part of the questionnaire includes the demographic information and then it includes questions related to the broad research questions. For qualitative part a questionnaire containing 5 open ended question had been developed and the data was collected through FGD. Both the questionnaires have been attached in appendix.

Results

The research results that demonstrate how well CLT has been adapted for use in online classrooms are shown in Table 1-3. The data has been presented from three different perspectives to make it easier to understand. The extent of CLT's usefulness in an online classroom will be determined by the statistics supplied here. The statistics demonstrates the viability of online classes in fulfilling the roles of teachers and students. Each table focuses on one of the four main components that were utilized to observe the classroom, namely feedback, classroom activities, speaking and listening practice, and classroom interaction. Here are the percentages, means, and standard deviations for each response on the Likert scale.

Table 1: Students’ role and teacher student feedback

	Not at all(1)	Slightly(2)	Normal(3)	Moderately(4)	Very(5)	Mean	SD
	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)		
How interactive the classes are?	8.60 (13)	16 (23)	46.9(68)	12.3 (19)	16 (23)	3.109	2.796
How frequent the teachers give feedback in the classroom?	1.2(2)	2.4 (4)	13.4 (20)	22 (31)	61 (89)	4.376	3.951
How frequent the listening and speaking are practiced in the classroom?	11 (16)	20.7(30)	35.4 (52)	22 (32)	11(16)	3.013	2.714

SD: Std. Deviation %: Percentage N= Number

The values presented in Table 1 represent the extent of students’ role that can be fulfilled in the classroom. The mean values for the classroom interaction, online content, and teacher-student feedback are 3.109, 4.376, and 3.013, respectively. It shows how engaged and involved the students are in the online classes. Additionally, it states that students participate voluntarily in classroom activities, just as they would in an offline class. The majority of students (46.9%) reported receiving enough feedback from the instructors throughout class. Additionally, it is clear that the majority of pupils have easy access to materials. Despite certain contradictions in the value provided in number three on the practice of speaking and listening in the classroom, it can be argued that the students' duty can be fulfilled in this situation.

Table 2: Teachers’ Role and Student-Teacher Feedback

	Not at all (1)	Slightly (2)	Normal (3)	Moderately (4)	Very (5)	Mean	SD
	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)		
How involving the classes are?	0 (0)	12.5 (2)	25 (4)	37.5 (5)	25 (3)	3.642	3.251
How effective the classroom activities are?	0 (0)	2 (2)	23 (4)	5 (2)	70 (6)	3.857	3.505
How effective the student-teacher feedback is?	0 (0)	25(4)	37.5(5)	37.5 (4)	0 (1)	3.142	2.751
How effectively the students need can be attained in the classroom?	0 (0)	50 (6)	37.5 (5)	12.5 (3)	0 (0)	2.785	2.360

SD: Std. Deviation %: Percentage N= Number

Table 2 similarly demonstrates the breadth of the teacher's responsibilities in the classroom. A significant portion of the practitioners (37.5%) expressed their perception that the online classes were moderately engaging, suggesting a balanced viewpoint. Notably, the data indicates positive sentiments regarding student-teacher engagement, classroom activities, and feedback,

with mean scores of 3.642, 3.857, and 3.142, respectively. However, the statistics present a contrasting perspective when it comes to satisfying the needs of students. The median score of 2.785 suggests that while student engagement, class participation, and feedback are reasonably effective, practitioners appear less satisfied with their ability to address the students' needs adequately. In line with the research findings, it appears that online classes may fall short in sufficiently meeting the diverse needs of students.

Table 3: Material, Technology and Classroom Context

	Not at all (1)	Slightly (2)	Normal/Familiar (3)	Moderately (4)	Very (5)	Mean	SD
	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)		
How familiar the technologies are?	2.4 (4)	4.9 (7)	53.7 (78)	11 (16)	28 (41)	3.568	3.198
How smooth the communication process (internet or other channels) was?	0 (0)	12.5 (2)	37.5 (5)	37.5 (5)	12 (2)	3.500	3.093
How would you rate your confidence level after a moderate (300 minutes) session of online classes on each skill (listening, reading, writing, and speaking)?	8 (12)	15.9 (24)	48.9 (71)	21.6 (31)	5.7 (8)	2.993	2.624

SD: Std. Deviation %: Percentage N= Number

The information in table 3 demonstrates how important materials, technology, and the classroom setting are to attaining CLT objectives. The data presented in the table demonstrates a favorable position (mean 3.500 and 3.568) with regard to the communication method utilized in teaching and learning as well as the usage of technology in the classroom. But the findings (mean 2.993) on the pupils' degree of confidence are somewhat inconsistent. The majority of the students' responses (53.7%) indicated that they were familiar with the apps and other platforms when they were questioned about the technology utilized to conduct the classes. Again, when asked about the teaching and learning process, the practitioners claimed it was easy on both sides. However, the students gave an average response when questioned about their level of confidence in their ability to communicate. The majority of students (48.9%) chose 3 out of 5 when asked to rate their degree of confidence.

Discussion

The outcome makes it clear that students participate in the classroom in a very involved and active manner. They enjoy and find online classes interesting. The teacher provides them with adequate feedback as well. Despite these encouraging trends, the data also revealed some inconsistencies in the techniques used in the classroom. When we dug deeper into the problem and asked the students to elaborate, they gave us the explanation that they were unable to sustain a constant connection with the classes. They said that some issues, such as an unstable internet connection, load-shedding, and noise in their home, prevented them from continuing. A few of them mentioned not having the right equipment for class attendance. A participant residing in a remote area of Bangladesh shared her challenges, noting that although she possesses all the necessary gadgets and technologies for online classes, the weak signal reception remains a persistent problem. Another student recounted having to travel to a nearby market, the only location with reliable network signals, to attend lessons. Despite these connectivity challenges, the data underscores that the fulfillment of the student role in an online classroom can be achieved to some extent. Thus, we conclude the response to the first research question. Similarly, the practitioners also reported a good outlook on the learning environment in the classroom. The majority (53%) of them reported that the lectures were interesting and that they were able to make the in-class exercises interactive. Although group work and duo work were first difficult, they began to see progress after two to three classes. The pupils first stayed in groups for class activities, just as they had in the past in the traditional classroom. And over time, they have begun utilizing Google Meet and Zoom features like the room and others. In online classes, the students had to present in groups. Despite some encouraging trends, there are still significant problems. Most of the practitioners admitted that though classroom activities were successful, the needs of students could not be adequately met in an online classroom due to a number of factors. As a result, fewer than 50% of students participated in some classes. Secondly, due to the remote nature of the connection between teachers and students, instructors encountered challenges in monitoring and engaging students who were not actively participating in class. Consequently, some students fell behind, indicating a gap in meeting their educational needs.

Despite not surpassing the 50% threshold, student engagement in online classes was notably higher compared to traditional classes. This heightened engagement attributes to the perception that the online classroom provided a more comfortable and engaging environment, as students were not required to face the audience directly. Interestingly, students actively participated in classroom activities, even with the psychological comfort of feeling hidden and shielded. One student expressed feeling more comfortable in the online classroom, where their interactions were not as direct as in a traditional setting. Therefore, it can be inferred from the

data that teachers were effectively fulfilling their role in the online classroom. Consequently, the second research question finds resolution.

The majority of participants also expressed satisfaction with the technology and learning environment in the classroom. The majority of participants said the apps used to conduct the classes were known to them. Additionally, they noted that the apps were highly user-friendly and simple to use, thus they encountered no difficulties. Additionally, the teachers assisted the students in locating the necessary materials. The practitioners acknowledged that they occasionally supplied resources or the source of materials. But when questioned about the improvement of their communication abilities, the majority of participants (48.90%) awarded it a three out of five rating. This discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that students were more accustomed to online communication as opposed to in-person interactions. In light of this explanation, it becomes apparent that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) exhibits a degree of effectiveness, despite the challenges it may encounter.

Limitation

This study had several limitations. Firstly, the cross-sectional nature of the collected data posed a challenge, as it made establishing causal relationships between variables difficult. Additionally, the survey was conducted with a relatively small number of participants across diverse universities in Bangladesh, which might limit the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the research did not explore other potential factors influencing online learning, such as the psychological and economic aspects affecting students during the pandemic.

Conclusion and Recommendations

During the pandemic online class has created a paradigm shift in the field of education all over the world. In Bangladesh, it also has become an alternative method of educational instructions from the pandemic time. In the past decades, CLT has captured the interest of all parties involved in the teaching-learning process in this country and it has been used in online classroom during pandemic. This paper has explored how CLT in online classroom has bridged with the traditional education system that was revised and supervised during the Covid period. This paper also has found that role of teachers and students in online class was crucial to acquire communicative competence for the learners. There is no substitute for teacher-learner and learner-learner contact because communication is the key goal to be achieved in this strategy. Despite the fact that the pandemic period hindered normal face-to-face interaction, it brought everyone together online to continue the teaching-learning process. This study investigated the efficacy of CLT in online learning, particularly for tertiary level study. It is found that online learning has both positive and negative effects, and that it plays

a crucial role in developing communicative ability both directly and indirectly. Being a developing nation, Bangladesh faces certain limitations related to the teaching-learning environment and the necessary resources needed to achieve the highest level of communicative competence within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). These challenges are particularly prominent during times of global adversity like covid-19. The results of this study will help us to get rid of the obstacles that we may face in future. Finally, additional study in this field is needed to keep current with the most recent discoveries. The study recommends that the aspiring young teachers need to improve their technological skills and strategies. Moreover, they need to experiment with various online tools to teach and assess the students to make the class interactive. They should receive proper training beforehand for making the class fun and interesting using a number of audio-visual resources.

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Appendix

CLT in Online Classroom: A post-pandemic Study on the Tertiary Level Practitioner and Participants of Bangladesh

This paper intends to analyze the feasibility of adapting CLT in an online classroom. Whether the objectives can be achieved through classroom activities or not is the primary research question. It also explores whether expected classroom atmosphere can be created for

learning. A quantitative approach was used to conduct this study. The findings of the study are evaluated in light of past research in this field. I would like to ask you to help me by answering questions concerning preferences on the effectiveness of communicative approach in online classroom. I am interested in your personal opinion. Please, give your answers sincerely as only this will guarantee the success of this survey.

1. You are?
.....
2. Mark only one oval.
 - Male
 - Female
 - Others
3. Name of your institution
4. Name of your department/subject/course

Participant: Students

1. How interactive the group works/peers works in an online classroom?
 - Very interactive
 - Moderately interactive
 - Interactive/Normal
 - Slightly interactive
 - Not interactive at all
2. Are you familiar with the materials or apps used in your online classes?
 - Very familiar
 - Moderately familiar
 - Familiar/Normal
 - Slightly familiar
 - Not familiar at all

3. How frequently can you interact with your teacher and classmates during the online classes?
 - Very frequently
 - Moderately frequently
 - Frequent/Normal
 - Slightly frequently
 - Not frequently at all
4. How frequently listening and speaking skills are practiced in your online classes?
 - Very frequent
 - Moderately frequent
 - Frequent/Normal
 - Slightly frequent
 - Not frequent at all
5. Do the course teachers give feedback?
 - Very frequent
 - Moderately frequent
 - Frequent/ Normal
 - Slightly frequent
 - Not frequent at all
6. Is the feedback given in the online classes sufficient?
 - Very sufficient
 - Moderately sufficient
 - Sufficient/Normal
 - Slightly sufficient
 - Not sufficient at all
7. Is the process (online teaching-learning) engaging?
 - Very engaging
 - Moderately engaging

- Engaging/Normal
- Slightly engaging
- Not engaging at all

8. Are online classes effective for developing communicative competence?

- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Effective/Normal
- Slightly effective
- Not effective at all

9. How would you rate your confidence level after a moderate (300 minutes) session of online classes on each skill (listening, reading, writing, and speaking)? (1= Lowest, 5= Highest).

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Participant: Teachers

10. How smooth the communication (teaching-learning) process was?

- Very smooth
- Moderately smooth
- Smooth/normal
- Slightly smooth
- Not smooth at all

11. How involved you were with the students as an independent practitioner?

- Very involved
- Moderately involved
- Involved/Normal

- Slightly involved
- Not involved at all

12. In your experience, do you think it is feasible to fulfill the needs of the students properly in an online classroom?

- Very feasible
- Moderately feasible
- Feasible/Normal
- Slightly feasible
- Not feasible at all

13. How effective the group works and pair works are in an online classroom?

- Very effective
- Moderately effective
- Effective/Normal
- Slightly effective
- Not effective at all

14. How effectively the feedback can be given?

- Very effectively
- Moderately effectively
- Effectively/Normal
- Slightly effectively
- Not effectively at all

15. What would be your suggestion for the young practitioners or who are willing to become a teacher so that they can make the online classroom more effective?

The contribution of available online materials, technology and the classroom environment

Participant: Both the Students and the Teachers

16. Do you have a smooth/uninterrupted internet connection at your home?

- Always
- Sometimes
- Neutral
- Rarely
- Never

17. What device do you use for classes? (You can choose more than one)
- Laptop
 - Desktop
 - Tablet
 - Smartphone
 - Others
18. How convenient the classroom environment is for teaching-learning process?
- Very convenient
 - Moderately convenient
 - Convenient/Normal
 - Slightly convenient
 - Not Convenient at all
19. What kinds of materials are used in an online classroom? (You can choose more than one)
- eBook
 - Printed book
 - Research articles
 - Video
 - Audio
 - Presentation slide
 - others
20. How available the materials are online?
- Very available

- Moderately available
- Available/Normal
- Slightly available
- Not Available

21. How useful the online materials are?

- Very Useful
- Moderately useful
- Useful/Normal
- Slightly useful
- Not Useful

Qualitative part

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Participant: Students

1. Can you describe the overall experience of attending online classes?
2. What technical issues did you encounter so far?
3. From your experience, do you think that the teacher's role and the learner's role were fulfilled in the classroom? (Before asking this question the moderator needs to explain the teacher's role and learner's role to the participants properly)
4. Can you share your overall experience with online material? -Describe briefly.
5. What are the advantages of online classes?
6. Please share your experience regarding the online assessment system.

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Adiba Murtaza is an Assistant professor of English at Southeast University. Being an English Language teacher and researcher, Adiba Murtaza has published numerous peer-reviewed articles. Her research interests are ELT methodology and technology integration in language teaching. An executive committee member of BELTA and a member of IATEFL, Adiba is currently undertaking her doctoral study on technology integration in language teaching.

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