



# **Challenges of Online English Language Teaching and Learning at Secondary Schools in Bangladesh**

Nishat Tasneem

Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka, nishat.ammy12@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

Virtual classrooms manifest a burgeoning pedagogic instrument in current English language teaching and learning contexts around the globe; the use of which was significantly increased with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Such practices can also be traced to the secondary-level educational context in Bangladesh. Alike the traditional classroom, these virtual classrooms are not without challenges. To unravel such challenges of online English classes at the secondary level in a developing country context like Bangladesh, a qualitative research framework was used in this research. As such, the current study utilized qualitative data collection instruments to collect in-depth information about the individual, course, contextual and technological challenges of online English language education at the secondary level in Bangladesh, based on Anderson and Grönlund's (2009) conceptual framework of online education in developing countries. The data was collected from both the learners and the facilitators of such online English language classes and analyzed based on the codes from the conceptual framework of the study. Moreover, data regarding the pedagogic participant-oriented suggestions to encounter such challenges were also collected and analyzed. The findings of the study highlight a range of different pedagogic and contextual challenges in relation to online English education in a developing country context like Bangladesh and draw on its implication to address policy issues as well as pedagogic practices.

**Keywords:** *Online Classes, English Language Teaching And Learning, Developing Countries, Challenges, Secondary Level.*

## INTRODUCTION

Advances in technology in the contemporary English Language Teaching (ELT) setting of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been used to propagate distance language learning and blended language learning (Fidalgo et al., 2020; Koptelov & Turner, 2021) as a system of choice in particular pedagogic contexts. The online language classroom manifests one such example and is defined as a system that provides the same opportunities for the teaching and learning process beyond the physical limits of the traditional classroom through a web-based learning mode (Chen et al., 2022). With the advancement in online education in Bangladesh during and after the pandemic, the domain of such online education has also been widely researched in the country (Noor & Shaoun, 2021; Shrestha et al., 2022). Contemporary research has extensively highlighted the challenges and limitations that persist in such mass-scale online education (Noor & Shaoun, 2021; Rouf et al., 2022). However, the research into challenges in more specified domains, like the challenges of English language teaching and learning through such online domains in a developing country like Bangladesh, still seems to be limited and an under-researched domain. Furthermore, although extensive research has been done in the tertiary-level online education context (Habib et al. 2020), the research into such challenges at the secondary level in the country is still limited.

Like other countries, the Government of Bangladesh's (GoB) lockdown restrictions resulted in the closing down of all schools and educational institutions in the country since 18 March 2020 (GoB, 2020). In response, many schools started taking online classes by using available means, such as Facebook, Zoom, WeChat, etc., for secondary level (i.e. Grade IX and X) (Ibid). A continuation of such online classes can be seen even in the post-pandemic era which is characterized by hybrid modules and a shift between online and offline classes, based on the increase or decrease of COVID cases in the country. Taking such online classes for secondary education is not quite easy in a developing country like Bangladesh as it requires the availability of technological infrastructures like an internet connection, a computer with a camera and microphone, or a smartphone both for the teachers and the students (Habib et al., 2020). The rise in internet costs and minimum required gadgets for participating in online classes is also beyond the reach of most of the students in Bangladesh (Azad, 2016). Online learning is also influenced by the computer knowledge of teachers and students, instructional methods of teachers, policy frameworks, and technical assistance (Srichanyachon, 2014). Based on the aforementioned research and

background of the study, we can hypothesize that challenges can persist at various levels in the contemporary online English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms at the secondary level in Bangladesh, which is denoted as a developing country according to the recent world statistics and data indexes (“List of 152 developing countries”, n.d.). With the hypothesis in mind, the study will aim at finding the answer to the following questions:

1. What are the primary challenges in teaching and learning the English language through online modules at the secondary level education context in Bangladesh in the contemporary post-pandemic times?
2. What are the teacher and student-centered suggestions to encounter such challenges of online modules at the secondary level English language education context of Bangladesh?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Online learning and education have been variedly termed in the pedagogic domain. According to Farrell & Seery (2019), the label “online” is widely used around the world and is frequently used interchangeably with other labels such as open and distance learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, networked learning, web-based learning, etc. The importance and advantages of online education can manifest multiple folds. Some of the prominent ones include its effectiveness in educating students; use as professional development; cost-effectiveness to combat the rising cost of education, and the possibility of providing a world-class education to anyone with a broadband connection (Mukhtar et al., 2020). Here, in the online education context, meaningful language learning, according to Ashburn & Floden (2006), is characterized by intentionality, content centrality, authentic work, active inquiry, construction of mental models, and collaborative learning. Thus, in the present pedagogic sphere, it is observed that several websites and companies like- Khan Academy, Udacity, edX, and Coursera, etc., are built on this premise, and consist of well-respected scholars and entrepreneurs for online language learning through massive open online courses (Bowen, 2013).

Although a wide range of studies highlights the benefits of online education, some of these studies are direct contradictions of the studies with positive results. In a study that compares student learning outcomes in random assessments, Arias et al. (2018) found that students in the online format performed significantly worse on tests than students in the

traditional format. This difference was most asserted for complex questions and least for basic questions. Again, studies show that online education also manifests a negative dimension in relation to time constraints and low quality of learning (Haron et al., 2021). Furthermore, the aspect of lack of confidence and motivation for using ICT in education also manifests a drawback in the sector (*Ibid*). Again, in some students, the lack of immediate feedback from teachers, ambiguous instruction, a lack of sense of cooperation and pedagogic community buildup, and higher online course prices. etc. manifest the disadvantageous sides of online education (Pagram & Pagram, 2006). In regard to perceptions of pedagogic participants towards such online platforms and tools of teaching and learning, there is a persistence of both positive and negative attitudes (Lobo, 2022; Timothy & da Silva, 2022).

Alike the implication of online education in the general education context, the application of online education has also become a prominent sector in the English language teaching and learning context at current times. The use of online learning can help to promote Krashen's (1982) lower affective filter in the teaching and learning context by minimizing the face-threatening factors that are often noted in the traditional classroom sphere. Moreover, as a wide range of ICT tools and teaching materials can be shared and used in such education mode, this can help to promote the dimension of "comprehensive input" or "i+1" and, thus, maximize "comprehensive output" as well. Furthermore, as online language learning manifests usage of a wide range of teaching tools and materials including audio-visual stimuli, interactive discussion boards, etc. in the teaching process, thus, it can also help to promote what Vygotsky et al. (1997) manifest as the "Zone of Proximal Development" among young learners. The use of technology also helps students to create their own learning routes towards proficiency in the target language and, thus, go beyond teachers' instructions (Allford & Pachler, 2007). This can also mean that learners can take charge of their own feedback and error correction process in order to prevent error fossilization (Selinker, 1972) in online classes. This can help in the formation of good learning habits among young learners (Skinner, 1938). Moreover, Castañeda (2008) asserts that such online education helps to assert learning tasks that require collaboration with peers and teachers through the online medium for the successful completion of the task and, thus, enhances collaborative learning. Last but not the least, online education helps in the process of meaningful language teaching and learning. This meaningful language learning through online means can also have a pivotal impact on the process of cognitive constructivism of

the learners through their schema activation and construction process (Piaget, 1976) in the language education contexts.

Although mediums, such as SonarBangladesh, English in Action (EIA), etc., provide online English language teaching and learning courses in Bangladesh, however, they cannot provide interactive online classes or lectures (Das, 2021). As such, the virtual classroom for primary and secondary level students inaugurated by the JAAGO foundation in 2007 manifests the foremost example of such interactive classes in language teaching in Bangladesh. In JAAGO schools, the classes are operated by a teacher from JAAGO Foundation's Teaching Center in Dhaka and two local classroom teachers in rural areas. The software currently used for this form of schooling is an interactive and professional video conferencing software aimed at making the learning process communicative and interactive even with the virtual presence of its remote learners (JAAGO School, n.d.). The proportion of such online classes increased during the lockdown restrictions induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even after the lockdown, many well-known schools, especially private ones, are still using Facebook, YouTube, Google Meet, Zoom, etc. apps to promote synchronous and asynchronous learning. However, only students from upper-middle and upper-class families get the opportunity to study in such private schools (Badiuzzaman et al., 2021). Moreover, Bangladesh has a large proportion of lower and middle-class families, and most of their children attend government schools where such online education cannot be promoted at a mass level when there is a requirement to switch to online modules to control the COVID-19 case numbers in the country (Ibid). Studies show that most of such lower-income families cannot even afford computers, mobile, and internet for doing classes online (Emon et al., 2020; Das, 2021). Thus, such schools and learners are still not well-equipped in terms of resources to switch to online or hybrid teaching formats when needed, despite the investments and promotion of online education throughout 2020 and 2021 in the country due to the restrictions and lockdown imposed by the pandemic (Das, 2021).

The virtual education context in Bangladesh, which is still an emerging domain, is ridden with various challenges concerning technological accessibility, attitudes, existing infrastructures, etc. Nevertheless, research also shows the potential of such online education to enhance access to quality education and promote Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in the country (Noor & Shoaun, 2021; Sultana et al., 2020). Again, Anderson and Grönlund's (2009) study on the online education context in developing countries also identifies 7 major challenges as- student support, flexibility, teaching and learning

activities, access, academic confidence, localization, and attitudes. While more research has been done on the nature of online education in the country context during the pandemic (Das, 2021, Sultana et al., 2020), research regarding the challenges of implementation of such online education in the ELT context at the secondary level in the contemporary, post-pandemic era is still limited. Thus, in this research paper, the gap in the study will be addressed by conducting a short-scale research investigation about the contemporary challenges of teaching and learning the English language through asynchronous and synchronous online mediums at the secondary level context in Bangladesh by using an adapted version of Andersson & Grönlund's framework as below-

Table 1. *Conceptual Framework of Challenges of Online Education in Bangladesh*

Categories	Criteria	Affecting Factors
Individual challenges	Student/ Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technological</li> <li>• Qualification</li> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Time</li> </ul>
Course challenges	Course design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content</li> <li>• Activities</li> </ul>
	Support provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for faculty</li> <li>• Support for students</li> </ul>
Contextual challenges	Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy/funding</li> </ul>
	Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attitudes to e-learning</li> </ul>
Technology Challenges	Technical Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access</li> <li>• Cost</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from Andersson & Grönlund's (2009) *Conceptual Framework of Challenges*

Here, the sub-criteria of individual, technological, course, and contextual challenges of online education of the framework has been selected based on a pilot study highlighting the relevance of the different sub-criteria at the secondary level online English language

education context of Bangladesh. The instruments of the research have been designed based on the categories, criteria, and affecting factors of the framework.

## METHOD

The objective of the research is to identify the challenges that secondary-level teachers and students face in the context of online teaching and learning of the English language in the country. In this regard, the research mainly aims at identifying the challenges faced by the pedagogic participants in 4 categories- technical challenges, course challenges, teaching-learning challenges, and, finally, contextual challenges, based on the aforementioned framework of challenges of online education propagated by Anderson and Grönlund (2009).

### Participants and Setting

For the purpose of this study, the researcher selected 4 secondary-level Bangla medium schools which follow the National curriculum. Of these, two are public Bangla medium schools and 2 are private Bangla medium schools. The researcher selected this institution through a purposive sampling technique based on the knowledge that they were conducting online classes through various means both amidst the pandemic and even at present when required. Thus, interviews and FGD with teachers and learners of Grades X and IX of these schools were also conducted respectively. The teachers and the learners were selected through a random sampling technique for the interviews and FGD sessions respectively. Here the sample size and demography of the research participants are as follows:

Table 2. *Sample Size of the Current Research*

Research Participants	Sample Size	Average Age	Gender
Teachers	12 (3 from each school)	28-40 years	7 female and 5 male teachers
Students	24 (6 from each school)	14-17 years	14 male and 10 female students

As such, the interview was conducted among 12 English language teachers (two from each school) of the 4 schools, and the 4 FGDs (one from each school) consisting of 6 students each were conducted as well.

### **Research Design**

The researcher utilizes the following two data collection processes: telephone/zoom/face-to-face Interview and online/offline Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (Morgan, 2009), based on the convenience of the target research population. The rationale of a qualitative research approach for the study is based on the existing research, mentioned before, which also deploys a qualitative data collection methodology in identifying the challenges of online classrooms in-depth.

Interviews are a qualitative data collection technique. It can be with either the facilitators or the learners in the pedagogical process. In the current research, interview sessions with the teachers were held in each of the schools. It included semi-structured interviews and replicated a natural conversation between the researcher and the participants. Dilshad and Latif (2013) assert that such interview sessions provide “a setting for the relatively homogeneous group to reflect on the questions asked by the interview” and are crucial for collecting qualitative data collection process (p.191-93). The time scale of each session ranged from 30-40 minutes and was recorded with due permission from the participants of the study. In the interview, the subjective attitude and opinions of the teachers, regarding the individual, course, contextual and technological challenges which they encounter in teaching online English classes at the secondary level context in the country were collected.

Moreover, based on convenience, online or offline FGDs with the students were conducted regarding the language learning, course, contextual and technical challenges, which they face in online classrooms. Four semi-structured FGDs were conducted, one from each school. The total number of participants in each FGD session was approximately 6 learners. The interviews and the FGDs were conducted in Bangla and were recorded after due consent from the participants. Here, according to Morgan (2009), FGDs are crucial instruments to obtain a collective notion of the participants’ subjective opinions in regard to an issue, event, or topic. As such, the FGD of the current study aimed at collecting the subjective attitude and opinions of the students, regarding the individual, course, contextual and technological challenges which they encounter in online English classes in the country at present. Here, each FGD session lasted for around 40-50 minutes.

## **Methods of Analysis**

The researcher coded the salient categories in the qualitative data (Gibbs, 2007) by reading and listening reflectively to the contents several times and using Microsoft Excel 2016 in the codification process. The codes for the data were selected based on the categories, criteria, and affecting factors of the conceptual framework of this study, which was developed based on Anderson and Grönlund's (2009) framework of challenges in online classes. Here, for the convenience of the readers, the qualitative data is presented through percentage calculation in visual diagrams in the next section. Again, although the qualitative data was collected in both English and Bengali language, however, for the convenience of the readers, the data obtained in the Bengali language was translated to English and used for the findings as well as the analysis and discussion segment of the paper.

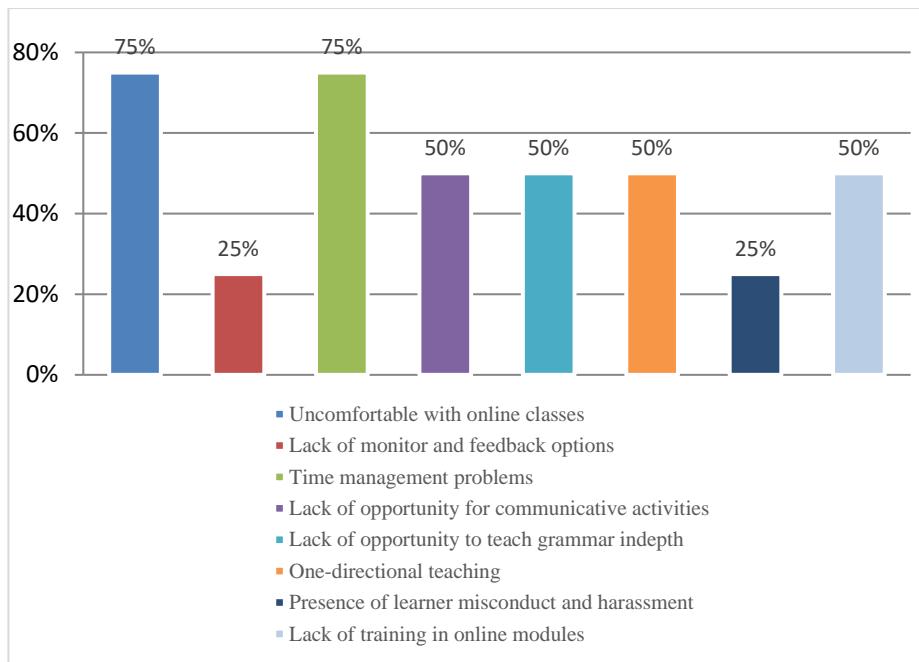
## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The section will present findings from the qualitative data collection and analysis process as well as manifest a critical reflection and discussion on the findings in the following sub-sections.

### ***Individual Challenges***

Based on the data analysis of the qualitative findings, the individual challenges in terms of teaching and learning in the online ELT classes can be collectively manifested as follows:

*Figure 1. Individual Teaching and Learning Challenges in Online English Classes*



Based on the conceptual framework of the study, the individual challenges in online English classes in the post-pandemic era consist of teaching and learning challenges. The interview findings highlight the individual challenges of teachers as consisting of being uncomfortable with the online teaching process; time management problems; inability to provide instant or regular feedback; problems with class management and technical aspects; problems with promoting communication in English as Foreign Language (EFL) online classes; issues with instruction delivery etc. The findings also highlight that teachers do not think that learning English through online mediums is as effective as physical classes. Another particular individual teaching challenge, which was asserted by one teacher in the questionnaire and interview session, highlighted the aspect of harassment and misconduct in online classes. Furthermore, the individual challenges of learners that were manifested from the student-oriented data findings highlight several aspects of learning problems stemming from incomprehensibility of teacher instruction and explanation of complex grammatical structures in online mediums; lack of interactive online classes; lack of frequent reading and writing practice; lack of instant and regular feedback and error correction; one-way instruction process; large online classroom sizes; lack of learner participation and motivation; lack of expertise in and use of more interaction friendly online modules like zoom, etc. As such, the findings from the teachers and the learners of the study highlighted some imperial findings in regard to the individual challenges in teaching and learning in the online English language teaching and learning module at the secondary level, which continues to persist despite the rapid promotion of online education during the

COVID-19 pandemic era. The asserted individual teaching and learning challenges in the findings section correspond with the sub-criteria of the aforementioned adapted conceptual framework from Anderson and Grönlund's (2009) study, which includes aspects like motivation, technological confidence, qualification, and time.

The findings also highlight issues that were not mentioned in the prior research including problems with promoting communicative classes in online mediums. Here, this highlights a crucial finding of the study as language classes needs to be communicative in order to promote the learners' communicative competence and promote a conducive learning atmosphere (Krashen, 1982) where language learning can take place. Here, the lack of communicative classes in asynchronous online modules, like Recorded Videos on Youtube or Facebook Live, asserts a crucial challenge in teaching and learning in online English classes. Again, the findings regarding the individual learning challenges in online classes also highlighted multimodal dimensions. The individual learning challenge in regard to the lack of motivation of attending online classes, lack of technical literacy and access, lack of adaptability to online modules, etc. were also noted in the aforementioned study by Emon et al. (2020). Here, the FGD session data with the students revealed that learning complex grammar is even harder for learners in online English modules because they cannot grasp teacher instructions and explanation. They cannot see the grammar structure deduction, which the teacher writes on the board or the copy, and this impedes their comprehensibility and the overall learning process. This data shows adherence to Pagram and Pagram's (2006) study, which asserts that online education, is harder and more difficult to understand for low-achieving students. Here, according to the teacher interview, the learners' proficiency level in English is already very low as they are from Bangla medium schools. Due to this low proficiency in English, it is even harder for them to grasp the English language and grammar through online mediums. The lack of adaptability of the learners with the online English teaching and learning modules, even after subsequent exposure during the pandemic period, is still very low and most of them believe that learning English is more efficient in physical classes. According to them, they took the physical classes more seriously and were more attentive as there was the possibility of punishment and repercussions if they were distracted.

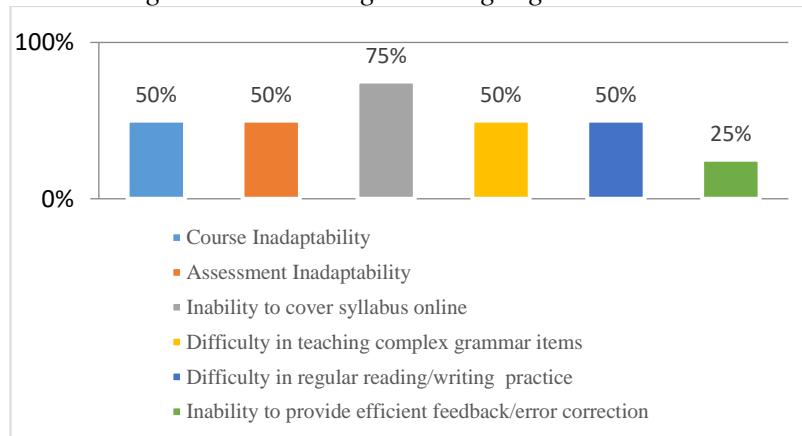
Here, based on the theoretical underpinnings in EFL education, discussed in the literature review segment, it is apparent that the issues with time management, delayed or no feedback, lack of interactive classes, etc. can lower the learners' motivation and interest

in the online classes and inhibit the promotion of a conducive teaching and learning environment or a “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky et al., 1997) in the online English classes. In order to enhance affective filters in online English classes, there is a need to ensure proper feedback and error correction along with the possibility of an interactive classroom session. Here, in most cases, due to various technical issues and large classroom sizes, such cannot be provided, and this leads to the fossilization of errors (Selinker, 1972) in the English language learning process. Moreover, it can also be deduced that such online classes do not cater to individual learners’ learning needs and styles either. Here, as the visual learners cannot see the deduced grammar structure in written format, therefore, it can affect their comprehensibility and the overall teaching and learning process. As such, from the findings and discussion, a range of teaching and learning challenges about adaptability, manageability, learning and teaching flexibility, etc. are noted in the criteria of individual challenges in online English language education in Bangladesh in contemporary times. While some of the findings resonate with prior findings in the domain, however, the study also sheds light on new findings on individual teaching and learning challenges about lack of communicative online spheres; lack of effective learning of grammar structure taught in the online medium; lack of options to cater to individual learners’ learning styles and preferences, etc.

### ***Course Challenges***

Based on the data analysis of the qualitative findings, the course challenges in the online ELT classes can be manifested cumulatively as follows:

**Figure 2. Course Challenges in Online English Language Classes**



From the findings, it was apparent that a series of course challenges preside in online English classes at a particular level. Interviews with the teachers and FGD with the students

highlighted that not only are the grammar topics not appropriate for online learning at the secondary level, but the English 2<sup>nd</sup> paper course itself is inappropriate in general. According to them, most of their students are low achieving in English language courses which makes it harder for them to grasp instructions and explanations of complex grammatical structures in large online classes with technical challenges like audibility problems and issues with the visibility of the whiteboard or the notebook where the teachers often deduce the structures. As such, comprehensibility, in general, is also low. This finding resonates with Pagram and Pagram's (2006) findings which also assert online education is harder for low-achieving students. Furthermore, in this regard, the teachers from both the public and private schools also asserted that the course is inappropriate for online modules as it cannot be made communicative, due to being in asynchronous formats and due to the large classroom size. Instant feedback and error correction to language use and exercises cannot be provided either. This holds similarity with Pagram and Pagram's (2006) study, which found that some topics and courses are often inappropriate for online education and require more physical touch. Here, this manifests a pivotal challenge of the online English language course at the secondary level itself as giving the learners some form of opportunity to communicate in English in the classes manifests a pivotal aspect of improving their communicative skills in the language. Thus, although such opportunities could be provided in the physical classes to some capacity, however, they cannot be provided in the online classes as most online classes of the public and private schools are large, and the instruction is mostly one-directional. Besides, the opportunity for pair and group work is also inhibited in online classes conducted via asynchronous applications such as Moodle, Google Classroom, etc.

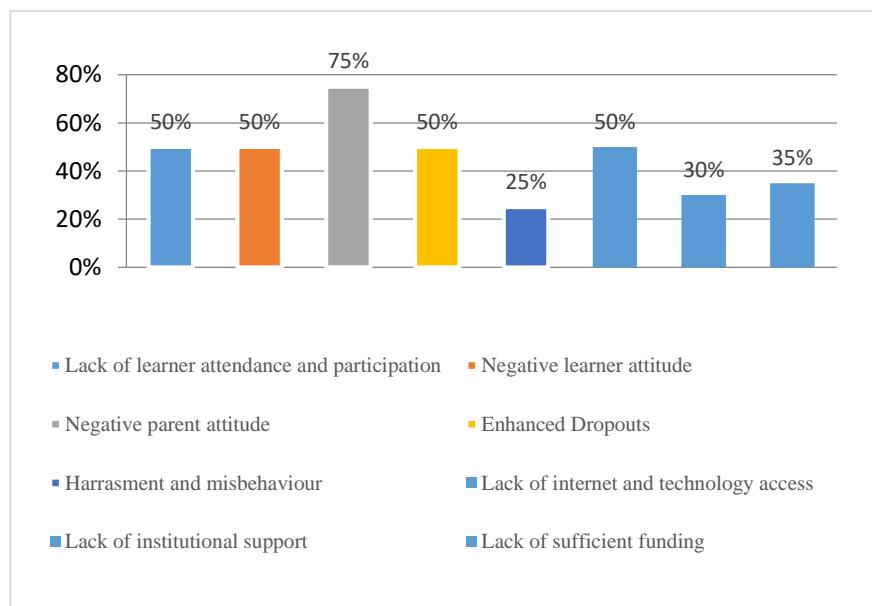
In this regard, the teachers also manifested that the English language assessment modes are not properly adapted to the online medium. Here, instant feedback and error correction to written work cannot be provided due to several technical constraints. Moreover, most students do the homework in their notebooks and send their homework and exercises in JPG or PDF format, thereby, providing written feedback and error correction in these formats are very hard and sometimes even impossible. According to the teacher interview, the tendency to plagiarize is also significantly high in such online assessments. This finding resonates with Emon, et al.'s (2020) study which also found increased plagiarism and misconduct in assessment modes in online education modes in Bangladesh. Again, a discrepancy is noted between findings from teacher interviews and the FGD

sessions with the learners where more learners expressed dissatisfaction with the feedback and error correction process in the online modules than the teachers. As such, this manifests that due to the large classroom size of the public and private secondary schools, interactive classes, instant feedback and better teaching-learning of the course contents cannot be promoted, which results in a slow language learning process among the learners in the contemporary online language classes in the country.

### ***Contextual Challenges***

Based on the data analysis of the qualitative findings, the contextual challenges in the online ELT classes can be presented as follows:

Figure 3. *Contextual Challenges of Online English Language Classes*



There are a series of contextual challenges to such online education in Bangladesh. Here, the teacher interview revealed their discomfort and overall negative attitude toward the online teaching process for its varied challenges. This negative attitude of the participants is demonstrated by the learners' reduced performance, attendance, and participation in online classes, disobedience and misconduct in online classes as well as disruptive and negligent attitude in the classes. Here, the FGD session provides similar findings. The students in most of the FGD sessions asserted that their parents hold a highly negative attitude towards online classes and, thereby, unconsciously disrupt the online classes in many cases. The FGD findings also reveal contextual issues like learners' lack of funding and support for the online classes, the anxiety of participation in the online modules, etc. Here the teacher interview findings and FGD sessions also highlighted the

broader implication of the negative attitude of parents and the general mass towards such online classes. As people in general in the country are accustomed to traditional classes, therefore, the new online module has become part of a culturally unacceptable factor to the mass. The broader implication of such lack of adaptability to and acceptance of online English classes manifest itself in the broader socio-cultural spectrum which reports an enhanced rate of dropouts on part of the student, even in the post-pandemic times.

Here, the contextual challenges can be better understood when related to relevant theories in the domain. The findings from the teachers' interview highlight that the students remain distracted and often engage in misconduct in online classes as there is no fear of punishment or repercussions. Learning, as such, is also affected in the process. This finding resonates with Skinner's (1938) theory of behaviorism, which shows the impact of negative reinforcement and fear of punishment in affecting certain kinds of behavior among learners. Here, as the learners are young, therefore, the fear of teacher punishment and repercussions in the traditional classes served as a positive affecting factor to promote their concentration and participation in the classes. Thus, in online classes, the fear of punishment is not there due to one-directional instruction and less monitoring by the teacher. This reduced fear of negative reinforcement made some of the learners less participatory and distracted in the overall online learning process. It is to be noted that although negative reinforcement is often discouraged in the teaching context at present, however, negative reinforcement in verbal and gestural form manifests a crucial role in keeping the young secondary-level learners in the specific country context attentive in the learning process as they have been accustomed to such modes of reinforcements since early childhood education. This lack of fear of negative reinforcement can also be taken as a reason for the increase in misconduct and harassment in online modules.

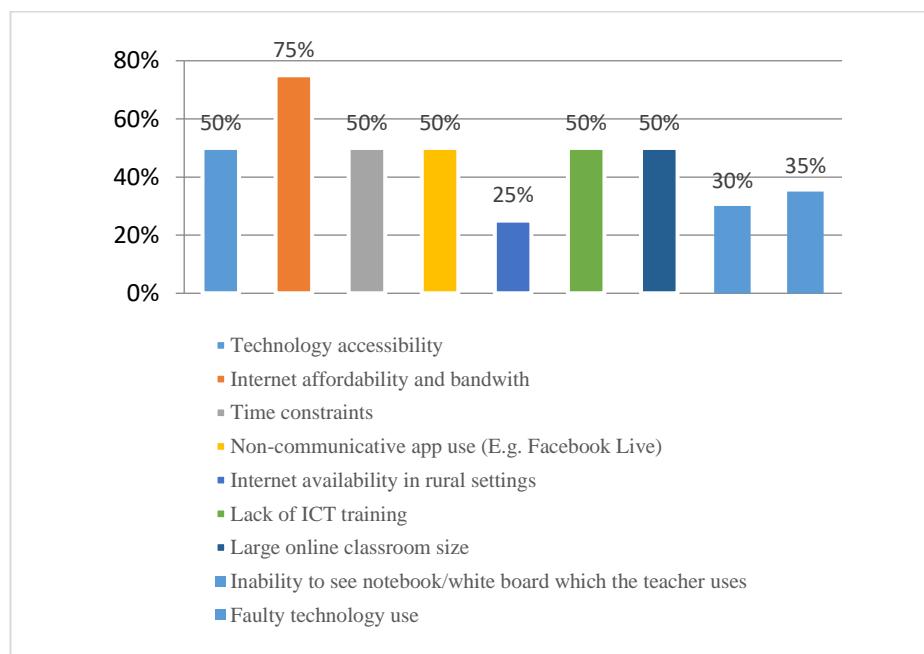
Here, as the online module is new to them with diverse technical and other challenges, therefore, it has a pivotal impact in raising the affective filter and hindering a conducive learning atmosphere in online English classes (Krashen, 1982). As such, we see that the data reflects a lowering of learners' learning motivation, performance, and overall interest in the online English language teaching-learning modules. Here, as the learners were more accustomed to physical classes since their childhood, therefore, they find it difficult to adapt to the new online English language learning module. Hence, due to such a lack of social and psychological integration with online pedagogy, the acceptance of the new online pedagogy is lowered and this, in turn, affects the overall language learning process in the

online medium. Thus, we see that due to this higher affective filter, learning is slow and general comprehension of taught language structure is reduced. In short, at a micro level, we see that the contextual challenges of online English classes at the secondary level include aspects like lack of sufficient funding and support, higher level anxiety, negative attitude of pedagogic participants, etc. On the other hand, at a macro-level, the contextual challenges of such online classes manifest themselves in a broader socio-cultural spectrum by enhancing the rate of secondary-level learner dropout. Here, the data manifest that the contextual challenges of the online module have more permanent and long-term implications, which will also keep impacting us in the post-pandemic social and education spectrum of the country.

### ***Technology Challenges***

Furthermore, in terms of technological challenges, the interview and the FGD findings were as follows:

Figure 4. *Technological Challenges of Online English Language Classes*



The technical challenges of online English education at the secondary level, as manifested from the qualitative data of the current research, includes budget, internet cost, and bandwidth, equipment cost, lack of technical knowledge and training, technical disruptions, low network in rural settings, lack of use of communicative apps like Zoom, Google meet, etc. As manifested in the findings and the aforementioned literature reviews,

technical issues manifest a pivotal and most challenging aspect of online English classes. As such, in Anderson and Grönlund's framework (2009), technological challenges regarding accessibility and budget manifest a pivotal criterion of online education. Here, from the findings, it is apparent that such technical challenges can also be generalized across a more specified context of online English language education at the secondary level in Bangladesh. These technical challenges also help to trigger and catalyze other challenges of the framework including individual, course, and contextual challenges. Therefore, the technological challenges manifest a pivotal aspect in the current research.

Here, the challenges manifest themselves by triggering slower learning and lesser comprehension among the learners. Due to the challenges, the conducive learning atmosphere is hindered and the opportunity to provide a "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky et al., 1997) is hampered, thus, leading to a higher affective filter atmosphere (Krashen, 1982). The disruptive audio and visual quality of the board/copy also manifest a negative impact on audio-visual learners of the context and, thus, cannot accommodate different learning styles and preferences. Therefore, these show how online education in developing countries can also promote a disruptive and distorted online educational process with higher affective filters and lower learning outputs. Furthermore, the findings also highlight some developing country context-specific technological challenges, which help to alleviate the gap in the digital divide between the learners. Here, we see that students from well-off families in urban contexts have more privileges and can attend online classes without many technical disruptions. However, with issues like cost, network disruption, and equipment unavailability, affording such online education is often a rare dream to many, particularly for learners coming from lower-income families or rural geographical contexts. These context-specific technical challenges were also highlighted in the study of Das (2021) and Emon et al. (2020) in Bangladesh, which was mentioned in the literature review segment.

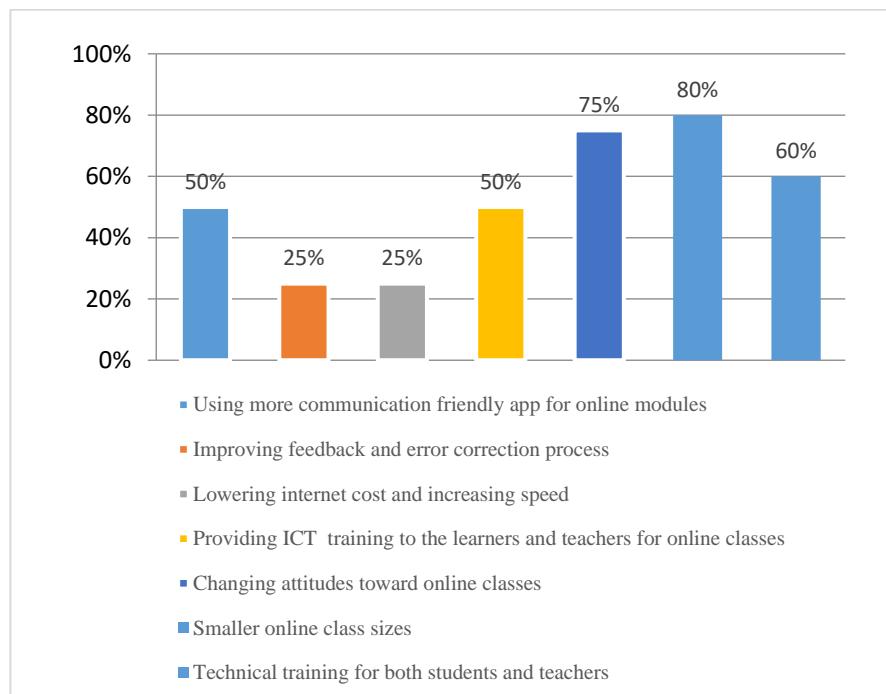
Again, we also see increasing discrimination and divide set in motion by the technical challenges of online education. While such technical disruptions can also persist in developed nations, however, the implication is more severe in developing ones as it triggers the aforementioned societal issues and increases the socio-economic divide in the overall education and social system of a country. Thus, the challenges manifest themselves both at the micro and macro level of education by both impacting the general comprehension of the learners and manifesting a broader implication through various social events such as

enhanced digital divide, dropouts, etc. As such, to deal with these challenges of online education some insights and suggestions of the teachers and the students were collected and this will be analyzed by relating with relevant theories of EFL education, in the next subsection.

### ***Learner-centered Suggestions for Improving Online English Classes:***

The findings regarding the learner-centered suggestions for improving such online ELT classes are as follows:

*Figure 5. Suggestions for Encounter Challenges in Online English Classes in Bangladesh*



A range of suggestions for encountering the challenges of online EFL modules were collected from the teachers and the students, through the interview and the FGD sessions. Such pedagogic participant-oriented research highlighted some important suggestions for improving such online English classes. In this regard, both the learners and the teachers asserted that online English teaching-learning modules are more effective when it is conducted in small class size and with more interactive apps, like zoom, instead of apps like Facebook live. Such online education modes with small classroom sizes and interactive modules can also help promote the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach in online classes and apply the interactive approach to produce a conducive learning

atmosphere (Krashen, 1982). This can promote better language learning among learners, despite the apparent challenges of online English education in a developing country context like Bangladesh.

Again, to manifest effectual learning and internalizing of language structures and skills, it is necessary to ensure appropriate feedback and error correction in online English classes. These suggestions were also echoed by the teachers and the students in the interview and the FGD session. Thus, to prevent the fossilization of errors (Selinker, 1972), it is necessary to ensure appropriate feedback and error correction to the learned structures and skills in English. Here, as per government instructions, although the teachers of the secondary schools are accountable for providing weekly assignments to the students, however, they are not accountable for providing feedback and error corrections to the submitted assignments. As such, the entire online education system takes a one-direction instruction process from teacher to students and there is a lack of teacher-student reciprocity in the feedback and error correction aspect of the online lessons. Therefore, in order to ensure a positive implementation of online English education, it is essential to ensure appropriate feedback, error correction, and student-teacher communication reciprocity in online English classes at the secondary level.

Again, the suggestions of providing technical training for students and teachers along with reduced internet costs with better bandwidth were also asserted by the research participants. Thus, to manifest a wider implication of the positive sides of online education in the contemporary post-pandemic era, it is imperial to ensure appropriate adaptability, accessibility, and usability of technology and the internet in the online pedagogic modules. As such, lowering the internet cost and ensuring its accessibility in the rural sphere along with appropriate ICT training for the pedagogic participants needs to be ensured if we are to encounter the challenges of online English language education in the contemporary pedagogic context of Bangladesh. While lowering internet costs and providing better bandwidth may seem like a long-term dream in developing contexts like Bangladesh, however, ICT training can be ensured through various online modules, for example, by running ICT training courses for online education through Bangladesh Open University (BOU). While such training will not entirely solve the technical challenges in the context, it will help manifest a slight improvement in the overall spectrum. As such, these suggestions entail some means of encountering the technical challenges of online English language education in the context of Bangladesh which can be taken into construction by

both individual pedagogic participants and policymakers in the contemporary domain of online education in Bangladesh.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study is a short-scale research that highlights some empirical findings about online English language teaching and learning challenges at the secondary level in Bangladesh in the contemporary, post-pandemic times and further highlights some important suggestions to encounter the challenges. As such, while the research objectives predominantly aim at exploring the challenges of online education in the domain of the individual, course, contextual and technological challenges at the secondary level online English language teaching and learning context of Bangladesh, it also highlights some teacher and student-centric suggestions to encounter the challenges of such online pedagogic modules. The findings highlight that while positive aspects of online education, such as flexibility, accessibility, etc. are manifested in developed countries, however, the challenges are more predominant.

Although the challenges are presented in four different criteria in this study, however, it is to be kept in mind that the criteria of challenges are not distinct and mutually exclusive domains. Here, the challenges in one criterion influence the challenges in other criteria. As such, while a lack of ICT training and knowledge can be manifested as a challenge under the technology challenges criteria, however, it is to be kept in mind that it also helps to reinforce the challenge of lack of motivation in participating in online teaching and learning process which falls under the individual challenge criterion, based on Anderson and Grönlund's (2009) framework. Hence, the challenges about online education in English language teaching and learning context at the secondary level in Bangladesh need to be viewed as a totalistic domain rather than mutually exclusive criteria.

Furthermore, the study also highlights some suggestions that policymakers, educational intuitions, and even individual teachers and learners can utilize to encounter the challenges and assert a better online English language teaching and learning module. Here, the incorporation of suggestions in one challenge criterion can manifest a positive impact in both that criterion as well as others as one criterion manifests a direct or indirect impact on the other. For example, promoting ICT training among pedagogic participants can both help encounter the challenge of lack of technical knowledge and expertise of the teachers and

students and, at the same time, manifest a positive impact on the learners' and teachers' motivation and attitudes in participating in online classes.

Therefore, despite having limitations in terms of being a small-scale study focusing only on qualitative research methods in the context of Bangladesh, the study posits some critical findings regarding the challenges of online English education at the secondary level in Bangladesh in the contemporary, post-pandemic era. As such, the study can have implications in both practical online English language teaching and learning domains in Bangladesh as well as other developing country contexts and, at the same time, can provide directions and aid regarding future research in relation to understanding pedagogic and contextual challenges in online language education in the post-pandemic era as well as encountering them through an informed decision-making process, both at the policy level as well as the individual virtual class level.

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