

Teaching Online: Perception, Experience and Needs of Tertiary Level English Teachers in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The education system in Bangladesh predominantly follows a long tradition of classroom-based face-to-face teaching. However, with the sudden outbreak of Covid 19, teaching across the country had to shift from offline classes to online platforms. This sudden shift put English teachers under strain and posed challenges regarding teaching-learning practices and classroom management. Using a mixed-method approach, this study explores the perceptions, experiences, and needs of tertiary-level English teachers in Bangladesh regarding online teaching. Though marked by mixed perceptions about online pedagogy, the study demonstrates English teachers' propensity to replicate face-to-face classroom teaching techniques in online classes. The findings also highlight the need for teacher training on using various learning management systems (LMS). Additionally, teachers require guidance on how to engage students, provide feedback, and conduct assessments in online classes. The findings of the study have implications for teachers in conducting online classes, teacher trainers in designing training modules, and policymakers in devising appropriate policy for online teaching at the tertiary level education in Bangladesh.

Keywords: *Online pedagogy, Perceptions on online teaching, Online teaching needs, Tertiary Education in Bangladesh*

Introduction

Over the decades, online learning has seen a phenomenal rise and popularity all over the world. Several terminologies, such as 'blended learning', 'e-learning', 'hybrid or mixed learning', 'distance learning' and 'web-enhanced learning' are found in the relevant literature. These terms are often used interchangeably to refer to 'the phenomenon of learning online' (Hockly, 2015). The basic

difference between the traditional form of learning and online learning is mainly one of place and time. In the former, the instructor and the learners are required to be in the same place at the same time whereas the latter does not necessitate this, and the instructor and the learner can join the virtual classroom from different places at their convenience. The virtual classroom, according to Ko and Rossen (2010), is "any online environment

in which instructors and students “meet and interact for course activities” (p.4). In this type of classroom, communication is either asynchronous, where people do not have to be online simultaneously to communicate or synchronous, where the communicators join the session concurrently.

The integration of online technologies into higher education during the last ten years has revolutionized the educational landscape for instructors and students alike (Ali, 2020, Paudel, 2020; Akram et al., 2021). The pioneering experiences of early adopters have prompted experts to remark that online teaching differs significantly from traditional classroom instruction, necessitating adaptations in both teaching methods and strategies to fully harness the benefits offered by this technology (Oliver, 2001). The transition from face-to-face mode to online classes has posed challenges for teachers. Redmond (2011) articulates the concern, “Academics who have commonly taught in a face-to-face environment are under pressure to embed ICTs into their face-to-face teaching and to work in blended and online modes.” Embracing technology in education presents a dual challenge for educators. On one hand, they must possess technical expertise, while on the other hand, they require pedagogical training tailored for the online learning environment. As higher education institutions are increasingly adopting online education to reduce expenses, boost flexibility, and expand student access, it becomes crucial to explore the perceptions of teachers transitioning to online teaching. (Redmond 2011).

Though online education in various forms is common in the developed countries, face-to-face classroom instruction is the dominant mode of teaching in the Bangladeshi education system. At all levels of education,

lessons are predominantly provided through face-to-face teaching in a classroom setting. However, teaching and learning across the country underwent a paradigm shift during the outbreak of Covid 19. The classroom teaching was replaced mainly by online teaching at all levels of education in Bangladesh. Complying with the University Grants Commission (UGC) directives, English teachers at public and private universities had to start teaching online using various virtual meeting platforms. The sudden shift from in-person to online classes posed various pedagogical challenges for English teachers (Khan et al. (2021). Several research (Khan et al. (2021); Khan et al. 2012; Sohel & Kirkwood 2012) looked at different aspects of online teaching in Bangladesh context. Khan et al. 2021 explored the perceptions and preparedness of tertiary level teachers and students for online learning. Khan et al. 2012 investigated the barriers for introducing ICT into education in Bangladesh. Sohel & Kirkwood 2012 explored the challenges and difficulties associated with using the technologies in the secondary level education in Bangladesh.

As most of the English teachers in Bangladesh are habituated to teaching face-to-face in the classroom, it is important to know how they perceive online education. Teachers’ perceptions often shape classroom teaching practice. Teachers’ cognitions and beliefs influence their decisions, judgments, and behavior (Borg, 2015; Kagan, 1992). Therefore, exploring teachers’ perceptions may help educators better understand the factors that promote effective online teaching. As tertiary level English teachers had to switch to online teaching without any prior training and managed to continue teaching online for around two years—2020 and 2021, it is also important to know teachers’ pedagogical

needs for online classes. This study, therefore, attempted to explore the following research questions:

- a) How do the tertiary level English teachers perceive online teaching?
- b) What skills do the English teachers need for successful online teaching?

Literature review

Pedagogy refers to how teaching and learning in institutional settings such as schools and colleges are planned and delivered (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Online pedagogy, therefore, stands for learning that takes place using a computer connected to the internet as a tool for communication and learning (Hockley & Clendfield, 2010). For Berstein (2007), who provides a broader perspective, pedagogy is “a sustained process whereby somebody(s) acquires new forms or develops existing forms of conduct, knowledge, practice and criteria from somebody(s) or something deemed to be an appropriate provider and evaluator” (cited in Daniels, 2007, p. 308). This definition, if observed closely, indicates the pedagogical components, such as the learner, someone or something that guides the learner, and the learning itself, which implies the use of an online platform through which learners can be guided, and learning is evaluated.

Anderson (2011) conceptualizes online teaching by the following principles: (1) the learner and teacher are connected remotely through various digital platforms, (2) learning and educational materials are accessed via technology, (3) interaction between teacher and learner occurs through technological means, and (4) the teacher supports the learner using different digital communication channels.

Hockly (2015) distinguishes between ‘blended learning’ and ‘online learning’ in that the former makes use of both face-to-face and online learning experiences, but the latter takes place entirely online via the internet. However, the following table shows the types of courses based on the proportion of content delivered online.

Proportion of Content Delivered Online: Typical Description

None	Traditional face-to-face	Course with no online technology used; content is delivered in writing or orally
1 to 29 %	Web facilitated	Course that uses Web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. Uses a course management system or Web pages to post the syllabus and assignments, for example.
30 to 79 %	Blended/hybrid	Course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. A substantial proportion of the content is delivered online; typically uses online discussions and has some face - to face meetings.
80 % or more	Online	A course where most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically has no face-to-face meetings.

Table 1 Types of courses (Adapted from Boettcher & Conrad, 2010, p. 9)

Table 1 shows that an online class has little or no room for f2f interaction. It also implies that a comprehensive learning management system is required to launch online courses in any educational setting to achieve the desired effect.

Ever since the learning via networked computers initiated in the 1990s in the UK, the new mode of learning saw immense growth and popularity across the world which coincided with the sophistication of computer accessories. The first institution to offer online courses was Open University (OU), UK in 1995 which provided French language courses (Hockly, 2015). Since then, the debate and discussion around the benefits of this new mode of learning over traditional face-to-face (f2f) learning have not abated till now, which, very fortunately, prompted a vast body of research. In this context, the study of Means et.al, (2010) deserves credit as it reviewed 1,000 empirical studies on online vs f2f learning published between 1996 and 2008. They conclude with the view that “a blended approach was most effective in terms of improved learning outcomes” (Hockly, 2015).

With the rapid proliferation of technologies, opportunities for online pedagogy and new learning delivery modes have become more ubiquitous. Formal language courses typically offer through web-based platforms, such as virtual learning environments (VLE) or learning management systems (LMS), which assist the learners to get online materials for instruction and assessment. In addition, virtual worlds or computer-based online environments also provide informal learning courses, modular object-oriented dynamic learning environments (MOODLE) and massively multiplayer online role-playing

games (MMORPGs). Further, the recent phenomenon gaining popularity worldwide is perhaps the US-based massive open online courses (MOOCs) which offer thousands of free courses through course providers such as Coursera and edX. Moreover, the increasing popularity of social networking sites and intelligent devices has revolutionized e-communication and e-learning which hurried the development of a plethora of mobile apps for language learning which, among others, include American English, BBC English and Duolingo. According to (Hockly, 2015), though questions arise about the persistence, motivation and effectiveness of the multitudes of mobile-based language learning apps, their growing popularity may remain a longtime player in online learning.

Several studies (Salam et.al 2019; Islam et.al 2019; Oliva-Córdova et, al 2021) report that the integration of technology improves pedagogical practices. Both teachers and students get benefitted in a technology enhanced classroom. Teachers with technological knowledge can organize lesson content effectively and deliver it in engaging ways, enabling students to learn with ease. Other studies (Dinçer, 2018; Alanazy & Alrusaiyes, 2021) claim despite having technological knowledge, teachers are not capable of using technology in teaching effectively.

Akram et al. (2021) believe teachers needs special competencies to be able to teach successfully in online environment. Without adequate competencies, it is challenging for teachers to effectively execute and organize online instructional programs. Teaching requires selecting various strategies for specific contexts, which may include lesson planning and the development of instructional

and learning materials. Roy & Boboc (2016) claim that the skills used by teachers in face-to-face classroom are not transferable for online teaching. A lack of understanding of the pedagogical changes necessary for online teaching can result in teacher stress. Al Abiki (2021) reports six major challenges in online teaching a) nature of remote teaching, b) content delivery and limit, c) teaching styles, d) online assessment methods, and e) students' interests and differences.

Likert scale was employed to collect data through the questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed online to 50 randomly selected teachers from both public and private universities in Chittagong. However, only 34 completed questionnaires were returned. Additionally, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with seven teachers who were conveniently selected based on their relevant knowledge and availability.

Table 2: *Description of the sample of the study*

It is evident from the available literature that online teaching differs substantially in form and mode from face-to-face teaching. Teaching online requires a different set of pedagogical techniques. Though technological know-how is must for online teaching, mere technology literacy does not guarantee successful teaching. So, teachers need both technology literacy and pedagogical knowledge to glean the benefits of online teaching.

Sample Universities		Sample Participants	Tools
Public University	Chattogram University	15 teachers	Questionnaire & Interview/ FGD
	Comilla University	05	
	Noakhali Science and Technology University	05	
Private University	International Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC)	10	
	Premier University (PU)	10	
	East Delta University (EDU)	05	

Methodology

Mixed-methods research (MMR) was adopted for this study to achieve a broader understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Plano, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Therefore, qualitative and quantitative (QUAL+QUANT) tools for data collection were used. The target population for the study comprised tertiary-level English teachers at public and private universities in Chittagong region. A five-point

The questionnaire was developed to elicit responses regarding tertiary-level EFL teachers' perceptions and needs for online pedagogy. Item 1-5 addressed the issues of teachers' perception towards online pedagogy while item 6-10 dealt with their needs for teaching online. A focused group discussion (FGD) with seven teachers of different public and private universities in Chattogram, Bangladesh was convened online to cross-check the questionnaire data and to gather

further information about different aspects of online pedagogy. The FGD session continued for 2 hours, and the entire discussion was recorded in the clouds with the permission of the members. The whole discussion was guided by the preset objectives. The FGD centred on two specific objectives. The objectives were to understand a) differences and similarities between the online and F2F classes as perceived by the members and d) the skills and strategies required by teachers for effective online pedagogy.

Table 3: FGD Participants

Participant	Affiliation	Designation	Teaching experience
P1	Public University	Associate Professor	15 years
P2	Public University	Assistant Professor	10
P3	Private University	Associate Professor	20
P4	Private University	Associate Professor	15
P5	Private University	Assistant Professor	15
P6	Private University	Assistant Professor	12
P7	Private University	Assistant Professor	12

Findings and Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to understand tertiary level English teachers’ perception on online teaching and understand teachers’ need for online teaching. An analysis of the data collected through questionnaire and FDG answers the two research questions.

Teachers’ Perception on Online Teaching

The first half of the questionnaire dealt with the perception of tertiary-level EFL teachers on online pedagogy and the second half focused on their training needs. The findings from the questionnaire show that a significant 92% of the respondents perceive that online teaching is different from in-person teaching.

Though the findings of the questionnaire and the FGD seem to be similar, the latter provided more insights into the online class practices and problems. In response to whether there is any difference between online and face-to-face (f2f) teaching, the FGD members have conceded that online teaching is significantly different from f2f classroom teaching because they require different strategies to make teaching effective. One of the participants says,

“There are basic difference online and offline classes. The two modalities require two different approaches. The problem arises when we start teaching with the belief that there is no difference between these two forms of teaching.”

Another participant outlines the differences in the following words,

“There are differences between these two forms of teaching. Maintaining eye contact with the students is important which we can’t do in online classes. It is easier to keep students’ attention in offline classes. Kinesthetic learners prefer movement which is not possible in online classes. Voice is not loud and clear in online classes due to technical

issues. So, there are basic differences between these two forms of teaching”.

Regarding students’ participation in the lesson, the questionnaire data shows 73.1% believe that online classes are not as interactive as offline classes. In FGD, P4 mentions *“classroom environment is important for learning. Attending classes in bedroom or in a car works as a major barrier to learning in online classes.”* However, one member (P3) finds no fundamental difference between the two learning modes. For him, differences surface due to not having operational knowledge of the teachers required for online classes.

Regarding teachers’ role in online classes, the respondents provided mixed opinions. For instance, 61% believe the teacher’s role is different in online and offline classes, whereas 35% believe the teacher’s role is similar in both online and offline classes. One of the members in FGD, (P5), maintains that the two different modes require two different types of strategies which the instructors should be aware of. He states that the wrong approach would be to disagree that they are different. He says, *“It would be a big mistake when teachers hold that there is no difference between the two learning modes. Having accepted the difference, many things will become easy if teachers start teaching.”* Those who find the two systems significantly different, identify a few differences involving both personal and pedagogical issues.

Regarding the effectiveness of online classes in the Bangladesh context participants expressed mixed opinions. While 50% of the participants believed that online classes are not effective in the Bangladesh context, 30% believed the opposite, and the rest 19.2% remained undecided.

Training Needs for Online Classes

Both questionnaire and FGD findings show almost similar findings regarding EFL teachers’ need for online training. A significant 88.5% of respondents believe that online classes cannot be conducted without proper training and logistics. Around 77% of the questionnaire respondents expressed that they find it difficult to engage students in online lessons. Around 73% find it difficult to make students work online. Regarding assessing students online, around 65% reported that they find it challenging while around 58% do not know how to give feedback in online classes.

In response to the question about the kind of skills and strategies the teachers need to master, all emphasized the need for a set of common basic online teaching strategies to be prepared by the institutions and supplied to the teachers and learners. The members, however, mentioned a list of online teaching skills which included mainly the online etiquette and presentation skills such as file sharing, screen sharing, using YouTube, using the Whiteboard and annotating a shared file, using break up rooms and most importantly, the assessment techniques such as preparing quizzes, MCQ items and providing feedback, creating Google doc files and spreadsheets etc. In addition, teachers should also involve the students in making online presentations and submitting assignments online to stimulate their confidence and motivation. Finally, all the FGD members agreed that instead of leaving it to the teachers discretely, these strategies could be taught to the teachers and students in a few short training sessions. However, it all depends on the institutions’ decisions to improve and ensure quality online pedagogy.

Teachers have a severe lack of motivation to teach online. According to P2,

“Though no teacher had received any training on online pedagogy, they proceeded with the decision to give online classes with self-generated motivation during the pandemic, and the motivation was born out of personal responsibility for and commitment to their profession. And this responsibility thrusts one to better performance and self-learning.”

On the other hand, many who do not feel motivated towards online classes seem to be reluctantly doing the job with no objectives. Therefore, motivation is the first thing we should ensure in teachers because it is the main factor that may take the teachers a long way towards achieving objectives even without adequate training.

In addition to teacher motivation, one member talked about enhancing learner motivation which is equally important. He shared his experience this way:

I have found that students in the first few classes are excited and 70 to 80% of students attend, but slowly the percentage decreases to 10 to 15 %. I have experience of giving a class to only one student. This also demotivates teachers. For this reason, both teachers and students need to be motivated.

Though, theoretically speaking, motivation is a personal mental drive to do something, the environment creates positive or negative conditions for it. All the members conceded that the UGC or university authority should tailor a reliable and practical guideline to make provision for online classes all year round, i.e.,

a particular percentage of every course must be conducted online. This practice would make the teachers and students in touch with online practices.

While commenting on the demotivating factors, one member brings up the issue of peer pressure, which demotivates the teacher. According to this member:

You are using almost all the effective tools like slide sharing, framing questions and quizzes, using the whiteboard, breaking up rooms for making online classes effective etc. However, you will find a few others who are not using them but are making fun of them, and you are slowly losing interest. Therefore, those who conduct online classes following different techniques are negatively influenced by those who do not.

Another FGD member brought up the issue of course load, to which all others conceded that the faculties, particularly private universities, are down with courses. This makes online classes difficult as the teachers must prepare slides and activity sheets for the students.

The study was prompted by the tertiary level EFL teachers' sudden move to online pedagogy during the Covid 19 and their strenuous efforts to adapt to the online practices and the challenges of the new teaching format. The study mainly focused on the teachers' perception, practical challenges and required skills for online teaching, and along this line, two research questions were framed. Data collected through the questionnaire and the focus group discussion (FGD) yielded essential and relevant findings about the research objectives. These findings support the internal and external barriers,

such as institutional and teacher-level factors, training issues, and logistic supports identified by Snoeyink and Ertmer (2001).

The questionnaire findings show that a significant number of teachers perceive online pedagogy as different from the offline or f2f mode of teaching and that the former is more interactive and effective than the latter. Moreover, mixed responses were gathered in two important areas of query where their opinions on teachers' differential roles in the two formats and the effectiveness of online pedagogy were sought.

Finally, a good majority of the participants conceded that for online pedagogy to be meaningful, proper training must be provided, and logistic support ensured. In addition, the members emphatically stressed the frequent power outage occurrences, particularly in the rural areas, as one of the significant challenges that are, to a great extent, beyond their control. This finding, though not entirely new in the context of Bangladesh, calls for a more comprehensive investigation of its potential implication for further study, which would contribute to the ongoing digital divide and dividend debate.

It is to be noted that in comparison to the questionnaire findings, the FGD findings were found to be more diverse and insightful, though a few questions were identical with those of the questionnaire. For instance, the FGD members shared, in a similar vein, that both the online and offline pedagogies are different and require different sets of strategies to make them effective. However, one member offered an entirely different view that the sense of dissimilitude regarding the two teaching platforms arose due to the absence of operational know-how to manage online classes.

The focus group discussants identified a number of limitations which include sustaining the attention and interaction of the learners. Though questionnaire findings substantiate those of the FGD in this regard, the FGD members identify some major causes for the limitations, for instance, absence of eye contact, unstable voice, broken images due to slow internet connectivity and learners' preference for going audio-only mode to save the data pack. One of the vital issues addressed by the focus group members was the complexity of online assessment. Since assessment policy and practices in public universities significantly differ from the private university assessment system, the private universities continued with the online assessment, and the public universities, on the other hand, could not find any alternative to the traditional assessment practices in the online format.

The total shift to online teaching in Bangladesh started without any formal training for the teachers by individual institutions or UGC. Relevantly, one of the participants compared the issue to the child who was given a cycle to ride before he had learned how to do it. However, one member observed the issue from a different perspective. For him, training may not work if the teachers do not have the proper scope to utilise the training in class. For example, all the classes were held online during pandemic. Now all the classes have been completely shifted to offline mode. In this situation, teachers trained for online classes will not have the scope to utilise their knowledge. This response provides insights into the potential gap between training and its application, implying the need for good coordination between stakeholders, such as policymakers, trainers and teachers.

Conclusion

The study explored the EFL teachers' perceptions of the online pedagogy that they adopted during the Covid 19 situation. The findings from the questionnaire data show that most of the tertiary-level EFL teachers in Bangladesh perceive online pedagogy differently from offline pedagogy. They realize the importance of being successful in online pedagogy, and emphasize the need for adequate training and logistical support. However, there is a significant difference in the responses between public and private universities. The differences of opinions emanated from the fact that most private universities are more equipped for online classes than public universities. Moreover, it is easier to adopt and implement policies in private universities. The authorities in private universities are prompt in policy adjustment. However, regarding the training needs for online pedagogy, respondents from both public and private universities expressed similar concerns. Most of the respondents need training on using popular online learning management systems. Participants from both public and private universities need training on how to engage students, provide feedback and assess students in online classes. One limitation that marks the study is the absence of the learner's voice from the scene investigated. The study focused on the teachers' perspectives that show only a partial view of online pedagogy. Consequently, the learners' perceptions and learning challenges following the online format have not come through the findings.

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Appendix

Table: 4 Summary of the questionnaire data

Question		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	There is no significant difference between teaching online and teaching offline.	44%	48%	0%	8%	0%
2	Online classes are more interactive and organized than offline classes.	3.8%	73.1%	15.4%	7.7%	0%
3	Teacher responsibilities are the same in both online and offline classes.	23.1%	38.5%	3.8%	7.7%	26.9%
4	Online classes cannot be conducted without proper training and logistics.	7.7%	0%	3.8%	46.2%	42.3%
5	Online classes are not effective in Bangladesh context.	15.4%	34.6%	19.2%	23.1%	7.7%
6	I need training on keeping students engaged in online classes.	3.8%	7.7%	11.5%	53.8%	23.1%
7	I have to learn the techniques of making students work online.	7.7%	7.7%	11.5%	57.7%	15.4%
8	I need training on the techniques of assessing students' online	0%	19.2%	15.4%	46.2%	19.2%
9	I have to learn the techniques of giving feedback on students' performance online.	0%	26.9%	15.4%	42.3%	15.4%
10	I need extensive training on online teaching platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom etc.	3.8%	30.8%	19.2%	38.5%	7.7%