

Factors Affecting Student Motivation in Undergraduate Online EFL Classroom in Bangladesh

Mehedi Kayser Pabitra¹, Tasnia Tarannum²

ABSTRACT: *Motivation is considered as a key contributing factor for successful language learning in an EFL context such as Bangladesh. Its importance is even more intensified in the new normal academic context of online classes since early 2020 due to Covid-19 pandemic. This paper examines the undergraduate students' motivation dynamics in online English classes at American International University- Bangladesh (AIUB). The paper intends to identify the major factors that may affect students' motivation which eventually influence their performance and success in English Reading, Writing, Business Communication and B.A. English major courses. It presents a rigorous analysis of data collected through two separate student and teacher surveys on one hundred and five undergraduate students of AIUB attending online English courses as part of their university curricula during the covid-19 pandemic. The findings of the paper indicate that students' preconceived negative ideas about online class environment, peer interaction, teacher factors, technological support, and online grading have significant impact on student motivation in online English classes. The paper also presents a detailed guideline for teachers to improve students' motivation and manage a conducive language learning environment in online classroom.*

Keywords: *EFL context, online class, undergraduate, student motivation, survey.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Online education was an uncommon topic for educators in Bangladesh even

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English
American International University Bangladesh (AIUB).

* Corresponding author: Email: mehedipabitra@yahoo.com

² Lecture, Department of English
American International University Bangladesh (AIUB).
Email: tarannum@aiub.edu

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a few years ago but it suddenly became an integral part of our education system due to the Covid19 pandemic during 2019-2021. In the latest rapidly evolving online education scenario in Bangladesh, learners were forced to adjust themselves to many new challenges such as inadequate digital fluency with limited logistic support, decreased interaction with peers and limited scope of support from teachers leading to an increased importance of self-motivation and self-determination among learners. Motivation is often deemed as a highly crucial factor for online education and considering the novelty of the online education situation in Bangladesh, it is even more important to understand the factors that may impact student motivation positively or negatively to ensure the optimum success of any online education program.

In a study, Bao (2020) pointed out effective instructional design, suitable teaching strategy, adequate teacher support as well as administrative support, scope for student- student interaction, and technical support as factors crucial to the success of online education programs at higher educational institutions. The amount of research conducted in motivation in L2 online learning in the context of Bangladesh is still not adequate since online learning has gained popularity here quite recently. This paper intends to investigate the key factors influencing learner motivation in undergraduate online English classes of Bangladesh. While putting the teacher at the center of attention, the paper also investigates the role of several other factors related to interaction among students, tasks, grading and technical issues. It is firmly believed that this paper would provide researchers and educators with useful insights on EFL learners' motivation dynamics in online setting at the tertiary level. The research hypothesizes that:

- Teacher plays the central role in motivating undergraduate EFL learners in online classroom.
- In Bangladesh, undergraduate students have negative notions about online class
- External fear factors largely hinder language learning
- Limited scope of teacher- student and student- student interaction negatively influence student motivation in online classroom.
- Inadequate technological support and competence affect EFL learner motivation in online classroom.
- The types and management of classroom activities influence learner motivation.
- Teacher assessment has implications for motivation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Motivation

Motivation is an instrumental factor in the teaching learning research and therefore, there has been a large amount of evidence of the influence as well as the dynamics of motivation in education. This paper looks at motivation based on several theories such as expectancy value, Attribution, and self – determination. The importance of motivation is evident in many academic researches. Schunk et al. (2014) argues that a motivated learner is goal driven who performs to achieve the learning target. While a motivated learner is ready to do whatever is required to succeed in a task, a demotivate learner profile in Schunk, et al. (2014) gets to see “disorganized learning efforts, inadequate attention, insufficient note taking, carelessness about organizing or rehearsing material, unwillingness to seek help, anxiety, and lack of confidence about their learning ability. While the most eligible learners may fail due to lack of motivation, high motivation can make a learner succeed even with inadequate abilities. The student’s active involvement is necessary for motivation (Dörnyei, 2014). Dörnyei (2020) further emphasizes that in any educational context, be it traditional or distance learning, students’ active engagement in the learning process is highly required.

2.2 Motivation in Distance learning

In distance education, traditionally known as online learning, teachers and learners being situated in their own settings, meet distantly in virtual classrooms through internet and technological devices (Moore & Kensely, 2012; Harnett, 2016). The physical distance between teachers and learners and the lack of face-to-face communication intensify the importance of motivation in online learning environment (Bekele, 2010). Especially in the last few years, motivation in distance learning environment has become the center of attention as researchers have often identified poor motivation as responsible for inadequate learner participation (Kyewski & Krämer, 2018) and high dropout rates in online courses (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005).

2.3 Research on Factors Affecting EFL Learner Motivation in Online Classes

The teacher is believed to play a very crucial role in sustaining learner motivation throughout the whole period of their studies in a course (Renandya, 2015). In EFL contexts, where teachers are mostly bilingual, understanding students’ language learning goals and needs, showing sensitivity towards students’ L2 learning problems, being competent in using English, and in using culturally appropriate teaching strategies are teacher qualities often deemed crucial for learner motivation

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(Brown, 2012, Renandya, 2015). Many researchers have identified instructor-learner interaction (ILI) as one of the most powerful contributors to learner motivation in online courses (Burnett et al., 2007; Kuo et al., 2014, Gray & DiLoreto, 2016). Fear and insecurity due to inadequate teacher support, uninteresting activities and content may lower learners' motivation level which, in turn, may lead to decreased student participation and attendance in online environments. That is why, need- based support for students has been advocated by researchers to ensure a fear- free, positive learning environment (Chen and Jang, 2010). Meaningful tasks, adequate communication between teachers and learners, and instructor presence are some other factors that have been reported to have significant influence on student motivation in online setting. Maintaining teacher presence by regularly contributing to online discussions and activities is also identified as crucial to enhancing student motivation in online classrooms (Baker, 2010; Bekele, 2010).

Hatziapostolou & Paraskakis (2010) found positive correlation between teacher feedback provided through online systems and student involvement, motivation, and achievement. A qualitative study examining the impact of online learning on EFL students' motivation reported negative impact of ineffective, inadequate, uninteresting course content, insufficient scope for 'socialization', lack of self- determination and discipline, inadequate feedback and interaction with teacher, simplified content and tasks targeting weaker students on learner motivation in an EFL course in Turkey (Meşe, E. & Sevilen, Ç., 2021). Learner- learner interaction (LLI) is also considered crucial to ensure learner motivation in online learning environment (Elizondo-Garcia & Gallardo, 2020; Kurucay & Inan, 2017).

Hartnett (2015) has highlighted the importance of creating sufficient scope for interaction among distance learners to make them feel being part of a supportive community. To sustain learner motivation, Jones & Issroff (2007) have stressed the necessity of creating a student- friendly environment to help them share their thoughts without hesitation. Another factor that has received significant attention in the discussion on motivation in online learning is 'Self- efficacy' which is defined by Bandura (1977) as learners' own perception of their ability to succeed in a given task (Tseng et al., 2020; Vayre & Vonthron, 2019). In case of online courses for undergraduate students, internet self-efficacy (ISE), which refers to learners' ability to accomplish learning tasks using internet, has been found to have important implications for learner motivation (Alqurashi, 2019; Kuo & Belland, 2019; Kuo et al., 2014). ISE may enable learners to feel confident, use resources and solve

problems more efficiently in online setting (P. C. Hsu et al., 2020; Kuo et al., 2014; Shi et al., 2011).

2.4 Theoretical Background

A myriad of theories has been proposed over time to explicate the nature of motivation and the relationship between motivation and learning. Among them, the ones that have been found highly relevant to educational context will be examined here.

2.5 Expectancy-Value Theory

The expectancy theory has two components. One is the expectancy and the other is the value. Schunk et al (2014) defines 'expectancy' as learners' perceptions about their abilities to succeed in tasks. According to this theory, learners' positive expectations about learning tasks make them sufficiently motivated to complete a task well. The other component is 'value' which refers to the necessity or usefulness of the task to the learner. So, it can be concluded that expectancy and value jointly determine a student's performance in a task. If a student believes that he has the necessary skills to succeed in a task, also if he finds the task useful for him, only then he will feel motivated enough to engage in the task. Researchers have found positive correlation between students' expectancies or ability perceptions and their achievements in tests (Eccles, 1983; Eccles et al., 1989; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002).

2.6 Attribution Theory

Attributions refer to the perceived causes of success or failure, and according to this theory, learners' 'expectancy beliefs' and their 'affective reactions to different experiences' are controlled by their perceived causes of success or failure (Schunk et al., 2014). The most influential person related to attribution theory and research in achievement contexts is Bernard Weiner. According to Weiner's Attribution model (1986, 1992), antecedent conditions that shape individuals' perceived causes of success or failure are of two types: environmental and personal. Weiner (1986) identifies three dimensions of attributions: locus, stability, and controllability. Locus or location of a cause can be internal or external. Stability refers to "the invariance of a cause over time" and controllability means whether the cause is controllable or not. An example of an internal, stable, and uncontrollable cause can be aptitude whereas chance or luck is external, variable, and, also uncontrollable (Graham and Weiner, 1996). In Weiner's model, causal dimensions have direct influence on affects (Weiner, 1986, 1992, 2000). For example, locus

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dimension influences esteem- related affects. Students' self- esteem increases when they attribute success to an internal cause or ability while it decreases when they feel they have failed due to an internal cause. The second causal dimension, stability is linked to expectancy of success. If a learner believes an internal cause such as aptitude to be responsible for success, his expectancy of success will increase whereas expectancy will decrease if failure is ascribed to a stable cause. The third dimension, control impacts social- related affects such as anger, guilt, pity and shame (Weiner, 1986). A learner will feel angry or ashamed if he attributes his failure in a task to an internally controllable cause. (Graham and Weiner, 1996). This theory implies that learners feel satisfied and motivated when they attribute their success in a learning task to internal factors they can control (Oxford and Shearin, 1994).

2.7 Self-determination Theory

The self-determination theory, introduced by Deci and Ryan (2000), is another influential theory of motivation that has relevance to online learning context as self- determination is often considered to be an important characteristic of online learners. This theory centers around individuals' inherent psychological needs for autonomy (self- control), competence (ability), and social relatedness (need for social inclusion or belonging to a group) (Schunk et al., 2014). SDT distinguishes three types of motivation: Intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation ((Ryan & Deci, 2000). For an intrinsically motivated learner, the sense of satisfaction and enjoyment gained by performing a task would be adequate to engage in a task and external rewards are not needed. In contrast, extrinsically motivated learners would participate in tasks when they see the scope of achieving some external reward, for example, a desired grade or teacher praise.

A motivation is the state where a learner is completely unwilling to participate because of lacking necessary skills (Deci, 1975), or not finding the task feasible or useful (Ryan, 1985). According to Deci & Ryan (1985), individuals find challenging tasks intrinsically motivating because of their fundamental need for competence, and to be intrinsically motivated, one has to feel competent and self- determined. Providing choices and providing feedback are two contextual features that have been found to have positive influence on intrinsic motivation and self- determination (Patall et al., 2008; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). On the other hand, contextual features such as threats and deadlines, or evaluation and surveillance are reported to have

negative correlation with self- determination and intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1987).

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research was carefully designed keeping the main objective of the study- to get measurable data to identify the impact of the affecting factors of students' motivation in online classes. Therefore, the study has several important features. To begin with, the research uses a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approach. For example, the student survey was based on self- reported feedback data system which has been interpreted through percentage in graph while the teacher's feedback was collected through individual face to face interview system in a group discussion mode which is qualitative in its nature. Besides, the sample unit of the research was a group of undergraduate students at American International University- Bangladesh (AIUB) who experienced both offline (i.e. traditional face to face class) and online class during covid-19 pandemic between 2020-2022. The sample unit was carefully chosen to ensure the maximum inclusion of varieties. It included both male, and female students, and all discipline students -BBA, Engineering, and English. [See below Graph-1].

The teachers' sample unit included six teachers from the English department of AIUB who have above 7 years of undergraduate teaching experience of functional and major courses of English and 2 years of unbreakable experience of teaching in online classes. They taught the students who participated in the student survey. The student survey was done through google online survey. They received a survey link to answer to the questions in seven days. The nature of the questions was both close and open ended. Most close- ended questions had four options. Total number of questions in student survey was 28. The questions were divided in general concepts about online class, impact of motivation, teachers' feedback, error correction and student teacher interaction and online semester grade. It also has three sections - pre, while and post. The objective was to identify the difference of self- reported feedback about online classes and the changes (if any) happened during the online classes regarding their motivation. The questions were also categorized into several areas to receive dynamic feedback from the students. They were about familiarity and fear about online class, quality, and quantity of teacher's feedback in online and offline classes, amount as well as quality of teacher and peer interactions and teachers' physical presence. The reason to select only AIUB as the survey context is quite significant. First, the university successfully and quickly shifted to online

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classes using Microsoft Team from the very beginning of pandemic in 2021. The transition from offline to online was smooth because of the state-of-the-art high-tech support that the university possesses. Secondly, both authors of this research work as English language teachers of AIUB. So, they have the quick access to the research subjects (AIUB students) who are familiar with online and offline academic systems.

4. FINDINGS

The survey was done on one hundred undergraduates. Male and female student percentage was 61% and 39% respectively. The amount of engineering students was just a little above the half while the amount of business students was nearly one fifth which is almost double compared to the English department students (Figure 1). The first and the foremost requirement for the students participating in the survey was the completion of at least one online and one offline course. The reason was that the nature of the study was the self-reported observation method of the students who themselves compared their experiences between online and offline class regarding motivation. 42.9% students completed at least one course online while 28.6% students completed 5 online courses.

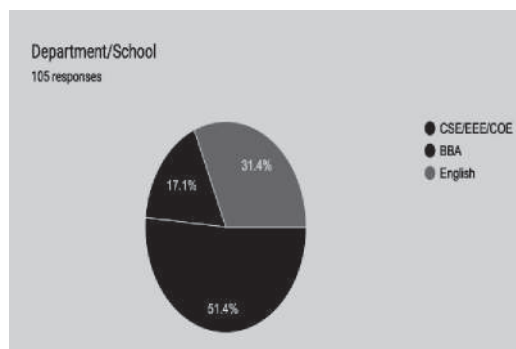


Figure 01: Survey respondents' academic discipline.

Regarding students' assumptions about online class before they experienced online classes at their university during the COVID-19 period, the result was that more than a third of them had prior familiarity about the process of online class. For example, 33.3% students had no knowledge of online class while 41% had little familiarity about it. Only 10.5% were complete familiar with online classes beforehand. [Figure 2]. It is assumed that the initial familiarity with online class procedure will have positive impact on their performances and learning.

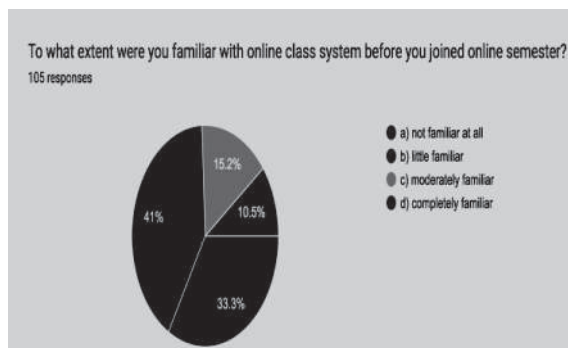


Figure 02: Survey students' familiarity with online class.

A number of questions of the student survey delivered several striking results. A prior negative mindset of students about the online class will require more motivational efforts from the respective teachers in the online class. For a question on the students' assumptions of what they feel about the online classes would going to be, with a general belief that students have negative notions about online class, it is surprising to see that 64% were positive about the online classes before they joined the online classes. [Figure-3].

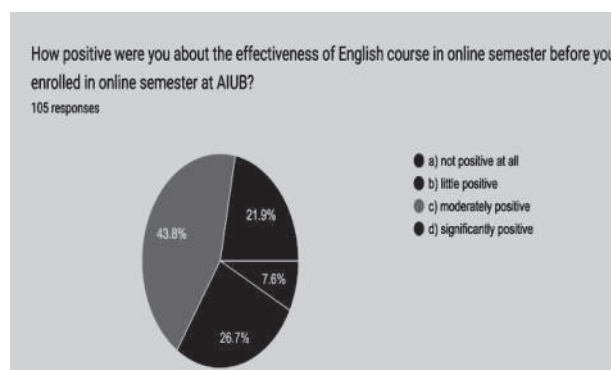


Figure 03: Initial assumptions about online class.

Even though many teachers were initially unsure of how they will adjust with the features of the online class, most students were confident of the success of it. Nevertheless, fear is an important factor for the language learning. For a question about the fear about online semester, slightly above the half of them was afraid of it. Interestingly, a quarter of the total respondents did not have any fear about online class. [Figure 4].

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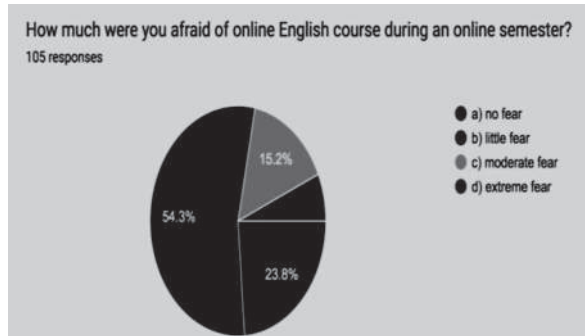


Figure 04: Initial fear about online class.

The next question was to identify if students have developed any positive ideas about the online class after they have experienced it. The rationale of this question is that students having a positive mindset about classroom instruction process or method certainly feel more motivated and dedicated to that class. It is found that 46.7% moderately developed their positive ideas while 30.5% significantly increased positive ideas about online class after experiencing online class. 3.8% of the respondents did not develop any positive ideas about it. [Figure 5].

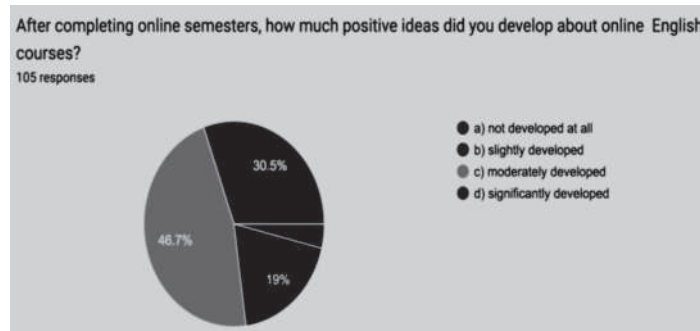


Figure 05: Post online semester feedback.

For a question if they would like to enroll for another English course online, 56.2% are affirmative and 30.5% are unsure. It is clear that the online class has a significant amount of acceptability to the students and the acceptance rate increases after experiencing English classes online. It can be summarized that during the pandemic most students joined the online semesters with positive hopes and they expected something fresh and new. One of the common sources of students' motivation is the student - student interaction

which was largely missing in the online class. Only 18.01% respondents experienced significant and effective interactions among themselves in the online class. But contradictory results are seen for a question if the students feel isolated and demotivated for limited student- student interaction. A total of almost 79% (40% no effect and 39% slight effect) students feel no effect on their individual motivation for limited interaction. [Figure 6].

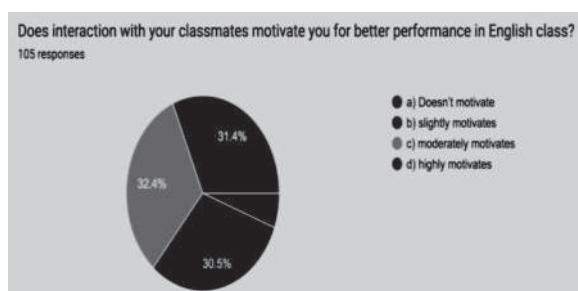


Figure 06: online class interaction with classmates.

Nearly 75% students demand regular feedback for their class works in online class and believe it directly motivates them for the course. [Figure 7]. In addition, course teachers' positive and friendly attitude in online class largely motivates them as opined by around 70.5% respondents. 19% of respondents believe that they are moderately motivated by the teachers' positive attitude in the class. [Figure 8]. In this regard, another important feature of motivation is the amount of interaction with the teacher. 42.9% respondents believe that they are significantly motivated while 33.3% respondents feel that they are moderately motivated by their interaction with the teacher in English class online.

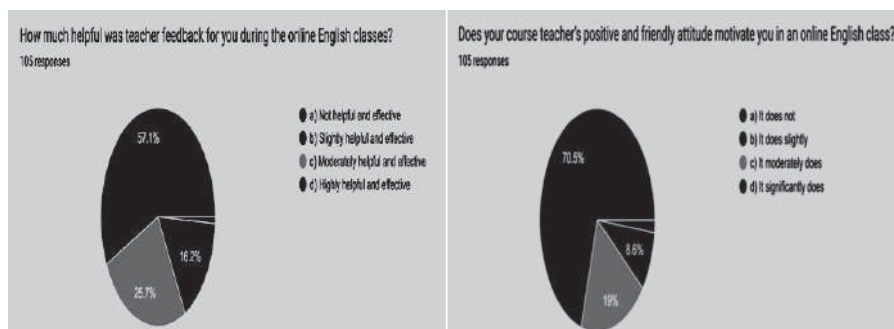


Figure 07: Relation between online class motivation and teachers' feedback. **Figure 08:** Impact of teachers' attitude.

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Besides, classroom tasks, lectures, and worksheets play a very important role in student motivation too in online class. It is rather more important in the online class since teachers' physical presence is missing. 40% students are highly motivated while 30% students moderately motivated by their online class tasks, materials and lectures. 21% students don't find them much engaging. [Figure 9]. Around two thirds of the students missed the teachers' physical presence in their online class which also demotivates them in the class. [Figure 10].

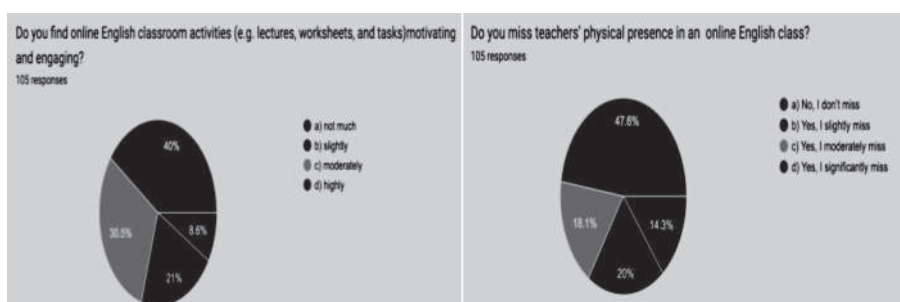


Figure 09: Impact of classroom activities on motivation.

Figure 10: Impact of teachers' physical presence.

Grade is an important instrument for students' motivation. Though it is assumed that in online classes grades cause dissatisfaction among students, the respondents in the survey confirm that most of them are satisfied with their grades. Half of the respondents believe that their grades are moderately justified and less than a quarter believes their grades to be highly justified. So, it is understood that grade has not been an issue for many online students. [Figure 11].

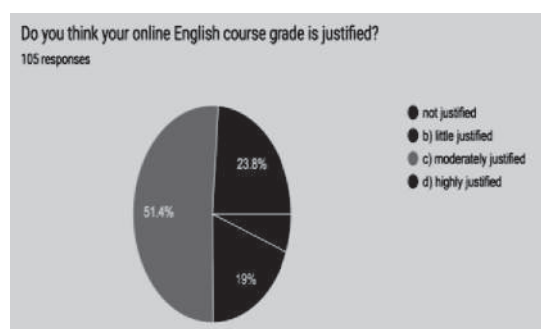


Figure 11: Students' feedback on online course grade

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Several important recommendations are made based on the feedback from student survey and from a focused group discussion with teachers. Students' responses for an open-ended question reveal a number of valuable suggestions to improve motivation of the students in the online English class. Students want that their teachers understand the students' difficulties and consider various personal situations that they face in online class in a challenging situation like pandemic. Besides, students also prefer individual works instead of collaborative works in online class environment. Moreover, they need detailed feedback.

In addition, students also emphasize on test questions that have detailed explanations for the students about what they are required to do in a test or in an assignment. It is also recommended by the students that in no circumstances teachers can behave rude. Some students want to record the class while all students want more visual contents in the class lectures. They also prefer flexible deadline for assignment submission. Fearless classroom environment is their first and foremost priority. Students also want to share their individual opinions. Overall, they prefer quite a relaxed environment. Six teachers participated in a group discussion in which they have forwarded a set of suggestions for an effective online English class. All six teachers started online classes in the pandemic without having any prior experience and with doubts about the processes and success of English class online.

However, all teachers agreed that as they found many benefits of online class after completing several semesters online. Two major benefits pointed by them are the maximum use of technological features of online class and the availability of a large amount of time saved from commuting from home to campus. On the other hand, giving timely and detail feedback on classroom tasks and students' performance and motivating students for their class work was considered as a major challenge for the teachers. For future online classes, all teachers agreed to keep their cameras on to ensure more teacher presence. Regarding the grades, more justification for the grade is possible. The face-to-face presence of students and seeing them what they are doing is essential for them.

Suggestions from students

- proper online class set up is needed
- They can stay more connected to each other through group
- Class representative system needs to be prepared and they need to be more active within the group

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What Teachers can do

- More small/personal talk with the students
- The lecture materials can include more visual aids
- The class can have more student engaging materials

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Among several limitations of the study, first limitation was that the number of students in this survey was hundred only. All of them are from one university- AIUB. The results would be more reliable if the survey respondents could be included from multiple universities and the amount of participation of students were more. Second weakness of the research is that it is entirely based on the self-reported feedback of students on their motivation. There was no scope to evaluate their feedbacks- to identify any intervention by creating any closed and open group of students.

7. CONCLUSION

For university education in Bangladesh, online class- what was once mostly an unknown academic activity is now a reality. Therefore, online class dynamics cannot be ignored. Students, teachers, and administrators are already habituated with this virtual academic system. In many universities in the country as well as worldwide, the online classes are still in practice in partial or hybrid mode. So, it is needless to say that this is high time to sincerely look after the online class student matters with a special focus on their high motivation level which has direct impact on their class performances especially in English class.

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