

Virtual Assessment in English Language Teaching During Covid-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Considerations in Bangladesh Perspectives

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Abstract

Background:

This study examines the methods of assessing the learners of English Language Teaching (ELT) learners virtually, obstacles both the teachers and students face in virtual assessment, the kind of renovations both teachers and learners have to accommodate for effective virtual assessment, and the imperative suggestions they have in terms of more fruitful and plausible assessment during COVID-19-like pandemics in the context of Bangladesh.

Methodology:

10 teachers and 21 students from 5 renowned private universities in Bangladesh participated in the study. And it applied a mixed-method approach consisting of both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Findings:

The findings of the study revealed that all the teachers and students go through virtual assessment during the COVID-19 lockdown; the majority of them use Zoom Meeting App and Google Classroom for both summative and formative assessments in the form of mostly virtual viva voce, online assignment, and presentation; virtual assessment is time and money-saving, and has scheduled benefits; its disadvantages include, mainly, unstable internet connection across the country; and most suggest for both teachers' and students' training in dealing with technological devices and apps used for virtual assessment.

Conclusion:

The major results of the research suggest that virtual assessment in ELT in the Bangladeshi context requires substantial technological modifications and renovations.

Originality:

Since online assessment in ELT, like other academic disciplines, is in function in Bangladesh, better decisions on assessment methodology and, logically, more appropriate assessment policies can be formed. Conforming to this purpose, this research aims to unearth the existing challenges both teachers and learners encounter in virtual assessment and modifications recommended by them.

Keywords : *Pandemic; Higher Study; Virtual Assessment; Challenges; Considerations*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled the academic sectors of the world to improvise and innovate techniques so that education, instead of getting stopped, continues no matter the crisis humanity goes through. Consequently, virtual or online education took the front seat and, albeit slowly at its inception, took the world by storm. Worldwide, online teaching, learning, assessment, and evaluation continued in educational institutes through versatile technological devices and apps existent and innovated. Unlike traditional onsite education, teachers and students in virtual education have to perform assessments differently and, as such, encounter multifaceted pros and cons. The swift transition of education to an online system caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has already upset the delivery of educational exposure and given birth to multifaceted pedagogical challenges and assessment hesitations (Gamage et al., 2020). Both teachers and learners in low-income countries have been struggling with access to internet connectivity and the shortage of essential technological support, which is why they barely manage smooth virtual teaching sessions and satisfactory student assessments (Kinoti, 2020). The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment survey representing the University of Illinois and Indiana University provides the following do's and don'ts relating to remote learning and its assessment amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and similar crises. Jankowski (2020) mentioned not to forget that we are in a pandemic and an inequitable pandemic. Not to cause further harm. Not to support, allow, or approve of policies that perpetuate further inequalities or trigger deleterious views of students. Not to ask students for their support for a decision that has already been made. Instead, engage with them in advance to help determine a solution. Not to require a higher level of proof of learning in an online class than you would normally require in a face-to-face setting. Not to forget that this is not the educational experience students wanted or expected. Furthermore, use learning outcomes as a guide to shape and emphasize educational offerings. Revise assignments and assessments in flexible ways, utilize low bandwidth, and are based on the principles of unbiased assessment. Be aware of and address systemic inequities. Involve in trauma-informed and healing-centered pedagogy and assessment.

Newer assessment and evaluation policies are necessary, and accountability is also a must for academic bodies in COVID-19 (Huber & Helm, 2020). Assessment drills being conducted online pose a number of concerning issues, particularly, how online examinations should be invigilated, for, without invigilation, there are so many ways open for the examinees to resort to unfair means available and usable (Gamage et al., 2020). According to

the SWOT analysis of Elzainy et al. (2020) on the experience of e-learning and online assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic at the College of Medicine, Qassim University, the 'new normal' educational activities sufficiently made up for the cancellation of onsite teaching. They discovered that the online summative assessments through webinars were regarded as satisfactory, for, the participants considered online assessment to be assuring the staff about students' achievement of learning outcomes and conduction of direct viva voce based upon a clear standardized checklist was highly pragmatic. Guangul et al. (2020) studied the challenges of remote assessment in the context of COVID-19 in the Middle Eastern College setting and discovered academic dishonesty, infrastructural anomaly, failure to cover learning outcomes, the discrepancy of the students to prepare and submit assignments as committed, etc. to be the basic as well as abundant challenges. The delivery and assessment of remote online education are new moves for many educational institutions that sparks various challenges, especially in safeguarding academic honesty (Gamage et al., 2020). To curb dishonesty in online examinations and assessments, one of the best approaches can be preparing different questions for each of the students (Guangul et al., 2020). Violation of academic integrity can be controlled to a great extent by assigning online presentations to students. The combination of disparate assessment methods, submitting reports and online presentations, can help suppress academic deceit since the examiner can confirm if the presentation reflects the submitted work (Guangul et al., 2020).

In terms of assessing the four skills of the English language via the online system widely put in effect by the COVID-19 pandemic, the case is almost similar to assessing learner performance on any branch of knowledge (Alavi et al., 2022). Among the advantages of virtual assessment are the flexibility of online assessment, immediate feedback, and inspiring self-regulated learning, while among the obstacles are technical problems, technology dependence, and lack of technology literacy, although Alavi et al. (2022) find that virtual ELT assessment has positive impacts on the learners if implemented with the optimum standard.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

After World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic on 11 March 2020, many countries of the world had to implement an emergency shutdown of schools, colleges and of course other academic institutes, as the effect of which, more than 1.2 billion students, worldwide, have been quarantined at home being out of the classroom (C. Li & Lalani, 2020). The quarantine resulted in emergency e-learning in almost all

countries, including Bangladesh. Thus, the global teaching system experienced a sudden transmission from an onsite classroom to the virtual one and from traditional assessments to online ones. Some researchers Baturay & Daloglu, (2010); Moradimokhles & Hwang, (2020) state that online assessments are fruitful, for they offer schedule benefits to both the students and teachers. And it is, in fact, effective in terms of giving feedback since a course teacher, through the online system, can give feedback at any time he wants to. In addition, differentiation and repetition of exam questions can be considered to be the advantages of online exams, although the reduction of face-to-face engagement of the students and teachers in virtual classrooms is, in fact, a problem (Spivey & McMillan, 2014). Contrary to this, issues relating to technology and network escalate teachers' and learners' anxiety about online testing. Inflexible technological settings are predominant problems for the students to write and explain their answers ornately (Betlej, 2013). Spivey & McMillan (2014) find that electronic testing is more effective and appropriate than traditional testing approaches and does not negatively impact students' grades. Alzamil (2021) shows that the participants appreciate the benefits online learning offers but do not think it can replace face-to-face learning. While some other researchers, Saleem et al. (2021) opine that the students prefer the traditional way of assessment and show resistance to online assessment because they are not prepared for the new exam format and can not trust the technologies used in the online exam. Again, the participants think classroom assessment to be more effective than online assessment for proper and timely feedback problem (Saleem et al., 2021). The study by Ambrose and Lim (2020) considers constructive and timely feedback to be an essential part of learning. We come across the same finding in the studies of Betlej (2013) and Kuriakose & Luwes, (2016), where they suggest that students are worried about whether they would be able to submit their answers in time, whether the assessors have received the answers, or the answers would be deleted before assessment. They are also concerned about the typing speed, the completion of the test in time, internet connection problems during online assessments, and automatic submission of incomplete answers. Crawford (2021) argue that all required resources like smooth internet, computers, and electricity must be ensured for the teachers and students to assess them successfully, otherwise all efforts of assessing students online will surely go in vain.

The study of Saleem et al. (2021) unearths that the students of Pakistani universities had to adopt willingly or unwillingly online assessment method. And most of the participants preferred close-ended and interview/ viva type question format for online assessment, for

they regarded close-ended assessments as convenient, less time taking and less daunting, and in this type of question, students with poor internet connection or other technical issues can, anyway, answer the questions. Studies Akhavan Masoumi & Sadeghi, (2020); Bai, (2020); Chen et al., (2020); Coombe et al., (2020) also suggest setting close-ended items in assessments for its proven benefits. Another study reveals that viva and interview-type assessments are effective and valid because no unfair means is possible in such tests (Ghanbari & Barati, 2020; Nikmard & Mohamadi Zenouzagh, 2020). The study Saleem et al. (2021) shows that the participants in closed-ended assessments are very anxious about unintended submissions, automatic answers, and cheating. And in open-ended assessments, they are concerned about the lack of options, typing speed, and time limitations. Because of poor internet connection, the participants become worried about listening or understanding the questions asked for assessment in the viva/ interview type of assessment. The study also demonstrates that the students and the teacher are not skilled enough to use the technology for online assessments. Therefore, students and their teachers need to be trained regarding technologies, and their needs and problems related to online assessment should be addressed, and they should be confident and competent as well (X. Li, 2019; Zhang, 2020).

Amin & Greenwood (2018), in their study on the examination system in Bangladesh and its impact on curriculum, students, teachers, and society, delineate the traditional as well as the current role of the examination system in a model that presents both its effects and influences that withstand it. They acknowledge the need for the existing examination system and other related issues to be changed to make the assessment culture more purpose oriented.

Throughout Asia and, mainly in Indian Subcontinent, high-stakes assessment is in practice. Such serious testing practices, it is believed to be common knowledge, produce significant pressure on the academy, academic aspirations, and society as a whole (Amin & Greenwood, 2018). Nevertheless, prevalent examination systems are not easy to change overnight due to scores of technical barriers, although many nations of the world face substantial crises with their assessment methods in practice. Despite the fact that the examination methodologies of many Asian nations have been, on many occasions, researched, scrutinized and refurbished on the basis of necessity and resolution (Amin & Greenwood, 2018), this has not knowingly taken place in Bangladesh so far (Amin & Greenwood, 2018). Bangladesh's usual examination system, which was prevalent before the emergence of the new normal examination method during the COVID-19 pandemic, needs remarkable reformations. This may include the simultaneous re-estimation of teachers' roles

and the development of a financially feasible and professionally liable teaching profession resolution (Amin & Greenwood, 2018). In a study regarding virtual education and its efficacy during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh, Hossain (2021) finds that majority of the learners receiving lessons and being assessed through online mode are satisfied with their performance and results, while some regard the online assessment system as failing to live up to their academic expectations.

Currently, in Bangladesh, virtual education is running in full swing. As such, English language teaching and learning is continuing in an accelerated mode via online classes, and the question of learner performance assessment on the four skills, i.e., Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking, of English language through online sessions is a pressing issue (Hossain, 2021). Accordingly, an overall understanding of teachers' and students' views of the new system is imperative so that better decisions on assessment methodology can be reached, and, logically, more appropriate assessment policies can be formed. Conforming to this purpose, this research aims to unearth the challenges both teachers and learners encounter in virtual assessment, the feasible sacrifices both make and the precious suggestions they offer, based on their individual and shared experiences in this regard.

The application of virtual education and assessment has increased rapidly during the past decade (Spivey & McMillan, 2014). In recent years, due to the circumstances exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions, teachers and students have encountered an absolutely unique set of challenges in terms of academic continuity, assessment, and evaluation (Ninković et al., 2021). Bangladesh, as one of the countries strongly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, carries on the overall academic management of the whole nation through the online system, and accordingly faces challenges with regard to appropriate assessment of the students (Hossain, 2021; Mahmud et al., 2021). Therefore, this study's crucial questions are how the existing assessment is done virtually in the context of Bangladesh and to what extent it is effective. The model of the study progressively determines the target questions considering the current educational circumstances of the country, inspects existing and previous research on the topic from home and abroad, determines suitable questions, sets appropriate questionnaires for the sample population, conducts the inquiry systematically, collects data, and analyzes data.

The study hypothesizes that assessment of learner performance through a virtual platform in the context of Bangladesh since (Bangladesh) is yet to be able to provide standard IT (Information Technology) facilities and speedy internet supply to her each corner faces many obstacles (Hossain, 2021; Mahmud et al., 2021). This hypothesis also contains that teachers and learners involved in the virtual assessment procedure must resort to some key considerations, as the lack of major tech-coverage and tech-literacy has created an immense psychological strain among teachers and students. (Mahmud et al., 2021; Shahriar et al., 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study targets the research question, the challenges teachers and students encounter. The considerations they have to devise as well as effectuate while implementing virtual assessment in the context of Bangladesh, adopted a mixed-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to attain more comprehensive findings on the research problem (O’Cathain et al., 2007). The purpose and justification of adopting the qualitative methodology were to understand and interpret the detailed data deeply, have deeper exploration utilizing the one-to-one relationship with the respondents, meticulously keep records of the data, and perform a profound analysis of the thematic contents (Haq, 2015). Simultaneously, the study applied the quantitative approach to numerically demonstrate the labels having identical responses, measure in percentage the participants having certain experiences and views and generalize as well as confirm the estimation (Haq, 2015). Eventually, the blend of both the qualitative and the quantitative methods applied in this research helped come up with expected explanations and generalizations on the research questions (Haq, 2015; O’Cathain et al., 2007).

The population of this research consisted of teachers and students of various subjects at different universities of Bangladesh. University teachers and students were the sample population of this research, for online teaching-learning and assessment is mainly in the higher educational institutes, particularly private universities of Bangladesh during the COVID-19 lockdown in the country. The study applied simple random sampling to select its population from five Bangladeshi private universities: Pundra University of Science and Technology, First Capital University of Bangladesh, Dhaka International University, Northern University Bangladesh, and European University Bangladesh. The researchers randomly sent questionnaires to 20 teachers and 30 students at these universities. The study

utilized simple random sampling because it is an impartial approach to gathering the replies from an enormous group (Horton & Boyle, 2021). Nevertheless, simple random sampling does have some negative aspects, for it can be time-consuming and expensive group (Horton & Boyle, 2021). This study, while availing itself of the advantages of the chosen sampling approach, made sure its drawbacks did not affect it.

We collected qualitative data on the research question from the selected population of teachers and students. To the sample population involving teachers, we sent a questionnaire containing 14 open-ended questions, whereas to the sample involving students, we sent another comprising 12 questions of the same type. Since the study was conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown, which forbade all sorts of physical or in-person communications, we had to take the help of the various modes of information technology, i. e., Facebook, Messenger, Email, and Cell Phone. The researchers sent the questionnaires to the participants through email or messenger and requested them over the cell phone to answer the questions at their earliest convenience. This study chose to use open-ended questions on the consideration that they are more suitable in many areas of the behavioral sciences, and in them, participants write or type their own responses, unlike the case in close-ended questions where one has to tick or select options already prescribed by somebody else (Connor Desai & Reimers, 2019; Hyman & Sierra, 2016). Participants, in open-ended questionnaire, can provide relatively detailed responses which, to a great extent, address the questions properly (Connor Desai & Reimers, 2019; Hyman & Sierra, 2016).

In this mixed-method research, the researchers quantitized the collected qualitative data through unitization, categorization and coding. Quantitizing refers to translating qualitative data into numerical forms, which has, of late, emerged as a major way of mixed-method research (Sandelowski et al., 2009). the researchers unitized identical responses from the participants and categorized them into disparate codes to numerically present the variables and perform a comparative analysis (Srnrka & Koeszegi, 2007).

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Teachers' Views

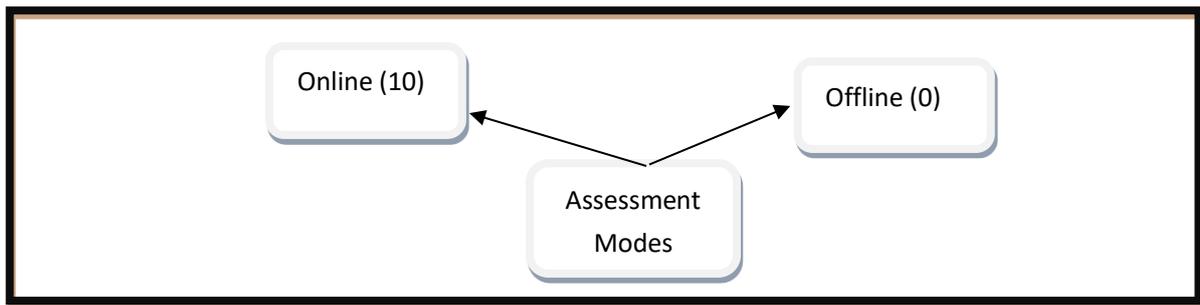


Figure 1 Assessment modes during the COVID-19 pandemic

All of the 10 teachers responding to the questionnaire of the study assessed the learners through online mode.

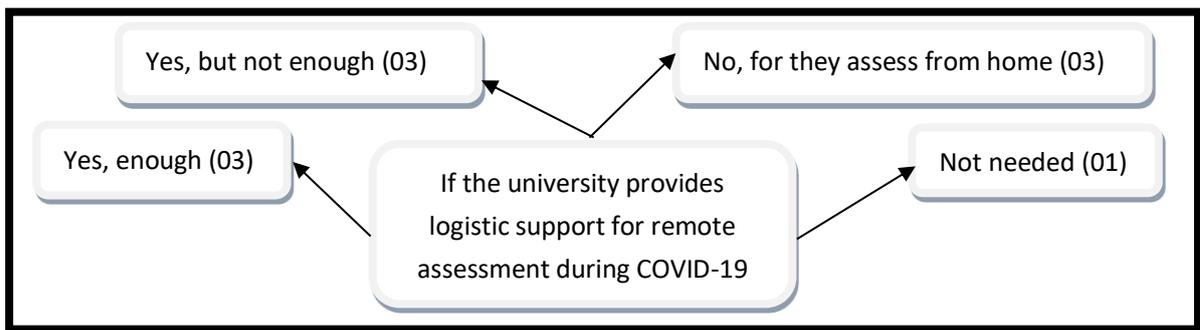


Figure 2 If the universities provide logistic support for remote assessment during COVID-19

Despite the fact that 60% of the teachers admitted that the universities where they taught and assessed students online provided them with logistical supports, such as technological devices and internet facilities (e.g., free Wi-Fi or broadband connection or internet data package), 50% of them revealed that their received support was insufficient, meaning that they either experienced internet shortage while teaching and assessing in the virtual system or they had to purchase additional internet data packages. Of the participants, 30% did not receive any logistic support from their institutions while 1 of the 10 teachers did not feel the need to obtain any such help from his/her university.

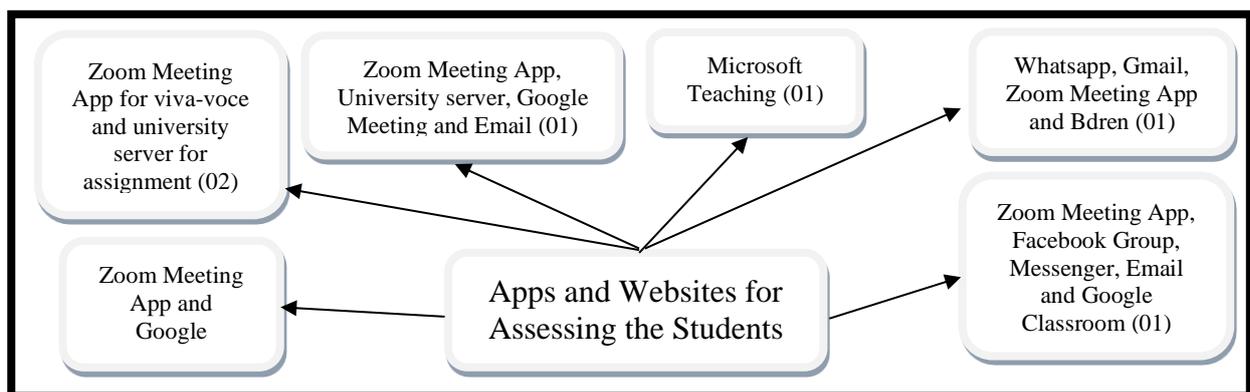


Figure 3 Apps and websites used by the teachers for virtual assessment during COVID-19

Nearly half of the teachers (40%) asserted that they used Zoom Meeting and Google Classroom apps, while 20% of the participants applied Zoom Meeting App and university server for virtual assessment during COVID-19, and they also specified the fact that they used Zoom Meeting for viva-voce and university server for assignment. Of the 10 participants, 04 teachers are somewhat different concerning using apps and servers. One teacher utilized Zoom Meeting App, Google Meeting App, university server, and Email; one participant used Microsoft Teaching software; one used WhatsApp, Gmail, Zoom Meeting App, and Bdren; and one used Zoom Meeting App, Facebook Group, Messenger, Email, and Google Classroom. It is worth noting that 09 of the 10 (90%) teachers answering the questionnaires used the Zoom Meeting App. However, they were, in fact, diverse concerning using apps, software programs, and university servers for virtual assessment during COVID-19.

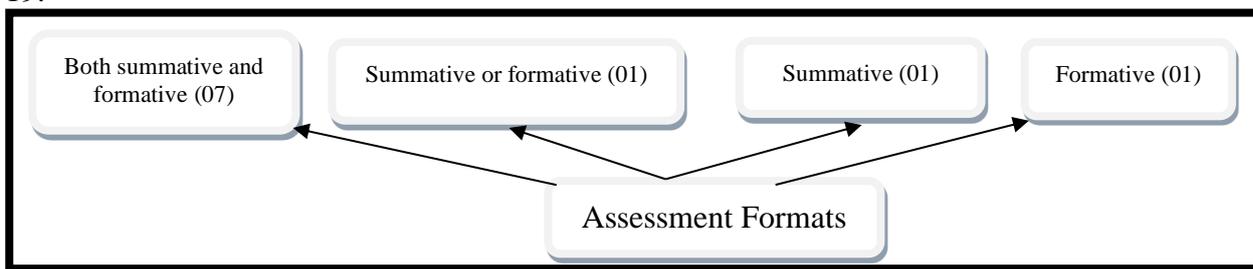


Figure 4 Assessment formats in virtual education

Over two-thirds (70%) of the teachers virtually assessed their students through both summative and formative assessments during COVID-19. Again, 01 of the 10 participants assessed his/ her students through summative assessment, and another assessed his/her students through formative assessment format, while the last assessed his/her students through summative or formative assessment.

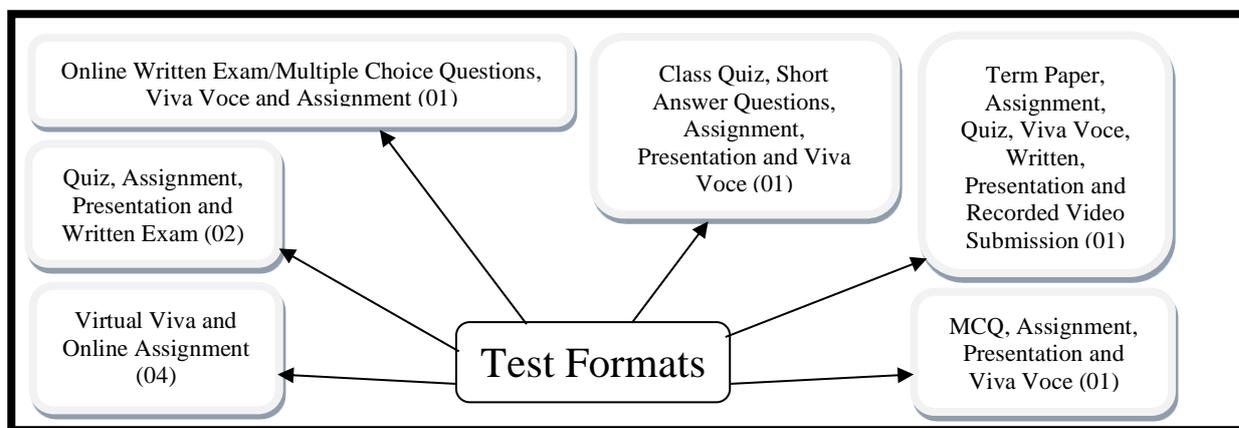


Figure 5 Test Formats for virtual assessment during COVID-19

40% of the teachers admitted that they assessed their students through virtual viva and online assignment while 20% through quizzes, assignments, presentations, and written exams for virtual assessment during COVID-19. In fact, findings reveal that the marking formula is disparate at different universities. It is mentionable that 100% percent of the participants responding to the questionnaire regarding test formats for assessing students virtually during Covid-19 used assignment test format, 90% viva-voce, 50% presentation, 40% quiz, 20% MCQ and written exam, and 10% term paper, recorded video and short answer question.

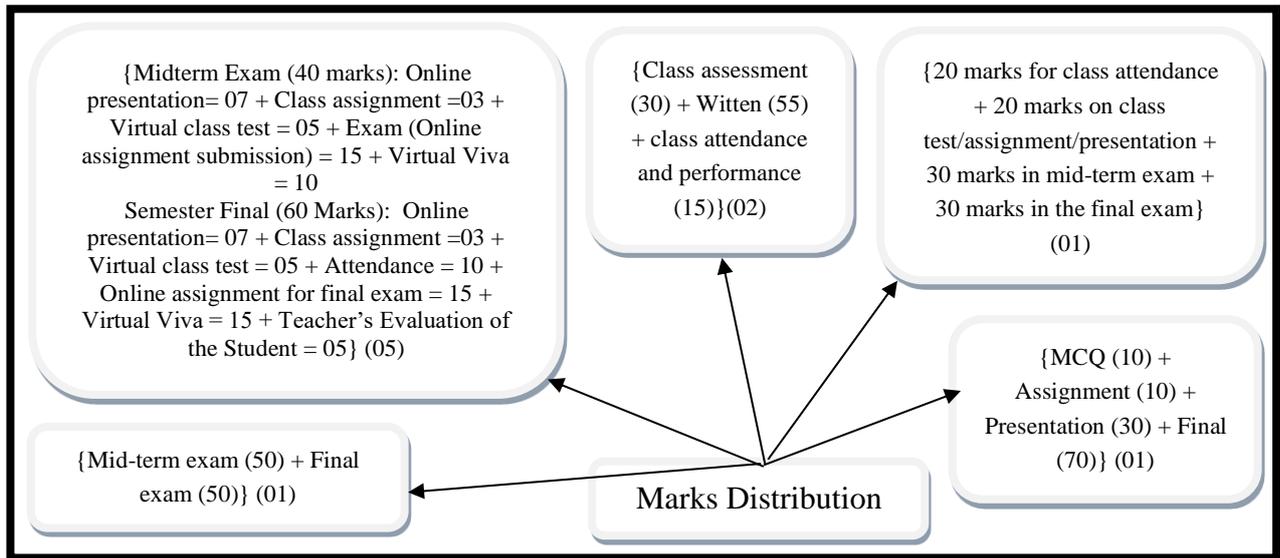


Figure 6 Marks distribution for online assessment during COVID-19

Half of the participants are awarded 40 marks for the Midterm Examination and 60 marks for the semester Final Examination, while 20% of the participants are awarded 80 marks. 10% of students, on the other hand, divide their 100 marks into four sections, 10% do the same but with a different mark distribution, and 10% divide their total course marks evenly between the Midterm and Final examinations.

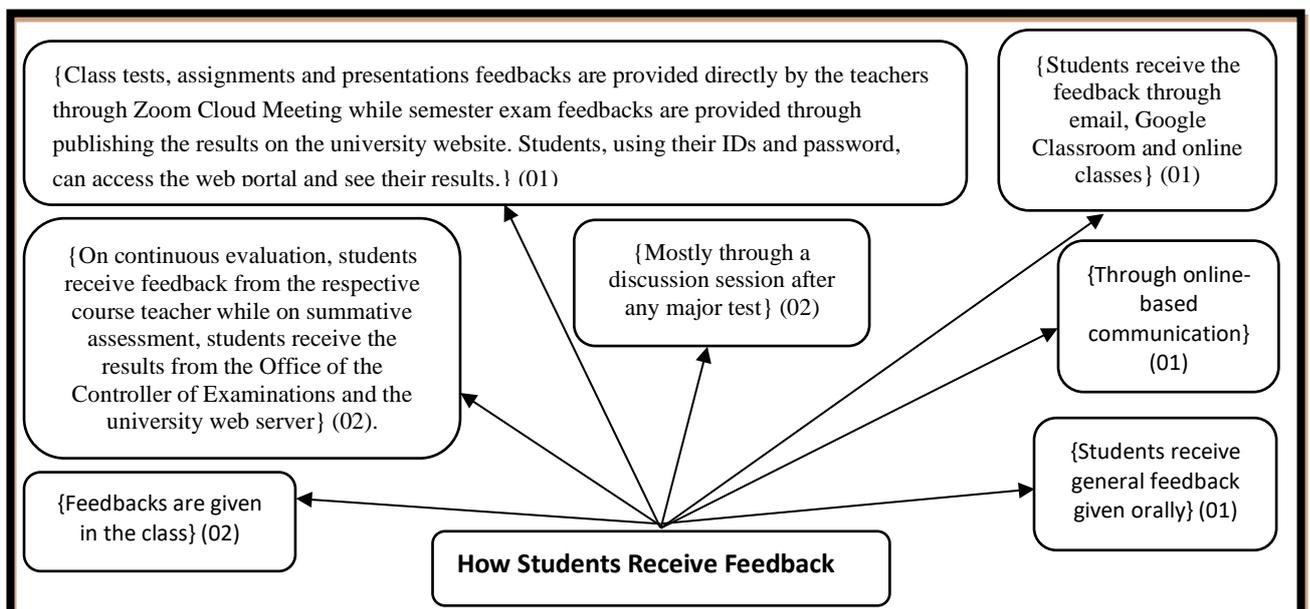


Figure 7 How students receive the feedback from the online assessment during COVID-19

One-fifth of the teachers stated that their students received feedback from the respective course teacher, while on summative assessment, from the office of the controller of examinations and the university web server. In contrast, the other 20% of the participants admitted that their students received feedback mostly through a discussion session after any major test. Another 20% teachers said that feedback are given in the class. Besides, feedback are also provided through online platforms like Zoom Cloud Meeting.

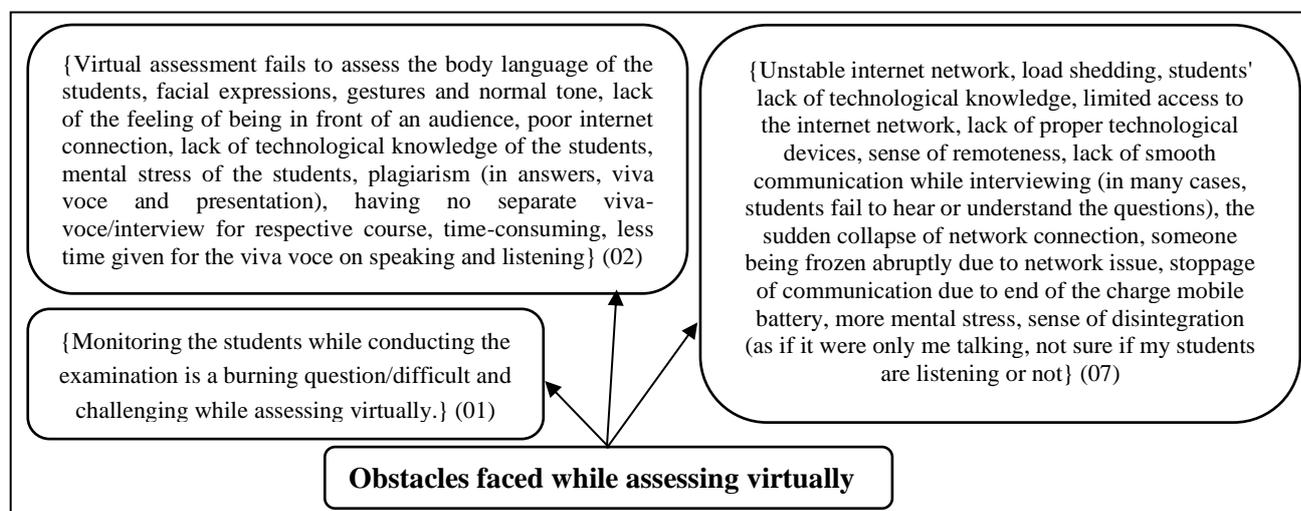


Figure 8 Obstacles the teachers faced while assessing virtually during COVID-19

More than two-thirds (70%) of the teachers admitted the obstacles they encountered while assessing virtually during COVID-19. Those problems were unstable internet networks, load shedding, students' lack of technological knowledge, limited access to the internet network, lack of proper technological devices, sense of remoteness, lack of smooth communication while interviewing, the sudden collapse of network connection, and som. In contrast, 20% of the participants revealed that virtual assessment failed to assess the body language of the students, facial expressions, gestures, and normal tone, lack of the feeling of being in front of an audience, poor internet connection, lack of technological knowledge of the students, mental stress of the students, plagiarism, having no separate viva-voce/interview for respective course, time-consuming, and less time is given for the viva voce/interview.

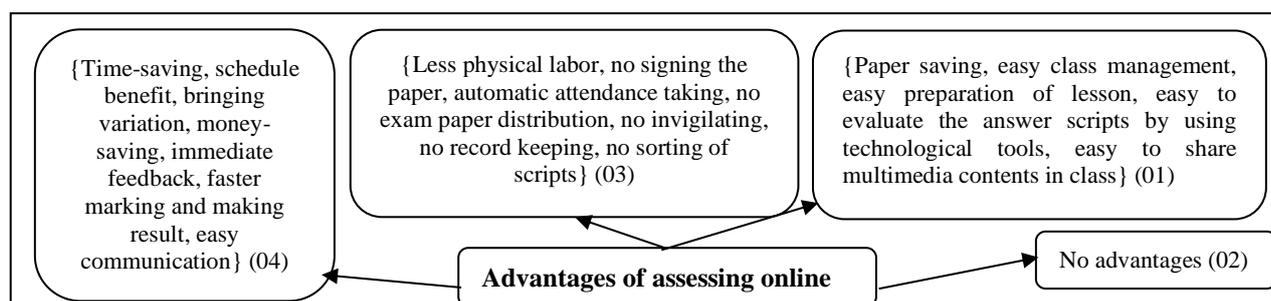


Figure 9 Advantages of assessing students online during COVID-19

About half of the teachers (40%), as the advantages of virtual assessment, mentioned saving of time, schedule benefit, pedagogical variations, saving of money, immediate feedback, faster marking and making results, easy communication etc. while 30% stated less physical labor, no signing the paper, automatic attendance taking, no exam paper distribution, no invigilating, no record keeping, no sorting of scripts as the advantages they enjoyed. In addition, even though 01 of the 10 participants (10%) specified paper saving, easy class management, easy preparation of lessons, easy to evaluate the answer scripts by using technological tools, and easy sharing of multimedia contents in class as the advantages, 20% of the teachers avowed that there were no advantages they had found while assessing students online

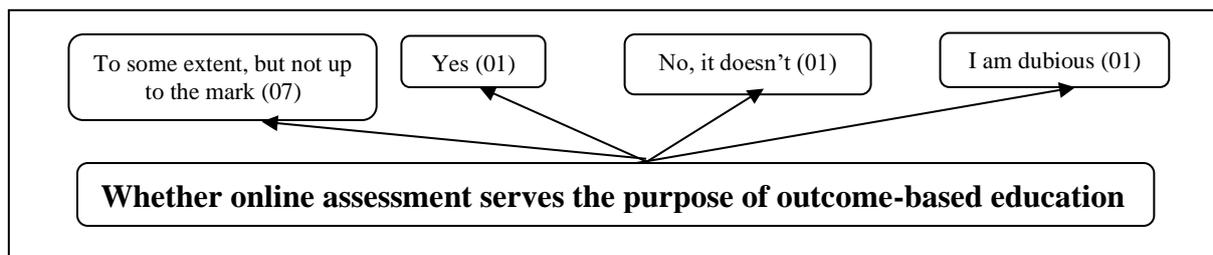


Figure 10 Advantages of assessing students online during COVID-19

The teachers' responses regarding the issue of whether online assessment serves the purpose of outcome-based education demystify obvious distinction, for 70% of them confirmed that to some extent, online assessment served the purpose of outcome-based education but not up to the mark, while 10% of the participants revealed that online assessment served the purpose of outcome-based education wholly and the other 10% of the teachers said no. But the last one was dubious about the whole idea.

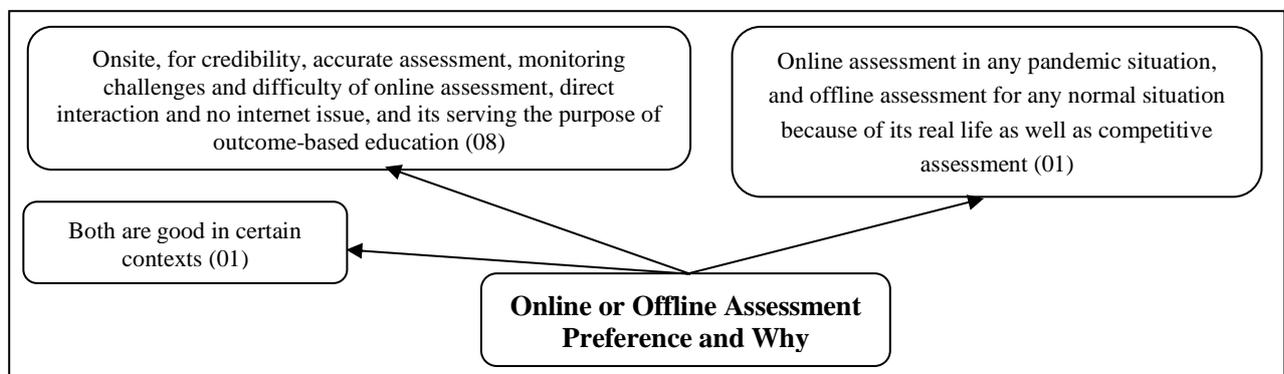


Figure 11 Online or Offline Assessment Preference and Why

80% of the teachers preferred offline assessment because of its credibility, accuracy, easily monitoring challenges, difficulties of online assessment, direct interaction, and no internet issue, serving the purpose of outcome-based education, while 10% of the participants

were in a binary opposition regarding the question of the online or offline assessment preference. They stated that there was no alternative to online assessment during the pandemic and the offline assessment was, in fact, for the normal situation and competitive assessment. And the last one admitted that both assessments are good in certain contexts.

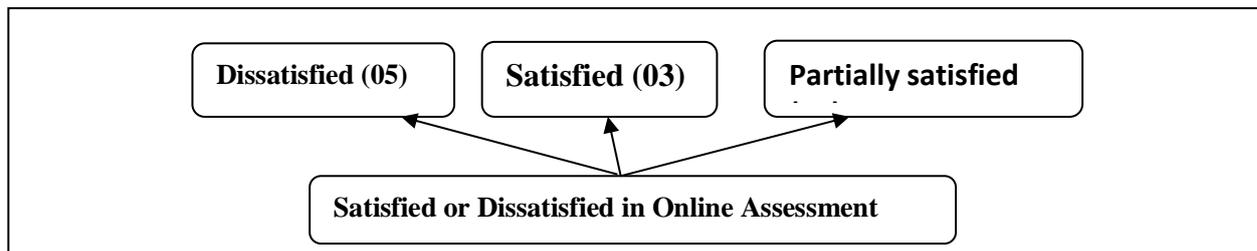


Figure 12 Satisfied or Dissatisfied with Online Assessment

The teachers’ responses concerning whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied in the online assessment divulged clear statement, for 50% of them were dissatisfied after considering all problems and benefits, 30% of the participants were satisfied, and 20% of the teachers were partly satisfied and partly not.

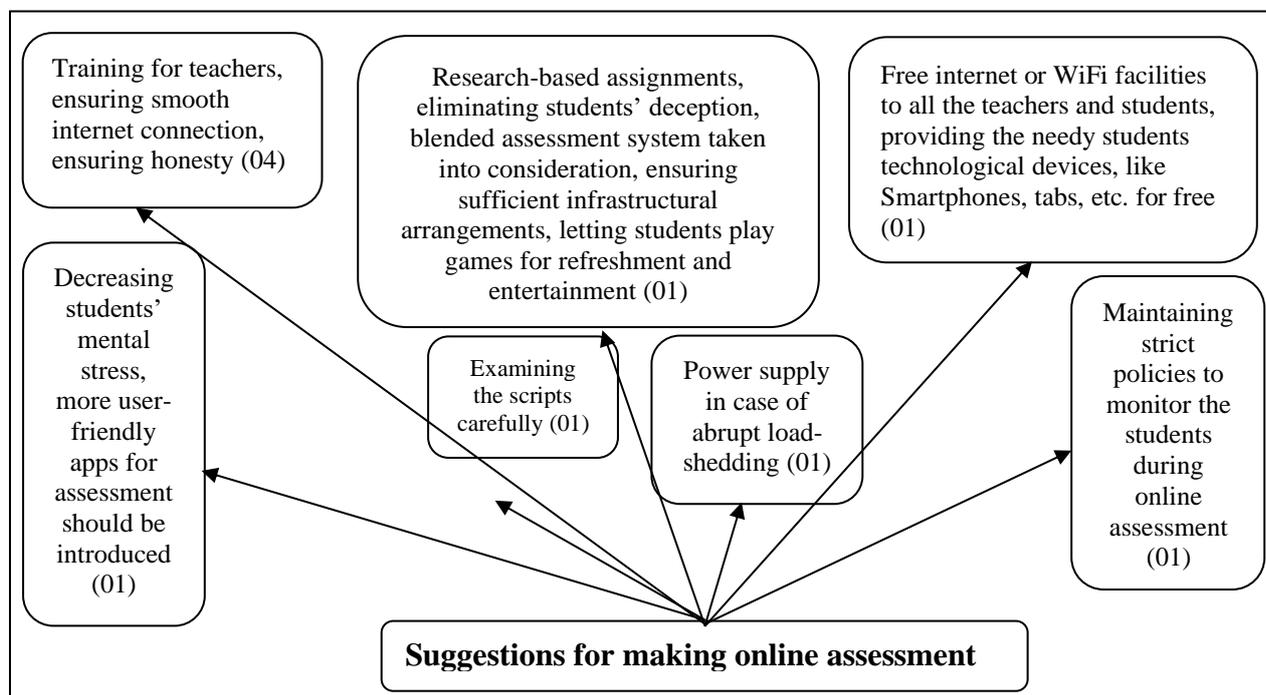


Figure 13 Suggestions for making online assessment effective

Teachers from 10 universities in Pakistan have taken part in a survey on how to make online assessment more effective and fruitful for students. The teachers suggested that the university administration should provide training for teachers and ensure smooth internet connection for all teachers and students. They also proposed to decrease students' mental stress, use more user-friendly apps for assessment.

4.2 Students' Views

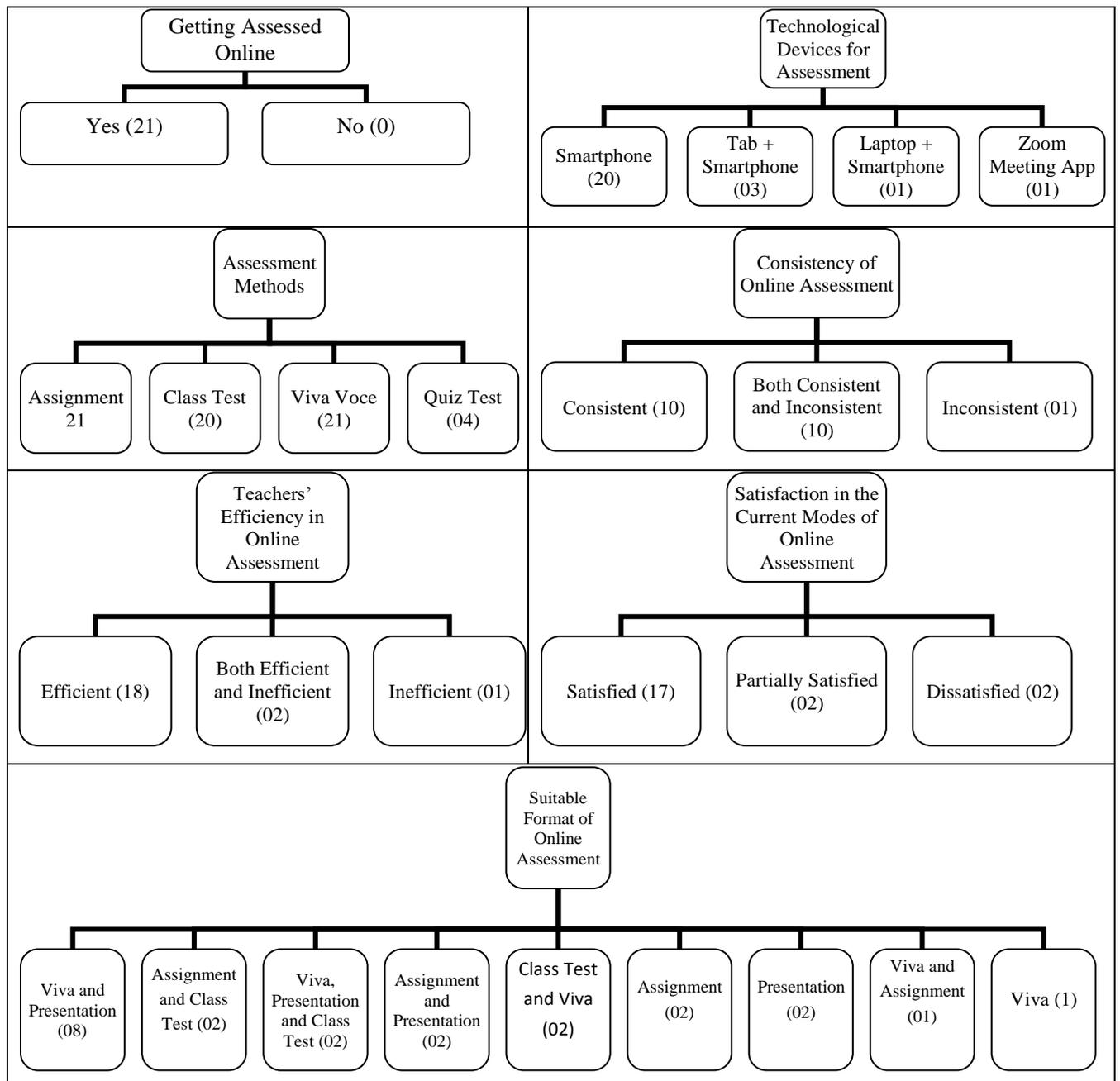


Figure 14 Number of students getting assessed online, technological devices used in online assessment, assessment methods, consistency of online assessment, teachers' efficiency in online assessment, students' satisfaction in the current modes of online assessment

All of the students participating in this open-ended survey experienced virtual assessment during the continuance of education in COVID-19 lockdown. 95% of them used smartphones when got assessed at the university as a technological device, while 03 of the 21 participants used both tabs and smartphones. Categorically speaking, 01 of the students applied for laptops and smartphones, and the last admitted that he/ she used Zoom Meeting App. Assignment, presentation, viva, class test, and quiz test were mostly prevalent

assessment methods for students who were assessed thoroughly during COVID-19. Most of the students stated more than three methods.

Along with other methods of assessment during COVID-19, 100% of the participants mentioned assignment and viva voce, about 95% of the students asserted class test, and the last approximately 20% affirmed quiz test. Around 50% of the students considered online assessment to be consistent, while nearly 50% of the participants thought offline assessment to be both consistent and inconsistent. And 01 of the 21 students acknowledged online assessment as inconsistent. 85% of the students regarded the teachers to be efficient in online assessment during COVID-19, whereas 01 of the 21 participants admitted the teachers to be unskilled. And 02 of the participants asserted that the teachers are both efficient and inefficient. Nearly 80% of them were satisfied after considering all problems and benefits, 01 of the participants was dissatisfied, and 02 of the students were partially satisfied with the online assessment. Around 40% of the students preferred viva and presentation, while 10% of the participants chose assignment and class test, 10% of the students mentioned viva, presentation, and class test, 10% revealed assignment and presentation, 10% said class test and viva, 10% denoted assignment, 10% considered presentation. But 02 of the 21 participants gave different opinions regarding choosing a suitable online assessment format. In them, 01 stated viva and assignment, and the last one asserted viva voce.

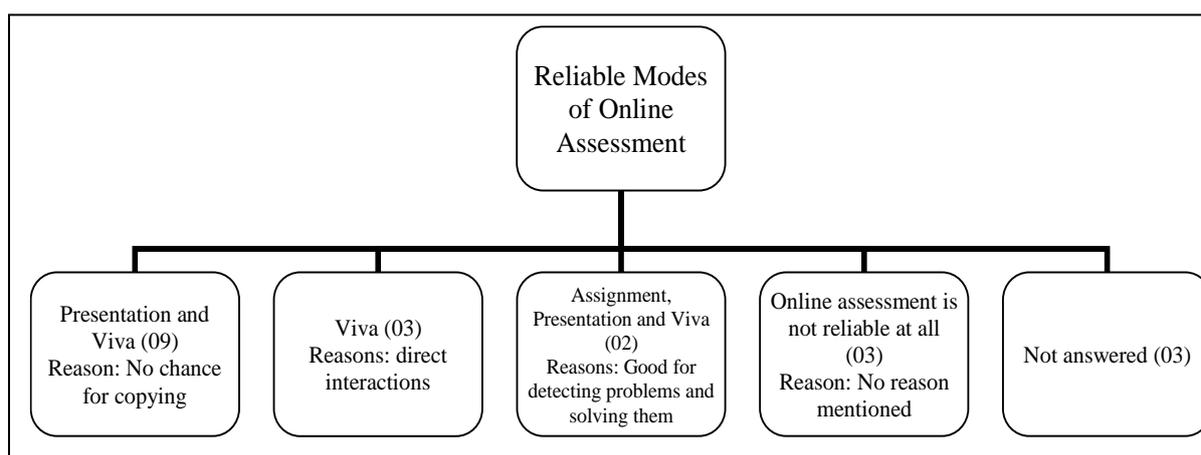


Figure 15 Reliable Modes of Online Assessment

About 40% of the students considered presentation and viva voce to be the reliable modes of online assessment during COVID-19 because they thought that the students would not get a chance to cope or adopt any unfair means of presentation and viva voce online assessment modes. Again, nearly 15% of the participants admitted viva voce to be the reliable mode of online assessment, and they also revealed that it was, in fact, very easy to interact with the teachers in those modes. Likewise, about 10% of the students thought assignments,

presentations, and viva were reliable for online assessment. Besides, they mention as the reason that those moods of online assessment are very effective for detecting problems and solving them. On the other hand, 15% of the participants confirmed that online assessment was not reliable at all but did not mention why they thought so.

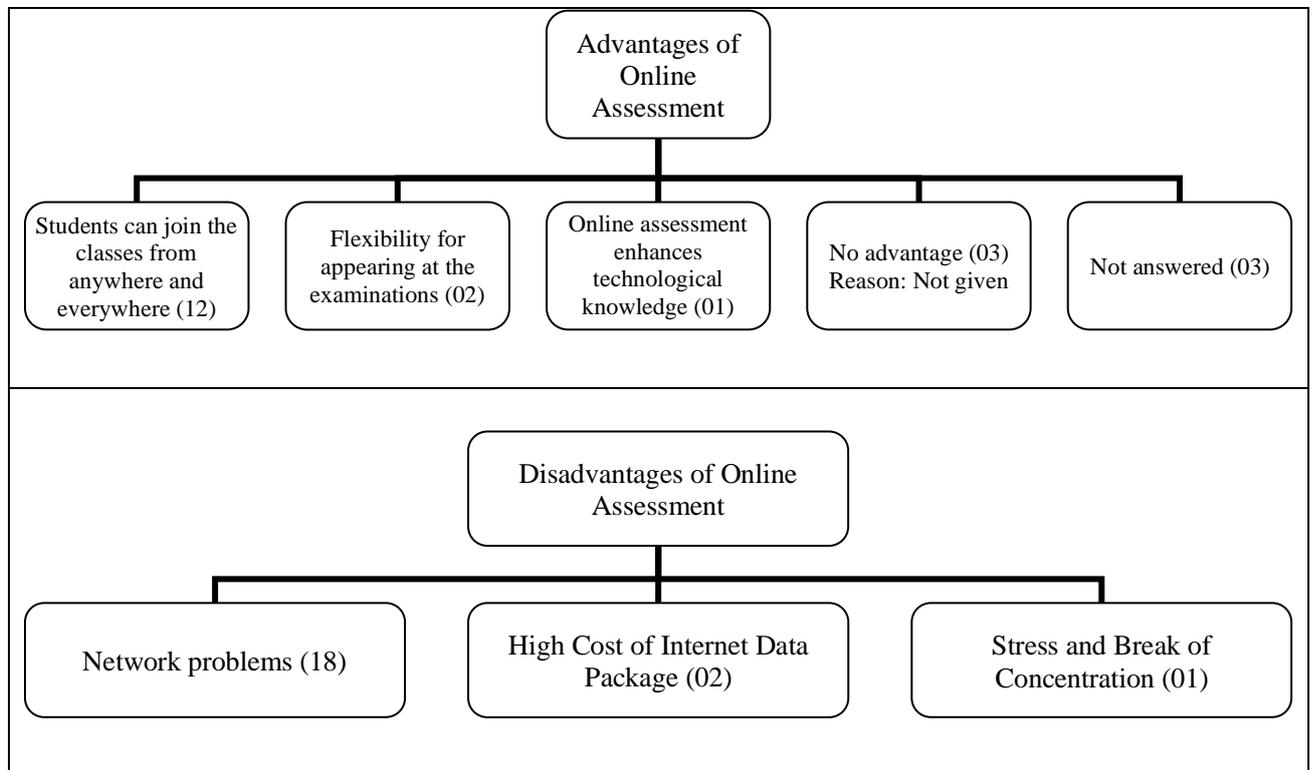


Figure 16 Advantages of online assessment, and disadvantages of online assessment

60% admitted the advantages they enjoyed in online assessment during COVID-19, revealing that they can join the classes from anywhere. Again, 10% of the participants considered flexibility or schedule benefits for appearing at the examination to be the major advantage of the online assessment. 5% of the students asserted that online assessment enhances the technological knowledge of the students. So it was a great opportunity for the students to introduce themselves to the new electronic devices like android mobile phones, laptop or tab or the new software like Zoom Meeting App OR Google Meeting App in the new online assessment. In contrast, about 15% of the participants found no advantages in online assessment during COVID-19 but they had not mentioned the reasons. The last around 15% of the students skipped the question of the advantages of online assessment unanswered. However, nearly 85% of the students regarded network problems or unstable network connection as the prevalent disadvantage they have faced in online assessment, while 10% of the participants admitted that the high cost of internet data package was the major downside.

Likely, the last 01 of the 21 participants acknowledged that online assessment escalated mental stress and broke concentration.

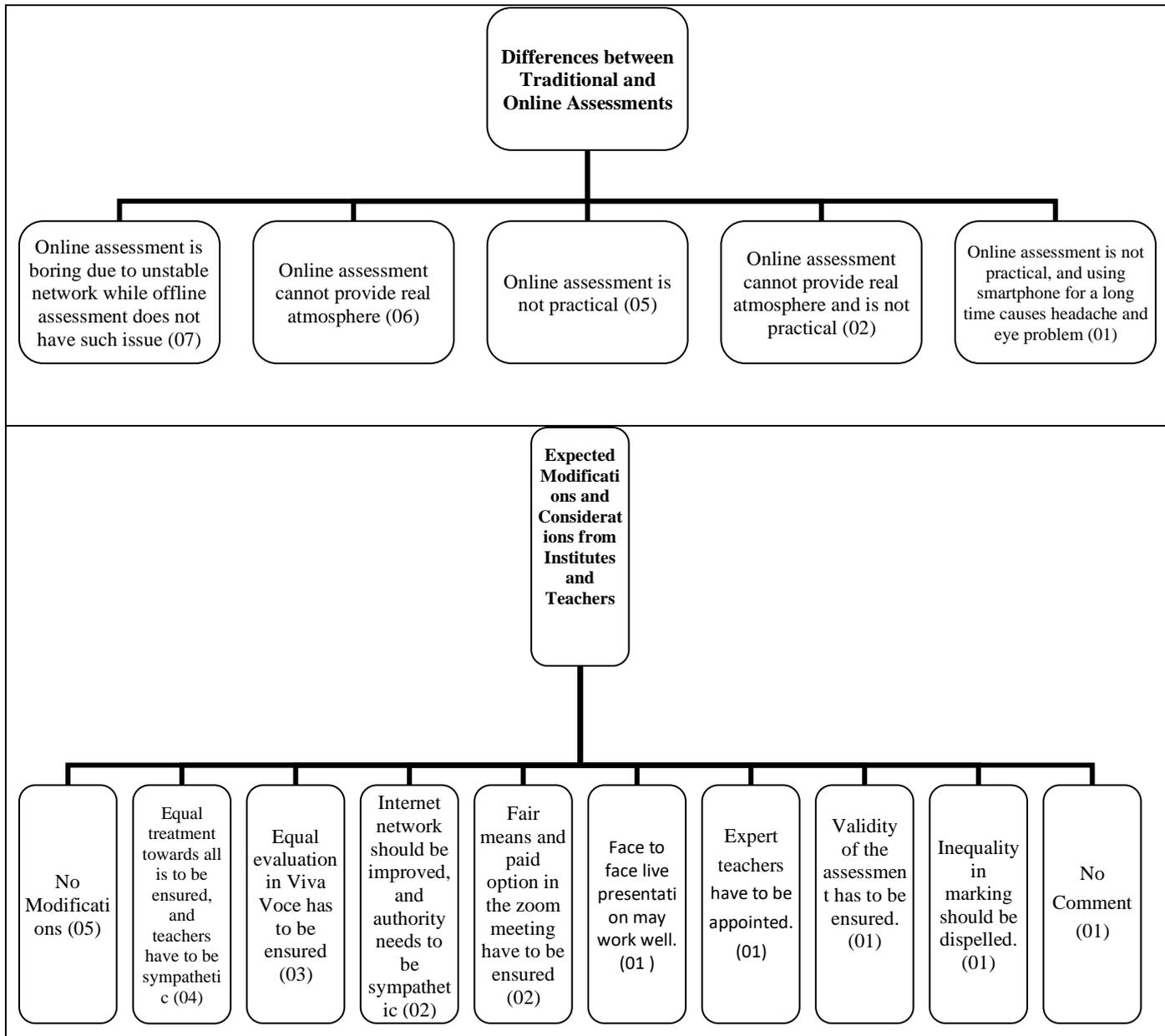


Figure 17 Advantages of online assessment, and disadvantages of online assessment

Approximately 35% of the students admitted that online assessment is boring due to unstable internet connection, while offline assessment did not have such an issue. Again, 30% of the students asserted online assessment failed to provide a real atmosphere, 25% of the participants exposed that virtual assessment was not practical, and 20% of the students considered online assessment to be different because of the real atmosphere and practicality of onsite assessment. The last 01 of the 21 participants mentioned that online assessment was

not practical, and using the smartphone for a long time causes headaches and eye problems but the offline assessment was, in truth, practical, and it had no such issues like these.

75% of the students wanted modifications although 25% suggested that no modifications should be brought into the virtual assessment. 20% of the 75% of participants revealed that teachers' equal treatment in marking must be ensured, and they should be very sympathetic to the students. Likewise, about 15% of the participants considered equal evaluation in viva voce to be the modification, 10% of them asserted that authority should improve the network and as well as they should be sympathetic, but the students didn't mention what sorts of sympathy they wanted. In a similar manner, 05% of the participants put emphasis on ensuring fair means in the virtual exam while 05% of students preferred face-to-face live presentation to making video of their presentations and uploading them on their Facebook page. Again, 05% of the participants admitted that authority should make the teachers experts so that they could assess the students accurately, 05% of the students suggested ensuring the validity of the assessment, and 01 of the 21 participants recommended dispelling inequality in marking. And the last one left the question of modification unanswered.

5. DISCUSSION

Although all the teachers participating in this study reported that they conducted students' assessment through online mode during the COVID-19 pandemic as the educational institutes of Bangladesh, especially the higher ones, continued teaching virtually, to the majority of them, the online, as well as technology-related logistic supports provided by the universities, are not enough. Among the apps and websites used by the teachers for assessment, Zoom Cloud Meeting and Google Classroom are more popular, while university server, personal email, WhatsApp, Facebook Group, Messenger and Microsoft Teaching are also utilized albeit by few. All students responding to the questionnaire of this research get assessed through online mode; the majority (more than 95%) use smartphones whereas fewer use tab and laptop too. Mostly both summative and formative assessment formats are in application in the virtual system where test formats are mainly virtual viva voce and online assignment though quiz, MCQs, presentation, short answer questions, and submission of recorded video of the presentation are also set in some fewer universities.

Despite varied marks distribution in online assessment in different universities, 50% allot 40 marks for midterm and 60 marks for final examinations in the semester system while others have respective number allotment. However, about half of the students feel satisfied

with the consistency of the virtual assessment while the rest half vacillate between the steadiness and unsteadiness of the process. Students receive assessment feedback from respective course teachers, the office of the controller of the examinations, on the university server, in-class discussion sessions and through online media. Maximum of the students (more than 85%) find the teachers efficient in virtual assessment, which logically explains why the majority of them (more than 80%) feel satisfied with being assessed through the online mode. With regard to the reliability of the various modes, about 38% of students vote for viva voce, presentation, assignment and class test, and 43% deem viva voce and presentation as reliable modes of assessment since there is no chance for copying in them. While assessing the students through online assessment system, 70% of the teachers face quite a number of obstacles comprising poor internet facilities, students' lack of technological knowledge, want of necessary technological devices, psychological stress, students' adopting unfairness, etc. 80% of the teachers find online assessment beneficial as it saves time and money, and brings variation easing immediate feedback. To them, online assessment is more automatic than manual, and more importantly, it works as a kind of green assessment method that saves paper use. On the other hand, to the students, the parameters of the virtual assessment to be beneficial are a bit different as the greater portion (71%) of them find it favorable in various regards consisting of their accessibility into the class and examination from anywhere, and its provision of technological knowledge although some find it disadvantageous in unmentioned considerations.

To the teachers, a question relating to if the current online assessment serves the purpose of OBE (Outcome Based Education) was asked, and 70% of them considered that it is doing so though it requires improvement. About their preference between onsite and online assessments, 80% of them supported the former one as it ensures direct attention and is free from the prevailing faulty internet issues. This is also reflected in their satisfaction level (30%) with the ongoing virtual assessment. Accordingly, the teachers offered a number of suggestions they regard crucial for virtual assessment to be fruitful. They included teacher training, unremitting internet connection, more user-friendly apps, research-based assignments to evade students' chance for deception, uninterrupted power supply, free internet and WiFi facilities, provision of required technological devices to both teachers and students, and innovation of a system which ensures virtual monitoring of the assessment task.

Regarding disadvantages, 18 of the 21 students mentioned the same lingering network issues. Approximately 33.33% called the online assessment boring due to the same internet-

related obstacles, 28.57% thought that it cannot provide real atmosphere, while 23.80% considered it impractical. Although 5 of the 21 students did not ask for any modification, the rest rather suggested a list of reforms necessary for effective online assessment. They demanded that teachers be more sympathetic, fair and equal evaluation be ensured, expert teachers be hired or existing teachers be made experts, and above all, the internet network problems be solved.

The study met a number of obstacles, and, it does possess some limitations too. Since the study was conducted during the country-wide COVID-19 lockdown, the sample population could not be approached in person, which resulted in the need for rigorous over-phone, on-social media or on-internet communications so as to re-request and remind the responders. This did create some psychological strains, at least, on the researchers' part. Besides, at least to us, it seemed that there prevails a general reluctance among both teachers and students in case of willingly responding to research questions due to, may be, their pre-occupations and scarcity of spare time. The study also could not take into its grasp a greater number of population for producing more representational findings in the researched question. Moreover, for pandemic issues and want of required logistics, the accomplishment of the study took more time than necessary. Furthermore, the study considered the virtual assessment of the learner performance in ELT in a holistic view in stead of collecting and analyzing data in relation to the online assessment of the four skills of the lingua franca separately, which can be regarded as one of its remarkable limitations.

In light of its findings, the study offers some recommendations which might be applicable and feasible in virtually assessing ELT learner performance both in Bangladesh and in many other countries of her kind in terms of population, resource capacity and academic arrangement. Ministries of Education and other educational institutions, as Ali & Dmour (2021) also suggest in their setting, should review their policies in order to implement the virtual assessment system to provide students with a robust and reliable area to perform their assessments. The universities should provide sufficient logistic support to both the teachers and the students in terms of essential technological devices and speedy internet facilities. Simultaneously, the prevailing online-education-related obstacles like unstable internet network, load shedding, students' lack of technological knowledge, limited access to internet network, lack of proper technological devices, sense of remoteness, the sudden collapse of network connection, someone being frozen abruptly due to network issue, stoppage of communication due to end of the charge of mobile battery, etc. should be

considered rigorously and solved to the greatest extent. Each of the universities needs to launch a technological enquiry system so as to help whoever faces any impediment while being assessed virtually. Some students might not be familiar with the technologies and tools they will be using during the online classes. Therefore, they must be provided with adequate training to be aware of the tools used during online classes (Ali & Dmour, 2021). Advanced remote invigilation mechanisms should be used to create the same exam experience in physical classes on campus. The Virtual Invigilator model should be adopted to achieve effective proctoring and students will be continuously monitored while doing their assessments. Teachers should formulate questions suited to the virtual assessment modes and make sure that the students have to perform live in presentation, viva voce, direct quiz tests and such visible performances. Likewise, the students too have to be guided in such a line that they nurture a changed mentality for online assessment where they are to go through modes other than the onsite ones. Lecturers should move away from traditional types of questions such as multiple choice and essay questions and use other types of questions such as open-book style questions or multimedia questions. Online assessment should open the door for creating a diverse range of assessment classes (Ali & Dmour, 2021).

6. CONCLUSION

The principal motto of this study was to unearth the obstacles and challenges both the ELT teachers and learners encounter while assessing and being assessed virtually amidst the continuance of academic activities in the shutdown of the in-class teaching-learning and assessment at the educational institutes of Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. Concurrently, the study sought to come up with the considerations required to be effectuated in terms of making the best of virtual assessment in the perspectives of Bangladesh. Among the major challenges faced by the teachers are the insufficient logistic supports they receive from the educational institutes they work for in relation to both technological devices and internet network connection for the smooth arrangement and execution, and subsequent functions as to the online assessment. As Spivey & McMillan (2014) find a robust affirmative correlation between students' study efforts and their course performance, especially in the virtual education and evaluation during the worldwide pandemic circumstances, we surmise that assessment in line with education through online has strong possibility to serve the purpose to the fullest or, in some cases, more if necessary modifications are effectuated altogether for the institutes, teachers and students.

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