ONLINE EFL TEACHING AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN BANGLADESH DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: PRACTICES, CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES

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by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

AI	Artificial Intelligence
BELTA	Bangladesh English Language Teachers Association
BOU	Bangladesh Open University
BR	Breakout Rooms
BTRC	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
BTV	Bangladesh Television
CALL	Computer Assisted Language Learning
CK	Content Knowledge
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
COVID-19	COronaVIrus Disease of 2019
DV	Dependent Variable
EAP	English For Academic Purposes
EIA	English in Action
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EIL	English as an International Language
EMI	English Medium Instruction
ERT	Emergency Remote Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GTM	Grammar Translation Method
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
ISP	Internet Service Provider
IT	Information Technology

IV	Independent Variable
L2	Second Language
LMS	Learning Management System
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MOOC	Massive Open Online Courses
PK	Pedagogical Knowledge
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PPT	PowerPoint Presentation
RO	Research Objective
RQ	Research Question
SAMR	Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition
SLT	Social Learning Theory
SNS	Social Networking Sites
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TIM	Technology Integration Matrix
TK	Technological Knowledge
TCK	Technological Content Knowledge
TDP	Teacher Development Programme
TPK	Technological Pedagogical Knowledge
TPACK	Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge
TSP	Telecom Service Providers
UGC	University Grants Commission
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
UPS	Uninterruptible Power Source

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PENGAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING SECARA DALAM TALIAN PERINGKAT UNIVERSITI DI BANGLADESH SEMASA PANDEMIK COVID-19 : AMALAN, CABARAN DAN STRATEGI MENANGANI

ABSTRAK

Sejarah pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris di Bangladesh bermula sejak zaman penjajahan. Kaedah pengajaran berubah apabila serangan COVID-19 pada Mac 2019. Negara ini, seperti kebanyakan negara membangun lain di dunia, terpaksa beralih kepada mod pengajaran dalam talian. Perubahan yang mendadak ini berlaku tanpa banyak persediaan dapat dilakukan terhadap guru dan pelajar. Hal ini juga berlaku pada peringkat universiti di Bangladesh, pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris setelah melalui mengalami transformasi secara besar-besaran. Bahasa Inggeris adalah subjek utama dalam pendidikan di Bangladesh, seperti bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL), Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua (ESL) dan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa antarabangsa (EIL). Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa global penting yang digunakan di peringkat antarabangsa untuk tujuan akademik dan profesional di dalam dan luar negara, pengajaran dan pembelajarannya perlu diteruskan dalam semua situasi, dengan segala cara. Satu-satunya cara untuk melakukannya semasa wabak adalah mod pengajaran dalam talian. Walau bagaimanapun, untuk melakukannya dengan berkesan, adalah penting untuk pengkaji mengkaji kaedah pengajaran yang bersesuaian. Kaedah pengajaran dalam talian adalah sesuatu yang baharu, keberkesanan kaedah pengajaran ini masih belum dapat dipastikan terutamanya dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Pengkaji perlu untuk mengenalpasti cabaran yang dihadapi oleh guru dan strategi pengajaran yang digunakan untuk mengatasi cabaran tersebut. Sementara itu, beberapa kajian telah dilakukan mengenai pengajaran dalam talian di negara ini, namun kajian terhadap

amalan, keberkesanan, cabaran dan strategi pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris berdasarkan teori dan reka bentuk saintifik masih belum diteroka secara meluas. Kajian yang memberi tumpuan khusus terhadap pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris, Kesusasteraan, linguistik dan ELT masih terhad. Bidang tersebut adalah merupakan komponen kurikulum jabatan Bahasa Inggeris di negara ini. Pendekatan pengajaran yang bersesuaian perlu dijalankan dalam bidang ini. Pengajaran perlu dilaksanakan secara berpusatkan pelajar, berasaskan tugasan dan berorientasikan aktiviti. Aktiviti pengajaran ini memberi tumpuan kepada pemikiran kritis, analisis dan tafsiran. Pendekatan pengajaran yang interaktif dan partisipatif dianggap paling sesuai untuk mengajar domain pengetahuan ini. Namun, keberkesanan pengajaran secara dalam talian perlu dikaji dengan lebih mendalam bagi mengatasi masalah yang dihadapi oleh guru dan menjadikan pengajaran lebih berkesan. Kajian ini menggunakan rangka kerja TPACK untuk membangunkan soal selidik sebagai alat untuk pengumpulan data. Kaedah penyelidikan empirikal campuran digunakan untuk memenuhi objektif kajian dan menjawab soalan kajian. Soal selidik berasaskan web yang mengandungi soalan terbuka dan tertutup diberikan kepada sampel kajian dalam Borang Google. Di samping itu, tiga perbincangan kumpulan berfokus telah dijalankan secara dalam talian melalui platform Zoom yang melibatkan lapan guru. Semua data dikumpulkan dari guru EFL yang bekerja di universiti awam dan swasta yang berbeza di Bangladesh. Kaedah analisis statistik deskriptif digunakan untuk menganalisis data yang dikumpulkan. Dapatan mendapati pengajaran EFL adalah berkesan namun terdapat beberapa masalah yang perlu diatasi. Dari sudut strategi pengajaran juga menunjukkan Keputusan yang baik. Dapatan kajian ini dapat memberi manfaat kepada pihak berkepentingan terutamanya Jabatan Bahasa Inggeris dan universiti di Bangladesh dari segi amalan dan dasar yang berkaitan terhadap pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Selain itu, dapatan kajian ini dapat menjadi alternatif terhadap kaedah dan strategi pengajaran dalam situasi kecemasan seperti pandemik

dan juga pengajaran teradun pada masa depan.

ONLINE EFL TEACHING AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN BANGLADESH DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: PRACTICES, CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES

ABSTRACT

History of English language teaching in Bangladesh traces back to the colonial times, but it never had any experience of online teaching before the onslaught of COVID-19 in March 2019. The country, like many other developing countries of the world, had to shift to online mode of teaching very suddenly immediately after the rapid and wide spread of the deadly pandemic with no previous experience and without much preparation of teachers and learners. English teaching at the university level in Bangladesh also suffered serious setbacks during this period and went through massive transformations. It is important to note that as English is a priority area of education in Bangladesh, like all other English as a Foreign language (EFL), English as a second language (ESL) and English as an international language (EIL) context. There was no alternative to continuing teaching English in the online mode during the pandemic. English being an important global language used internationally for both academic and professional purposes both at home and abroad, its teaching and learning need to be continued in all situations, at all costs. The only way to do it during the pandemic was the online mode. However, for doing it effectively, it has been essential to examine the various ways of online teaching of English. As it was new, how effective online teaching of English proved, what challenges were being faced by teachers and what strategies they adopted for overcoming the challenges need close and critical examination. In the meantime, some studies have already been done on online teaching in the country during the pandemic and beyond, but no significant study has been done on the practices, effectiveness, challenges and coping strategies of teaching English with a strong theoretical back-up and scientific design. No detailed and in-depth study has

been conducted with special focus on teaching of English language, literature, linguistics and ELT which are the components of English department curriculum in the country. These areas are unique in many ways as fields of study and require special pedagogical treatments/ attentions. Teaching these areas of knowledge requires learner-centred, task-based and activities-oriented pedagogical approaches with focus on critical thinking, analysis and interpretation. Interactive and participatory pedagogical approach is considered most suitable for teaching these knowledge domains, but how meaningfully and effectively these could be done in online teaching needs a careful, meticulous and intensive investigation for overcoming the problems experienced and making it more effective. For a clear and comprehensive understanding of the different dimensions of online EFL teaching, TPACK framework has been utilized as a theoretical back-up and blueprint for developing a questionnaire as a tool for data collection and interpretation. A mixed-method empirical research method was used to pursue the research objectives and probe into the research questions. A web- based questionnaire survey containing both open-ended and closed-ended questions was administered in Google form. In addition, three focus group discussions were organized online via Zoom platform involving eight teachers. All data were collected from EFL teachers working in different public and private universities of Bangladesh. A descriptive statistical analysis method was used to analyze the collected data which allowed the researcher to identify significant patterns and trends within the dataset. The findings demonstrate that while EFL teaching methods were riddled with numerous problems, they were not devoid of effectiveness too. The strategies employed to surmount the problems do not, however, seem encouraging. It is believed that the findings and implications of this research will benefit the relevant stakeholders in terms of implementing effective practices and meaningful policies of teaching English in at the university level in Bangladeshi, especially for English Departments. Moreover, study will be of national significance for any such emergency situation in future and

also forblended form of teaching in normal circumstances beyond the pandemic.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

It was an unprecedented situation that compelled Bangladesh, like most other countries of the world, to adopt online teaching and learning. Normal life, or normal situation of the world was turned upside down with the beginning of COVID-19, which began in Wuhan, China in March 2020, soon spread all over the world and claimed thousands of lives, irrespective of old and young. Within a short period of time hundreds and thousands of deaths were reported from different parts of the world and many times more were reported to have been infected by the virulent virus. The whole world was baffled, completely bewildered, knowing not what to do. All spheres of life such as business, agriculture, employment, sports, travel including education came to a complete standstill. It sorely affected all sectors of human life and activities including teaching and learning (Nugroho & Atmojo, 2020). As there was no possible respite within sight, within the shortest possible time, nobody could even guess when it was likely to end (Kimball, 2022). Sometimes partial and sometimes complete lock-down, shut down etc. (Almahasees et al., 2021), sometimes in regions and sometimes at national levels were recommended and enforced by most of the nations; death and infection rates were decreasing and increasing, by turns.

One wave after another of the different variants of COVID-19 gripped and ravaged the whole world, and for safety, specialists were constantly

reminding people of the importance of social distancing, with ‘Stay home and stay safe’ cautioning by virologists and other specialists for self-security and security of others, locally and globally. Life was totally paralyzed; people’s movement stopped; schools, colleges, universities, all offices, business establishments and industries were shut down. People were forced to stay at home by state decisions; police and even armed forces were deployed; even curfew was enforced for forcing people to stay home (Al Shdaifat & Salih, 2021). People were caught between ‘life’ on the one hand, and ‘livelihood’ on the other, both being important. Whatever was the situation, people had to eat for survival, they needed to earn their livelihood for which their activities or works should continue, but by staying safe.

1.2 Beginning of Online Teaching-Learning

This being the reality, in education, conventional mode of teaching-learning with physical presence of teachers and learners in the classroom became practically impossible. Some ways and means became essential for continuing life and activities in various fronts including education; it was necessary to go for ways that could help continue activities by ‘staying home and staying safe’. Following this slogan, the norms of education changed from face-to-face to online mode (Shahzad et al., 2020).

Education, as it helps build up future generations, is a very crucial sector for all nations of the world. According to a report of United Nations, it is not only a fundamental human right. It is an enabling right with direct

impact on the realization of all other human rights. It is a global common good and a primary driver of progress across all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals as a bedrock of just equal, inclusive, peaceful society. (Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19, 2020, p. 3).

Therefore, education must be continued, but by remaining safe. Safety of teachers, students and all concerned should be a major consideration, which was possible only through online mode. In the backdrop of this evolving crisis, online teaching was a new development that emerged as the only possible solution to continue teaching during the strange and uncertain situation (Dhawan, 2020). With the onslaught of COVID-19, when nations of the world felt helpless against it, when lockdown or shutdown became an urgent need to save people's life, when the entire global scenario of education had been facing a serious problem and had been in a state of total deadlock, online mode of teaching came as a solution to continue emergency or even regular, normal office works, trade, commerce, and teaching-learning and testing along with many other activities at the national and international levels. It was adopted as an alternative for activities with physical presence. In fact, it was the only alternative left for continuing education for all levels, from preschool to the very last level of education all over the world (Mahyoob, 2020). It had been used globally for teaching, learning and testing, as well as for other educational and official purposes around the world, like holding meetings, symposiums, webinars and the like. Advancements in technology, especially the revolution in computer programming and information and communication engineering, helped develop programmes very fast to

respond to the new demands of the changed emergency situation arising out of the rapid transmission of COVID-19 virus.

Online teaching-learning was adopted by most of the countries (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020) of the world including Bangladesh to continue education in a situation that is described as 'new normal' (Elshami et al., 2021), as nobody knew when it is going to end, or when the situation was going to be good enough for returning to physical classes. Most of the countries decided to adopt it knowing full well that there were challenges involved, (as it happens with all major changes in education, which is a complex thing that involves, teachers, students, context, teaching-learning aids including technology required for implementing changes).

When the decision for it was taken, none of these variables such as teachers, learners, infrastructure, administration, was properly ready. So, preparation was necessary but with minimum preparation, most of the countries including the less technologically developed countries started online education (Al-Hunaiyyan et al., 2021). However, some teachers and students gradually became used to it. By now it has become a somewhat familiar way of teaching, learning, testing and also activities in different spheres of professional life.

Literature on online teaching shows that sophisticated use of technology or software can make online teaching interesting (Rafiq et al., 2020), engaging (Ganimian et al., 2023) and useful; it can help introduce varieties in teaching and make it a motivating experience, but majority of the teachers did not initially have that level of technology literacy in many

contexts (Melvina et al., 2020) including Bangladesh, and there had been many other limitations with related issues for an effective use of online teaching. Training of the teachers also had been an urgent necessity (Khan et al., 2020). This mode of teaching had been used globally for a prolonged period from the lowest to the highest level of education. In Bangladesh, like most other countries of the world, this mode of teaching had been used for nearly two years until face-to-face classes started in February, 2022 (Sarkar, 2022).

1.3 Official Adoption of Online Teaching-Learning by the Ministry of Education in Bangladesh and its State of Preparation

Like many other countries, online teaching is a totally new experience for Bangladesh. On 30th April 2020, the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC), a statutory apex body in the field of higher education, in a high-level meeting with the Vice-Chancellors of the universities decided to start online classes to continue education during the crisis. On May 7, the UGC issued a guideline for conducting

courses online amid the pandemic for private universities (Pvt Uni Students Can Attend, 2020). But teachers were not prepared for it (Wadud, 2020). The unpreparedness is largely attributed to the woefully inadequate institutional support (Hidayat et al., 2023), their limited ICT literacy and experience in managing online classrooms (Sahito, 2022), and the insufficient time allocated for online course design and test preparation **(**Tram, 2021). However, experts worked on it and developed programmes

and software. Workshops were organized for teachers to help teachers with the knowledge and skill to conduct technology-based classes.

A few private universities started online classes from April, 2020 whilst public institutions were quite late to start classes in web-based platforms (Islam et al., 2020). According to a report by a leading daily newspaper, initial online class offerings were limited to just 63 universities, and the majority of those were online in name only (Alamgir, 2020a). These universities were ill-prepared for e-learning services, according to their administrators, who also cited institutional incapabilities with regard to technological and logistical support required to carry out teaching activities beyond normal classrooms (Islam et al., 2021). There were initial difficulties for teachers and students; for some these challenges persisted as long as this format of teaching continued. The private universities of Bangladesh conducted online exams to complete the current semester (Jasim, 2020), but the public universities delayed in conducting any online exams. Dhaka University developed software for conducting online exams (Dhaka University Develops New Online Exam System, 2021).

1.4 Online Teaching-learning of English in Bangladesh during the Pandemic

English teachers of Bangladesh, like those in other contexts, did not have any option other than embracing this "new normal" mode of teaching without enough preparation. They struggled to adopt and adapt to these changes, especially the teaching and assessment of the four skills of English language in the online mode (Hossain, 2021). But as English is a

priority area of education in Bangladesh, like all other EFL, ESL and English as an international language context, there was no alternative to its online teaching-learning for Bangladesh to continue it during the COVID-19 pandemic. Like all other areas of education, English teaching-learning had to be continued in the online mode during the ordeal, and, therefore, making online education as effective as possible is crucial for producing graduates knowledgeable and skilled in English language. As English is very important for academic and occupational purposes both at home and in international contexts, examining the practices and ensuring effective English teaching in the online mode is essential for the country both for quality higher education and for developing skilled human resources proficient in English for the professional sectors.

EFL teachers of universities had been somehow giving instructions in the online mode, but how well/effectively they had been doing those requires a special attention and systematic investigation. It is necessary to examine closely how well the English teachers have been managing to teach, and if it is not effective, measures must be taken to improve it considering the importance of English education in the country and beyond. It is also important to examine if there had been problems with it; the types of problems teachers encountered; the ways teachers dealt with the problems; the perceptions and experiences of teachers etc. The problems experienced must be identified and resolved so that better and more focused attention can be given to address the problems. Examining its effectiveness, too, is crucial to learn lessons from the factors that made it effective, and the lessons learnt can be used to address the problem zone and ensure better

learning outcomes for students. If it can be developed as a smooth, manageable and effective mode of teaching English, it can help sustain the quality of English education during any emergency situations.

As it had been the only mode of education during the pandemic, there is no substitute to making it as problem free and effective as possible to continue meaningful education. Therefore, the topic demands serious research attention for the teachers and more importantly for the educational policy makers in the country. With this end in view, this research aims to scrutinize critically what methods and techniques of online English teaching practices were used, how well online English teaching had been working in Bangladesh in online classes during the pandemic, how effective it proved; if it did not prove effective, what reasons stood behind its ineffectiveness; what are the perceptions of Bangladeshi English teachers regarding these issues. The findings will play a significant role in making this mode work the best possible way in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world. It is for these reasons that the present research, through a detailed, scientific and rigorous study, attempts to examine all these factors of online English teaching practices in Bangladesh during COVID-19 ordeal.

1.5 Major Areas of Focus in University English Department Syllabus

The special focus of this study will be on examining the effectiveness and problems of online teaching of English at the university level in Bangladesh. It is important to note that the courses offered by the English departments in the universities of Bangladesh combine literature,

language, linguistics, English Language Teaching (ELT) and General Education (GED) courses. For example, in Pabna University of Science and Technology University where the researcher works as a teacher, BA Honours syllabus (2021-2022) (See Appendix A) of the Department of English offers 55 courses, worth 143 credits. An area-wise breakup of the syllabus is as follows:

1. Literature: 25 courses, 75 credits (40%)
2. Language courses: 10 courses, 26 credits (25%)
3. GED courses: 5 courses, 12 credits (9.09 %)
4. Linguistics: 3 courses, 9 credits (5.45%)
5. ELT: 2 courses, 6 credit (3.64%)
6. Others: 10 courses, 15 credit (5.45%)

On the other hand, the MA syllabus (2019-2020) (See Appendix B) of the same department offers 12 courses, worth 34 credits. It is necessary to mention that the department was established in 2015 and students of the 2019-2020 session are the first and latest Master's batch of this department. The area-wise break up of this syllabus is given below:

1. Literature: 8 courses, 24 credits (66.67%)
2. ELT: 2 courses, 6 credits (16.67%)
3. Others: 2 courses, 4 credits (16.67%)

Similarly, the English Department in all other public and private universities in Bangladesh offer courses in the same areas with some variations in number of courses and credits. For example, of Rajshahi University which is one of the oldest and most reputed universities in

Bangladesh offers 30 courses (28 taught courses + 2 viva voce and others), having a total of 120 credits (each course carries 4 credits) in the BA Honours syllabus (2019-2022) (See Appendix C), and the area wise breakup of these courses are as follows:

1. Literature: 18 courses, 72 credits (60.00%)
2. Language: 5 courses, 20 credits (16.66%)
3. ELT: 1 course, 4 credits (3.33%)
4. Linguistics: 1 course, 4 credits (3.33%)
5. GED: 3 courses, 12 credits (10%)
6. Viva-Voce & others: 2 Courses, 8 credits (6.66%)

For the MA degree, the Department of English, Rajshahi University, like English Departments in other major universities in Bangladesh, has two different streams—MA in English Literature and MA in ELT which offer pure literature and pure ELT courses respectively.

1.6 Nature of Teaching and Learning English

From the two above lists, it is evident that the English departments in Bangladesh offer courses in a number of areas, each of which has its distinctive nature and characteristics, different theoretical positions and approaches, and requires different kinds of attention to teaching and learning. Teachers need theoretical, content and pedagogical knowledge of all these areas in order to teach each area effectively. The majority of the courses are literature-based courses which, according to Mathew and Pandya (2020), are unique as modes of communication, use of language, details, devices and techniques for different genres and forms. Teachers

need to know the different genres and their distinct features, and use specific techniques for teaching. In most cases, literature is taught using the lecture method, but discovery-oriented, student-centred, activity-based pedagogical approaches are recommended to find out the different literary aspects in literary texts to be read for pleasure, and also for critical evaluation and interpretation. Students of literature have to depend more on collaborative discussions and interpretations on different themes, aspects of characters, literary devices etc. When teaching different genres of literature performance-based lectures, presentation skills, effective use of gestures and variation of tones by the lecturer are important. To do this successfully, gestures, emotions and facial expressions are much more significant than in dealing with other subjects.

When teaching English language, on the other hand, lecturers focus more on the knowledge and skills of the English language through engaging learners and by using the language in and outside of class. For teaching English language, teachers need theoretical knowledge about the different aspects such as phonology, morphology, syntax etc., but for development of languages skills, it is important to provide extensive practice opportunities for all the major skills and sub-skills, which requires a special pedagogical focus.

Language learning can be broadly defined as the development of the ability to communicate in a second/foreign language. Students neet to speak, read, write and listen in the language they are learning throughout the learning process (Zou et al., 2021). Language development can occur

in both a conscious and subconscious process and is the result of either formal learning situations or self-learning programmes or exposure to or immersion in the target language (Kramina, 1999). When learning a language, students are aware of the rules of the new language and are able to transfer the knowledge into reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. In some settings, the teaching of linguistic rules has been overemphasised but research shows that simply knowing grammatical rules does not necessarily make learners speak or write correcctly although it may help them pass standardized tests of English (Foppoli, 2022).

Applied linguists have diverse opinions on the processes of language teaching. One group of professionsla believe that learners should receive didactic, teacher-centered instruction or student-centered instruction. These professionals argue that the home and community environment does not provide all learners with the experiences they need to become competent language users and that direct training in grammatical forms, vocabulary and pronunciation can help students catch up with their peers. A similar argument is made for the didactic teaching of written language. Another argument is infavour of language teaching is that learners should be provided with a stimulating, rich language environment and equipped with the necessary tools to further improve their spoken and written skills. Teachers' instructions should be base on the needs and interests of the learners rather than prescribing the content and rules of the language in a predetermined way. The complexity of the language learning process makes it necessary for students to participate in all kinds of language learning activities as opposed to isolated activities that ruin the language

learning process by oversimplifying it and making learning more difficult for them (Bloome, 2022).

Badjadi (2020) claims that globalized approaches to education reflects the paradigm shift in education towards student-centeredness for quite some time. Learner-centered education (LCE), as opposed to teacher dominated education, is a model that emerged at the turn of the 20th century to provide a new understanding of how teaching and learning ought to be like in the new millennium (Starkey, 2019; Weimar, 2013, as cited in Badjadi, 2020). When teachers try to work on students' English language development, they often encounter their (students') inadequate language skills and limited subject knowledge. Teachers must, therefore, incorporate student-centered and participatory teaching methods to overcome these weaknesses in vocabulary, grammatical errors, limited range of ideas, and the disorganized presentation of ideas. Ellis (2017) emphasizes that students must be encouraged through tasks, activities and projects to expand their knowledge in both language and content. When learning a language, it is essential to consider cognitive aspects and to ensure that the language is learned through cooperative and collaborative practices (Donato, 2016).

Unlike other disciplines, language is both the subject of study and the medium through which it is taught (Zou et al., 2021). Language teaching is therefore is an area where teachers must keep in mind the specific features such as impart knowledge of English language system, or competence (Chomsky, 1957) and developing skills of using language in a social

context (‘Performance’ in Chomsky’s word) which are two distinct areas with some connections, and need two different types of attention.

Henard and Leprince-Ringuet (2008, as cited in Pacaol, 2021, p. 44) argue that “quality teaching is necessarily a student-centered” process whereby special attention is given to the needs of each individual student. Even in online mode of education, teaching of all subjects should follow a student-centered approach, according to Knowlton (2020), who contends that this will improve the effictiveness of teaching. Such an approach is therefore is also essential for teachiing linguistics, ELT and GED courses which have their own specific characteristics, and are different from other fields of study. Linguistics needs to focus on the theories of language, while ELT focuses on the theory and practice of language course and materials design, methodology and testing, which also requires different emphases and theories. So, teaching in the department of English is very complex and challenging.

It is a very important topic of research of the time and a research worthy topic since online education during this pandemic caused by COVID-19 is a burning issue. It is important to mention that there has not been any systematic, scientific and detailed study on it in Bangladesh so far, except a very few short-length, hurriedly published research articles producing insufficient amounts of data. So, a close, detailed and rigorous study is necessary to examine the effectiveness and problems of online English teaching practices in Bangladesh. This study proposes to examine how effective the practices proved, what were the problems experienced with

these and what coping strategies the teachers followed to deal with the challenges. This will be the first postgraduate level study on this topic in Bangladesh.

1.7 Statement of Problem

COVID-19 has brought about a drastic change in all areas of life, including education around the world. In this situation, online activities proved to be the only substitute to keep all emergency sectors running such as teaching and learning. Teachers had to adopt online teaching methods using various online platforms (Wargadinata et al., 2020). COVID-19 brings it as a frontline mode of teaching to continue education during the pandemic (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). However, as this is entirely new for most of the teachers in Bangladesh, including English teachers, there are naturally many problems with it in Bangladesh; teachers are not prepared for the transition at all, although a few educational institutions used online teaching in the pre-pandemic era, it has never been used before on such a large scale (Adnan & Anwar, 2020).

On April 30, 2020, the Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC) decided in a high-level meeting with the vice-chancellors of the universities to start online teaching to continue education during the pandemic (Alamgir, 2020a). On May 7, the UGC published a guideline for conducting online courses at private universities in view of the prevailing coronavirus pandemic ("Pvt Uni Students Can Attend Practical Classes, Exams: UGC", 2020). However, simply issuing instructions through a change in pedagogy does not solve the problem.

Changing from one pedagogical mode to another is not easy; it is not something that someone just decides and happens automatically; it requires in-depth research and good planning. This new approach assigns new skills, new equipment, and their use which is a huge challenge for those involved in education. Everyone has been struggling to reconfigure and acclimatize and many problems, regarding this matter, have been experienced so far. Concerned authorities, experts and educators have been trying to find ways and means for effective solutions to the problems to make online education as effective as possible.

Courses of the different areas offered in the English department require different pedagogical and content knowledge to be effectively taught through the technological knowledge and skills in online classes, which initially posed significant problems for many teachers. Developing students' literary competence is important for teaching literature (Armea et al., 2022) and such a skill can be achieved through students' meaningful engagement in class. Mathew and Pandya (2020) assert mastering literature, unlike other subjects, requires the presence of an effective performer and not just a lecturer in the class. In addition to discussions and interpretations of various aspects of literature, group performance is crucial to nurture students' interest in literature. The possibility of active group participation is reduced to a great extent in online classes; these classes do not offer much opportunity to foster an engaging environment.

Online English teaching is fraught with numerous challenges which include the creation of digital materials (Gao & Zhang, 2020), the absence

of social interaction, the resulting lack of corrective feedback (Lee & Song, 2020) as well as time constraints (Putri, 2020). This is especially because English language, literature, linguistics, and ELT are specialized fields of study that require ample practice opportunities that can only be achieved through different theoretical and pedagogical approaches. Language courses should therefore focus on skills training because language is a set of skills that requires extensive practice for skills training in addition to teaching knowledge about language (also known as linguistic competence) (Hymes, 1972). As in many other subjects, lecture-style teaching is not suitable/effective for developing language skills and knowledge of literature. ELT promotes the negotiation and development of meaning in educational contexts through a learner-centered approach (Badjadi,2019). The idea that modern ELT methods and post-methods revolve around learner-centeredness has impacted on the methodology of current ELT practice (Hall, 2017; Nunan, 2012). Therefore, teaching language, ELT and linguistics proves to be effective when it focuses on knowledge in the respective areas and is student-centered.

However, many English teachers in Bangladesh fail to conduct participatory and collaborative teaching effectively, even in onsite classrooms (Sinha & Idris, 2013). The majority of English teachers in Bangladesh, including the English teachers of English departments do not have the required level of digital literacy to make sophisticated use of digital devices for language skill development. What is more, most of the teachers are given insufficient time to acquire knowledge about it and adapt to technology-enhanced teaching which

includes both synchronous and asynchronous methods (MacIntyre et al., 2020). They have hardly received any training. When examining pedagogical strategies for pre-service language teachers amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Sumardi and Nugrahani (2021) find that professional development for teaching via digital platforms is rather limited. Unfavorable circumstances have forced them into this quagmire.

Like teachers around the world, English teachers who teach language, linguistics, literature and ELT have also had to transform traditional classroom teaching to online teaching without much preparation (Rouf & Rashid, 2021). Before the onslaught of COVID-19, EFL teachers, despite having numerous problems, managed to their students in language skills in the physical classrooms by organizing and monitoring student-centred interactive activities and providing feedback but they do not have the knowledge and experience to do all this in online classes through the sophisticated use of digital devices. They are also not familiar with apps/ technologies, devices, their varieties, features, characteristics, functions and modes (synchronous and asynchronous), which pose enormous challenges for them to effectively teach the different areas of English.

Khan et al. (2020) emphasize that effective online teaching and assessment require teachers to have general skill sets to redesign the syllabus for which teacher training is also a crucial factor. However, in Bangladesh, pre-service teacher training is relatively rare, especially in universities, as pointed out by another study (Rony & Awal, 2019, as cited in Khan et al., 2020). Teachers' inexperience, coupled with their lack of exposure to ICT-

enhanced teaching and digital literacy, hinders their ability to innovatively integrate different dimensions of ICT into technology-driven teaching. Furthermore, unfavorable conditions and infrastructural constraints exacerbate these challenges. Weak infrastructures and inadequate resources are some of the serious shortcomings of this new mode of teaching. Technical issues such as poor Internet coverage (Al-Amin et al., 2020; Jalli, 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Melvina et al., 2020; Oraif & Elyas, 2021; Sarkar et al., 2021; Will, 2020) and power supply problems (Agung et al., 2020; Ikwuka et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021; Oyedotun, 2020; Tariq & Fami, 2020) have made the process of teaching and learning various aspects of English through online platforms less fruitful and unsatisfactory.

Moreover, teachers tend to dominate the classes by primarily explaining texts with recorded lessons often focusing on content rather training than students in language skills. This is confirmed by Rouf and Rashid (2021), who argue that English teachers fail to teach and practice the four skills of English in online classes. The effectiveness of teaching and learning through online platforms, particularly in relation to English language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, is also questioned by many educators (Hossain, 2021). The abrupt transition and the resulting lack of time to learn how to use ICT most efficiently hinder the development of language skills and knowledge of language and literature (Akilandeswari, n.d.). This unprecedented shift is particularly challenging for those who were previously accustomed to face-to-face teaching (Afrin, 2020) as was

the norm in Bangladeshi EFL context. Consequently, these serious problems have a negative impact on students' learning outcomes.

Some other grim challenges have been identified in the context of online pedagogy of different aspects of English teaching. Issues such as monitoring students, getting feedback all students and general class management are prevalent. There are also limited interaction between teachers and students which make it difficult for them to organize group and pair work (Khan et al., 2020). Teachers often feel that they are speaking “to a void” as learners are not physically present in the classroom, leading to a sense of disconnection (Khan et al., 2020, p. 9). As a result, online EFL teaching and learning becomes, by and large, a teachers’ show as students rarely engage in meaningful and interactive tasks (Rouf & Rashid, 2021). It is obvious that online EFL teaching amid the pandemic is carried out far less ideally due to the strange unfamiliarity of the situation that prevented teachers from giving full attention and efforts.

The above problems have made the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in an online environment very challenging and created chaos in the education scenario worldwide. However, the data on reported problems is limited to a few published research papers. Moreover, the studies conducted so far are a few short length research papers, published in haste with hurriedly collected insufficient data. The present study therefore aims to conduct a detailed, scientific and rigorous investigation of various dimensions of online EFL teaching at the university level.

1.8 Research Objectives (RO)

This study has the following specific objectives:

RO1: To investigate the practices of online teaching of English language, literature, linguistics and ELT in the Department of English in Bangladesh during COVID-19 pandemic.

RO 2: To examine the effectiveness of online teaching of English language, literature, linguistics and ELT in the Department of English in Bangladesh during COVID-19 pandemic

from teachers' perspectives.

RO 3: To identify the challenges or problems experienced in online teaching of English language, literature, linguistics and ELT in the Department of English in Bangladesh during COVID-19 pandemic.

RO 4: To examine the coping strategies that teachers use to overcome/surmount the problems they face while teaching English language, literature, linguistics and ELT online in the Department of English in Bangladesh during COVID-19 pandemic.

1.9 Research Questions (RQ)

In order to achieve the above objectives, the present study will answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What were practices of online teaching of English language, literature, linguistics and ELT in the Department of English in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ 2: What was the teachers' assessment and interpretation of effectiveness of online teaching of English language, literature, linguistics and ELT in the Department of English in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic?

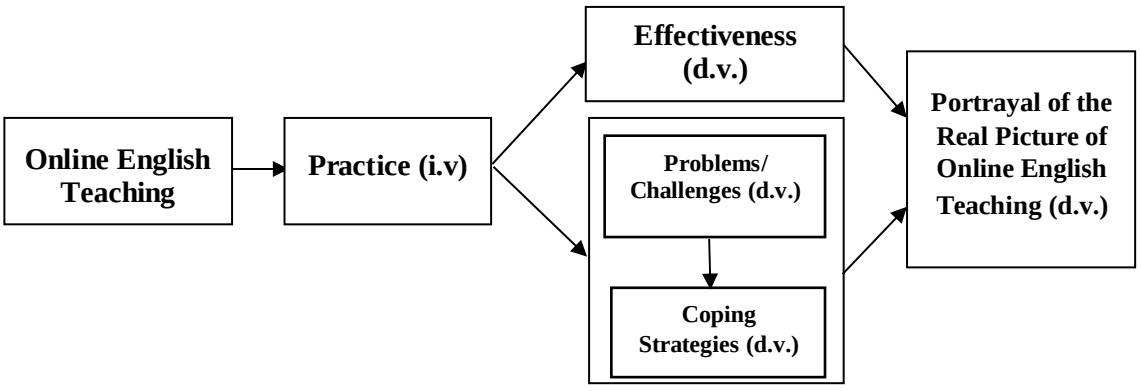
RQ 3: What were the problems/challenges teachers faced in online teaching of English language, literature, linguistics and ELT in the Department of English in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ 4: How did the teachers overcome/surmount the problems they face while teaching English language, literature, linguistics and ELT online in the Department of English in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.10 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1

Conceptual Framework of this Study



The conceptual framework (CP) illustrated in Figure 1 shows the exploration of different aspects of online English teaching during COVID-

19 pandemic and their progression through various phases. As is seen in the figure, this framework comprises four phases all connected to one another. As the study advances, the focus diverges on different dimensions of online English teaching which are its practices, effectiveness, challenges and ways of dealing with those challenges. The investigation of all these aspects will lead this research to arrive at its final goal of depicting the real picture of teaching English in online platforms. As it can be seen in the figure, the practices, effectiveness, challenges and coping strategies of online teaching of English are dependent variables. Online teaching of English is the only independent variable in the figure. However, while effectiveness and challenges emerge directly from the English teaching practices, the coping strategies of the challenges of English teaching in digital platforms are known only when problems are mentioned. The former originates from the latter. These two factors are obviously interlinked with each other and therefore kept in a single frame.

1.11 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because the lessons learnt from online teaching-learning of English during emergency situations like the COVID-19 global pandemic can be used for any national or global emergency situations to continue education. It will help build capability of teachers and learners for blended learning that is widely used now globally. Presenting and participating in local and global webinars too have been made possible because of the technological know-how teachers and learners learnt for their online classes during the pandemic. This research is very important as it exhorts teachers and learners to learn the use of technology for

teaching (for the teachers) and learning (for the learners), and this becomes a permanent resource for teachers and learners who can use technology for teaching and learning in normal times in their classrooms and also for online classes if any class is missed for some reasons. Thus, it serves as a wake-up call to educational authorities that crucial measures and tactics should be taken to guarantee that EFL practitioners are well-positioned to effectively improve their teaching abilities as soon as possible.

Teachers can borrow the positive findings of this study to use technology for effective teaching of English language which is a specific field of study that requires special attention for creating practice opportunities to promote the development of the major skills of English and their sub-skills among the learners through extensive practice. English teaching is aimed at facilitating both conscious 'learning' through learning of the rules of language (rules of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, discourse, text, and genre) and 'acquisition', or subconscious development of language through exposure to or immersion in English or development of communicative competence that includes (1) linguistic competence or language rules, (2) sociolinguistic competence or 'appropriate language use in social context according to role-relationship, (3) discourse competence or speaking and wiring logically, coherently and cohesively above sentence level, and (4) strategic competence or ability to use extralinguistic and paralinguistic features to make communication more effective (e.g. Hymes, 1972; Canale, 1983; Canale& Swain, 1980). As developing language skills require practice, a language teacher has to follow many techniques to create opportunities for practice. Pair work,