Is blended learning the future of higher education?: Stakeholders' Perspectives from Bangladesh

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Abstract

Government higher education is extremely cheap in Bangladesh, in comparison to private education. To cover the cost of private higher education, graduate students of private universities who work and study at the same time, face an uphill struggle in finding the right balance. In dire circumstances, they are forced to make a critical life changing choice— either to completely become immersed in work, or leave and pursue fulltime higher studies. In such a situation, blended learning can apparently be the answer, as this will enable graduate students to work and study at the same time. However, as hardly any research has been carried out in this field in Bangladesh up until 2018, it seems too naive to jump to conclusions. This paper specifically looks at the implication of blended learning from the perspectives of stakeholders like students pursuing graduate studies, academics, employers, and housewives. Data was gathered from 10 private universities, six corporate sectors, and dropout housewives, and analysedby employing two theories (Social-constructivism and Dual coding) and multi-modal model of blended learning (enriched virtual model and flipped classroom). Findings proved to be interesting. The implementation of online classes on the one hand may help learners to balance the work and study equilibrium, as well as decrease dropouts from higher education, on the other hand would be quite costly due to virtual infrastructural development and teacher training.

Keywords: Blended learning, digital Bangladesh, private universities, social constructivism theory, dual coding theory, flipped classroom, enriched virtual model

Rationale

Dhaka is the most expensive city in Bangladesh, and the most expensive in South Asia[11]. When university applicants fail to get chance to study in state run universities, they may opt for private universities. In comparison to public universities, the cost of private higher education in Bangladesh is very high, and not everyone can afford it (see Helal, 2012; Kumar, Sharmin, Dey, 2012; Rabbani and Chowdhury, 2014; Mazumder, 2014). In 2015, private university tuitions ranged "from around BDT 40,000 to 80,000 per semester/trimester for a student on an average, depending on the number of credits"[12].Coupled with the high maintenance of living expenses, in addition to the tuition fees of private universities, it becomes difficult for parents to balance the budget. Hence graduate students enrolled in private universities in Bangladesh, particularly Dhaka, tend to work and study at the same time. However, at times work pressure, monthly expenditure including tuition fees, political strikes (e.g. hartals), traffic congestions, makes it difficult to balance academic and professional commitments (see Islam, 2014). Under such circumstances, can blended learning provide an alternative solution? If so, is blended learning the future of higher education in a developing country like Bangladesh?

Blended learning is like an umbrella term, and may be defined in various ways. One of the definitions suggest that blended learning is an amalgamation of both face-to-face and online learning, incorporating both synchronous and asynchronous learning environments (Watterston, 2012, p.5). With reference to this definition, it should be kept in mind that even though blended learning has been used in developed countries for quite some time, in Bangladesh up until the end of 2018, the time when this research was conducted, no institution of higher education in this country had formally employed this approach to teaching and learning. Therefore, this paper has two objectives: to look at the implication of blended learning from the perspectives of stakeholders like students, teachers, employers; to explore whether private universities are capable of providing technology-enhanced tertiary education through blended learning. In the context of this study, stakeholders will comprise fulltime/part-time(working)/dropout housewives graduate students, school and corporate/ professional organization (banks, mobile operators, merchandisers and consultancy firms, NGOs) employers, as well as private university teachers.

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[11] https://www.daily-bangladesh.com/english/Dhaka-most-expensive-city-in-South-AsiaEIU/3221
https://www.thedailystar.net/dhaka-most-expensive-city-in-south-asia-for-expats-survey-33782

[12]   https://www.thedailystar.net/shout/how-much-does-your-education-cost-98533

Significance of Blended Learning in Bangladesh

The present government, which has been in power for the last 10 years, is committed to achieving Digital Bangladesh by 2021. By Digital Bangladesh, government actually meant to achieve social, cultural and economic liberty with the maximum use of ICT and in many sectors the result has shown positive outcomes (Habib, and Baizid, 2010, p.393). However, in terms of education sector the digitization process has not been so comprehensive thus far. According to Ghahari and Golestan (2013, p. 6), the only use of technology cannot bring the ultimate success; they feel that incorporating technology with traditional face-to-face teaching gives the opportunity to bring distant learners closer by giving them better learning environment. In a developing country like Bangladesh, volatile political situations tend to cause classes to be unofficially and/or unpredictably suspended for certain periods of time, which hinders the quality of education (see Hossain, 2013). Under such circumstances, even though learners become enthused with the online learning process, they, according to Kobayashi and Little (2011, p.105), accept the fact that combining online and face-to-face learning processes is much more beneficial for them. Though learners in general get better learning outcomes through active learning with the proper guidelines from the face-to-face instruction (Saliba, Rankine, and Cortez, 2013, p.5), the ones with less motivation and focus tend to find blended learning to be more advantageous for providing greater opportunities than merely online or face-to-face teaching-learning situation. This tends to pave the way towards learner-autonomy. Tayebinik and Puteh (in Alaidarous and Madini, 2016, p. 69), opine blended learning cannot only overcome higher educational challenges, but also mitigate the obstacles encountered by face-to-face and online/virtual learning.

In general, both teachers and students of Bangladesh have started shifting gear by teaching and learning from the traditional education system to technology-based teaching and learning (Hossain, 2013, p. 148). Furthermore, to implement 'Vision 2021' and make 'Digital Bangladesh' a reality, every sector including academia and corporate world are emphasizing more on cloud computing. Cloud computing, according to some scholars (Hayes, 2008; Creeger, 2009; Armbrust *et al.*, 2010 in Kaur, 2017, p. 147), provide flexible communication infrastructure in a convenient schedule. Therefore, 'Vision 2021' and 'Digital Bangladesh' seem to be paving the way towards blended leaning. By allowing university academics to explore blended learning, other stakeholders like employers of schools and corporate organizations (banks, mobile operators, merchandisers, consultancy firms, and NGOs, who employ student-works, could also benefit by combining virtual along with face-to-face teaching-learning platform. Keeping in mind, the Bangladeshi government and university stakeholders need to take positive initiatives regarding blended learning approach to higher education (see Monem and Baniamin, 2010).

Literature Review

Though low adult literacy rate, inadequate higher and professional education and training opportunities, lack of informal and non-formal educational opportunities lead to the low knowledge-based economy of Bangladesh (Hossain and Saddik, 2016, p.−1), according to Mahmuda (2016), technology in teaching has changed the scenario of the education system of this nation by increasing communication, creating classroom communities, making textbooks interactive and by making learning more web-based. This section takes a brief look at literature pertaining to the topic of investigation in the form of blended learning in Bangladeshi private higher education.

Use of Technology in Bangladeshi Private Higher Education

Although studies show that the use of educational technology can increase quality of learning, it is not adequately applied in Bangladeshi universities (Islam and Salma, 2016, p. 100). However, Haque (2016) draws attention to the fact that there is a clear emerging digital culture in Bangladeshi higher education, particularly in private universities. It is one of the election promises of the present Bangladeshi government to achieve 'Digital Bangladesh' through its Vision 2021 manifesto by the year 2021, when the country turns 50. To make that into a reality would mean a 'science-based Bangladesh comprising innovations, inventions, connectivity' (Bayes, 2009). Haque and Akhter (2014) emphasize that despite the challenges there are numerous potentials of using Computer Assisted Language Teaching (CALT) in Higher Education, while Haque (2012) highlights the prospects of web 2.0 (i.e. social media) in this country. Mahmuda (2016) points out that not only have Bangladeshi students become comfortable with 'blog, twitter, Facebook and many other online platforms', but also that multimedia projector, mobile phone, Moodle, podcast, e-book, web-quest and social networking websites are some of the technologies and applications that are already being used in Bangladeshi education. To realize 'Digital Bangladesh', Rahaman and Akter (2017, p. 2) emphasize that ICT is even being used in primary and secondary levels of education in rural areas of Bangladesh, particularly the Sylhet division. Even though Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is the only public university which spreads knowledge throughout distance education, other public and private universities are using various technologies in their 'brick-and-mortar campus' (Karim, 2014, p. 38).

Stakeholders

Any new invention in an education sector does affect the stakeholders related to that institution. According to Mitchell et al. (in Benn, Abratt, and O'Leary, 2016, p. 1), stakeholders include 'persons', neighbourhoods', 'institutions', 'groups', 'organisations', 'society', and the 'environment', while Freeman and Reed (in Benn, Abratt, and O'Leary, 2016, p.1) specify that the stakeholders are those who can affect the intentions made by the. Moreover, the primary stakeholders for any institution are "shareholders and investors, employees, customers, and suppliers", as without their active and continuous participation an institution cannot

run (Clarkson, 1995, p. 106). Clarkson also mentioned "the public stakeholder group: the governments and communities that provide infrastructures and markets, whose laws and regulations must be obeyed, and to whom taxes and other obligations may be due" as the primary stakeholders of an institution. However, the secondary stakeholders have very little to no influence on the objective of the institution. In terms of educational institutions employing the blended learning model, stakeholders group comprises of students, instructors, educational institutions, content providers (instructor themselves or outside sources), technology providers (product providers for effective learning), accreditation bodies (government or education council), and employers (Wagner, Hassanein, and Head, 2014). Apart from students and teachers/instructors, stakeholders can also comprise parents and administrators of educational institutions (Whiteside, 2016).In the context of this paper, stakeholders include students, teachers, dropout housewives, employers of schools, NGOs and corporate organizations.

Blended Learning

Blended learning has numerous definitions based on the need of a particular community, society, or education system. The diverseness of earlier definations of blended learning give fodder to critics like Oliver and Trigwell (2005) who say that there is a lack of consistency regarding this form of learning. Irrespective of the differences of opinions regarding the definition of blended learning, it is the teacher or instructor who tends to aid face-to-face and/or online communication facilitation. In this respect, Bryan and Volchenkova (2016, p. 28) explain that despite the differences of opinions among scholars and/or researchers, they all "agree that blended learning is an integrated learning experience that is controlled and guided by the instructor whether in the form of face-to-face communication or his virtual presence".

Chew, Jones and Turner (2008), who base their definition on Maslow's Vygotsky's educational theory in hybrid learning and education environment(s) feel that blended is an amalgamation of 'two fields of concern', particularly 'education and educational technology'. Likewise, Watterston (2012, p. 5) specifies that "blended learning combines teaching and learning methods from both face-to-face to mobile and online learning and includes elements from both synchronous and asynchronous online learning options". Since there is hardly any research in terms of blended learning (combination of face-to-face and virtual online video-recorded class) in Bangladeshi educational systems, we can look at the Indian educational infrastructure, which is similar to that of our country. Lalima and Dangwal (2017, p. 129) who talk about the scope of blended learning in Indian education context explain that it is an "innovative concept that embraces the advantages of both traditional teaching in the classroom and ICT supported learning including both offline learning and online learning". Furthermore, there seems to be a dearth of knowledge regarding blended learning with respect to English language teaching, learning and training. Bryan and Volchenkova (2016) talk about one of the initiatives of South Ural State University (SUSU), which in 2015 became involved with Project 5-100 initiated by the Ministry of Education of Russian Federation;

SUSU explored how blended learning through educational technologies can provide English language training to undergraduate students.

Caner (2016, p. 21) says that different environments are needed for blended learning, and explains that this approach of learning blends "face-to-face instruction with distributed learning environments that highlight the use of Internet-based technologies, which is characterized by a reduction in the number of face-to-face sessions". According to Young (in Caner, 2016, p. 21), blended learning is an effective system to provide better learning for the higher education students who do not have the advantage of getting into the 'on-ground learning environment'. The present research is based on this concept of blended learning that combines face-to-face classes along with synchronous online teaching/leaning, and looks at the practical implications of this approach to learning in Bangladeshi private universities from the stakeholders' perspectives.

Blended Learning Models

There are various models of blended learning. Model(s) may be adopted and/or adapted depending on the infrastructure of the educational institution, learners' background(s), learners' level(s), teachers'/instructors' training, schema, attitude, and so on. According to Christensens (in Staker and Horn, 2012, p.5), blended learning programmes are conducted based on one of the four models: Rotation Model, Flex Model, À la carte Model (formally Self-Blend Model) and Enriched Virtual Model (see Figure1). The Rotational Model is further sub-categorized into Station-Rotation Model, Lab-Rotational Model, Flipped-Classroom Model, and Individual-Rotational Model.
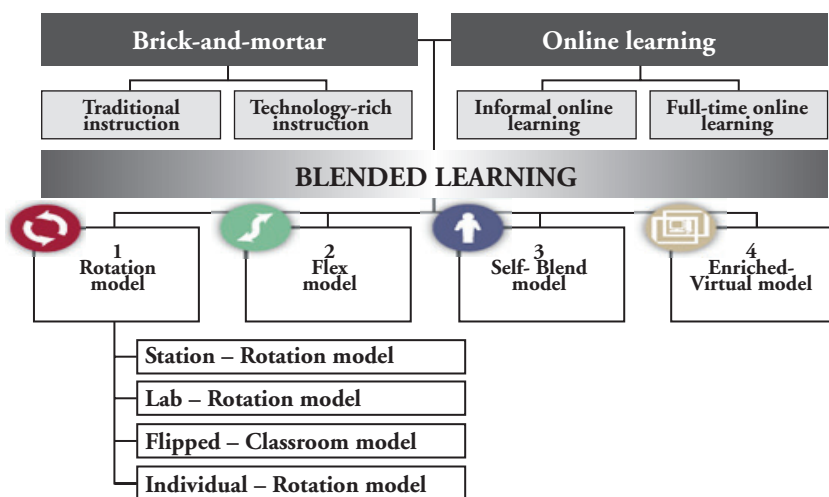

Figure 1: Models of Blended Learning
(Source: Staker and Horn, 2012, p.5)

In addition to the above models, Picciano (in Aguilar, 2012, p.170) discusses about 'The Multimodal Model' which takes into consideration the multiple intelligence of learners in the same classroom, and that blended learning should incorporate multiple approaches rather than one-size-fits-all approach to cater to the needs of wide number of students.

This study particularly employed Flipped Classroom Model and Enriched virtual model of blended learning (see Staker, and Horn, 2012, p. 5). According to Staker and Horn (2012), in the Flipped classroom model (See Figure: 2 below), students rotate between a regular teacher-guided on campus environment and an online command of content delivery from any remote place outside the classroom. Similarly, Urfa (2018) mentions that in flipped classroom, traditional contents are shifted to online platforms for learners to access; he cites a study, and emphasizes that the usage of Flipped Classroom Model has increased drastically in 2017 compared to 2011. Furthermore, the interactive time in flipped classroom model as explained by Bergmann, Overmyer & Wilie (2011), is done during face-to-face classroom, and it is the learners' sole responsibility to look over the classes uploaded online and make notes for any conundrum (Ozdamli, and Asiksoy, 2016, p. 100). Again, to create maximum use of conceptual knowledge in the practical life of the tertiary level students, and to satisfy their required lecture classes efficiently, flipped classroom model is considerable (Garza, 2014, p. 11). However, in the Flipped Classroom Model, the time of face-to-face traditional class is not compromised, which is not the case in the Enriched Virtual Model (See Figure: 3 below). Unlike Flipped classroom, students rarely visit the 'brick-and-mortar campus', hardly once in a week.
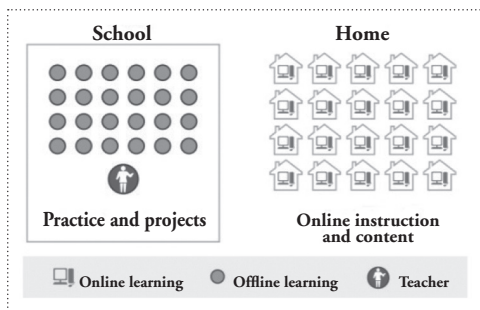

Figure 2: Flipped Classroom Model
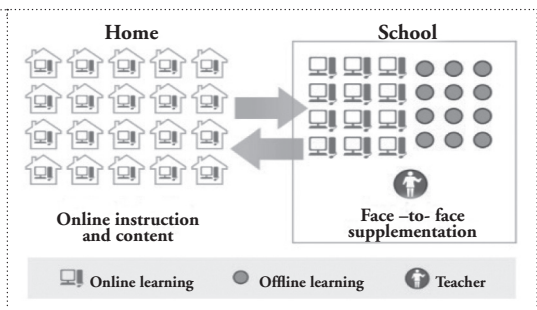(Source: Staker, and Horn, 2012, p. 10)

Figure 3: Enriched Virtual Model
(Source: Staker, and Horn, 2012, p. 15)

Connecting Blended Learning with Social Constructivism and Dual Coding Theory

According to Vygotsky (in Suhendi and Purwarno, 2018, p. 91), social interaction(s) of people, within their zone of proximal development, seem to enhance their cognitive function(s). Learners tend to generate knowledge about a concept by interacting with each other and sharing their views. In other words, social interaction is of paramount importance for learning, particularly language learning. English language instructors need to adapt to the changes of 21st century.

The greatest gift of the new millennium is advancement of technology, which should be incorporated into the education system. Institutions of higher learning need to incorporate educational technology in the teaching-learning process. Subsequently, it is important for these institutions to move away from yesteryear's traditional teaching-learning style(s) and adopt innovative and pragmatic emerging methodologies that rely on technology, like blended learning. Blended learning would allow learners to maintain their social relations with other people through technology in spite of being at home or any other place outside the brick-and-mortar classroom. In other words, blended learning would enable instructors to stimulate students' learning process and ensure optimumlearning opportunities through blended learning procedure(s) (Kalpana, 2014, p. 24).

Dual coding theory refers to two channels of communication that process information in the human brain: through the verbal channel and the non-verbal, that is, visual channel (Clark and Paivio (1991). The two channels for processing information can be very significant in terms of language learning. From the perspective of educational psychology, Clark and Paivio (1991) explain how the dual coding theory can be employed as a general framework. They (Clark and Paivio, 1991, p. 151) suggest that the verbal system contains 'modality-specific codes' and non-verbal system retains 'modality-specific images' as shown in Figure 4. Language acquisition procedure works in a similar manner, that is, human beings tend to link the new 'logogenic' expression(s) they learn with the existing imagery they have in their mind to create the dual code schema (Moreno, 2017, p. 23). This process can be connected to blended learning, because blended learning like dual coding theoryoperates by means to two forms of communication channels: verbal and visual (i.e. visual and/or audio-visual). Hence, the findings of this paper have been explained in terms of Vygotsky's (in Suhendi and Purwarno, 2018) concept of social constructivism, and Clark and Paivio's (1991) dual coding theory.
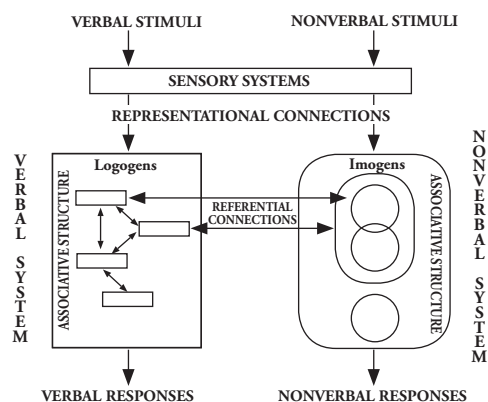

Figure 4: Visual Representation of Dual Coding Theory
(Source: Clark and Paivio, 1991, p. 152)

Methodology

This study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It explores the practical implications of blended learning in English departments of private universities of Bangladesh in terms of stakeholders' perspective(s), as well as whether private universities have the necessary infrastructure of offering technology-enhanced education.

Since random sampling provides the best chance to obtain a representative sample (Onwuegbuzie, and Leech, 2007, p. 242), this form of sampling was used to select 10 private universities from Dhaka metropolitan by means of the Fish Bowl Technique. Ten English Language Teaching (ELT) instructors who teach graduate classes in the Department of English were selectedwere also selected by means of random sampling from those 10 universities in order to be interviewed. However, due to the nature of the data, other samples were collected based on the convenience sampling: for instance, graduate students for focus group interviews, employers from schools and corporate organizations, university dropout housewives. Focus group interviews were conducted with 100 graduate students from the English department of 10 private universities; they were divided into 17 focus groups, each comprising 6-7 students. Eighteen employers from schools and corporate organizations (banks, mobile operators, merchandisers and consultancy firms, NGOs) were selected for interviews. Furthermore, three university dropout housewives, who completed their undergraduate studies from English department, were selected.

Theoretical Framework

A typical blended learning framework may have 'two or more' models (Kose, 2010). Flipped classroom and enriched virtual model (see Staker, and Horn, 2012) seemed appropriate in this study, which look at stakeholders' opinion(s) of blended learning that was based on a combination of face-to-face and online teaching-learning approach. Vygotsky's social constructivism theory (in Suhendi and Purwarno, 2018) is also relevant for this research. This theory shows how students and teachers as well as employers generate their knowledge about a concept by interacting with each other and sharing their views in order to learn. Likewise, in Blended learning environment, where learners are given opportunities to watchfootage/clips of their classes, interact/stay connect virtually, and have discussion(s) with their instructorsand/or their peers through synchronous and asynchronous communication. Consequently, learnersare connected with their peers (classmates/course mates) and instructors 24/7. Hence, stakeholders (university academics, administrators, graduate working and non-workingstudents of from the English departments of private universities employers of corporate organizations (banks, mobile operators, merchandisers and consultancy firms); NGOs, schools, and University dropout housevives are constantly generating their knoeledge through regular interaction(s). Furthermore, Clark and Paivio's (1991) dual coding theory is significant for analysing both face-to-face as well as online teaching-learning situations, because both require verbal and non-verbal (visual/image) forms of communication. It should be kept in mind that in terms of blended learning in institutions of higher learning, all

stakeholdersare interdependent; which means that any positive outcome for one leads to positive outcome (explicit and/or implicit) for others.

Findings of the Study

The findings of the study have been discussed in terms of the various stakeholders (teachers, students anddropout housewives from English departments of private universities, as well as employers from schools, NGOs and corporate organizations like banks, mobile operators, merchandisers and consultancy firms), in order to bridge the relation with the objectives of this study.

The primary objective of this study was to explore the practical implications of blended learning in with respect to stakeholders' opinions. Teachers are the important stakeholders of academia. A total of 10 teachers from 10 private universities, who teach postgraduate courses in English departments, were interviewed. While asking about the possibilities of blending both face-to-face and online class, all of the teachers (100%) accepted the usefulness of the blended learning. They agreed that their students use technology to search for information from the internet, download scholarly articles by using JSTOR, read online newspapers, watch YouTube videos, podcasts and advertisements. Toassist working students with their studies, few teachers (10%) regularly upload various materials like PDF files, PowerPoint slides, or any sort of material used in the class in Google drive or send them to the students individually after every class. Furthermore, discussion boards in Moodle, Facebook group, or Google Classrooms are used by few teachers (20%) for generating discussions; and based on these discussions, students are asked to make PPT slides and submit assignments. At the same time, half of teachers (50%) were concerned about plagiarism, due to the copy-paste culture. However, the majority of the teachers (60%) suggested the ratio of online and face-to-face classes should be 1:4, some (20%) said 1:1, and others (20%) opined 4:21.

Graduate students are another important stakeholder of private higher education. A total of 100 English department graduate students (working and non-working) from 10 private universities were interviewed. Among the 100 students, 25 were part time, as they were working, whereas the rest, that is, 75 were full time students. The studentswere divided into 17 groups, each group comprising 6 to 7 students. The first few questions werefocused on whether and why they work beside their studies, and the challenges they face, as well as initiatives they take to overcome those challenges. Among the 25 working students, more than half were working in schools (56%), some in banks (16%), very few in NGOs (12%), and hardly some in consultancy firms (8%), ad firms (4%) and in universities (4%) as graduate teaching assistants (GTA). However, majority of the students from all 17 groups agreed that it is important to do a job while pursuing studies because it gives opportunity to gain experience by the time they complete their graduate programme. The working students added that doing a job gives them sense of independence as they sponsor their own studies, and help tosolve the economic problem of their families. Even though, a good number of working and full-time

students from all 17 groups expressed that it is tough to balance work and study, they mentioned the importance of doing both. On the contrary, some students from all the groups explained that, initially theoretical knowledge provided by university is necessary before stepping into the practical life; so, for them doing job is not important as their families are sponsoring their studies. Some of the working students mentioned that their classes and exams clash with their office hours, including important meetings and seminars. Next few questions were related to students' perceptions of blending face-to-face and online classes,and whether training would be helpful for their better learning. Most of the students opined that blended learning would be effective, and would give working students and housewives a chance to overcome their challenges. Most of groups (12 from 17) suggested that the ratio of online and face-to-face classes should be 3:7, some (4) 1:3 and one group 1:1. Furthermore, the majority of the (15 groups) agreed that training was needed to competently use online learning technology, whereas two groups mentioned that this was not necessary, as they were somewhat tech-savvy.

Graduate English department students work in different sectors like English medium schools, corporate organizations and NGOs. The interview questions for these sectors were mainly focused on the troubles or challenges faced by the employers while working with the students of higher education. The study reveals that the employees (i.e. working graduate students) find it difficult to balance their new careers and graduate studies at the same time. They tend to concentrate more on their academic studies, which results in unfinished official work or interferes with the quality of their work. Furthermore, student workers tend to miss a substantial number of meetings and they tend to leave early to attend classes in their respective institutions. These are only a few of the problems identified among many others. The Human Resource personnel of English medium schools, corporate organizations and NGOs welcomed the new concept of blended learning, and wants it to be implemented immediately as it would be of great help for both the student-workers and the organizations where they are working.

In total, there were three English department dropout housewives who were interviewed. All of them said that they have to take care of all the daily domestic necessities like looking after babies, buying groceries, household cleaning, washing clothes, cooking—just to name a few. All these chores leave very little time, scope or room to pursue higher education or indulge in hope of a career of one's own, because the domestic culture and/or atmosphere of a housewife is where she is supposed to be nothing more than be a caregiver and/or caretaker. Under such circumstances, blended learning could offer housewives, a ray of hope of continuing their education with the hope of forging a professional identity. The findings of this study suggest that it is this view that all the housewives expressed. They slightly differed regarding the ratio of online and face-to-face teaching; two housewives said 2:3, and one mentioned 1:1.

The second objective of this study was to investigate if the private universities of Bangladesh are equipped enough to provide technology enhanced tertiary education through blended learning. The data for this objective was particularly derived from the private university

English department teachers, however, we also need to know whether the students are also logistically equipped or not. In terms of teachers' perception regarding blended learning, some (40%) said that the online part will put extrapressure on them; furthermore, if they are video-taped during face-to-face classes, this will also put pressure on them as their mode of delivering lectures will be impacted due to being monitored by camera or cameras in the class. On the contrary, few (10%) opined that if the teacher is confident and/or honest about his/her teaching abilities, being videotaped should not be a problem. Some (20%) of the teachers were concerned that videotaping all the lectures would be expensive, as it wouldrequire highly sophisticated infrastructure and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) support. The teachers also expressed that allowing students to access class lectures would deprive them from engaging in meaningful discussions. Contrary to this view, some (30%) of them showed their excitement saying that the students could communicate with them (i.e. teachers) through Facebook, email, or meet them during their office hours to discuss anything from the recorded classes. However, all the teachers recognizedthe significance of face-to-face classroom interaction. In terms of students, though majority of them had laptops and smartphones, some used IPad for educational purposes. Few of the students expressed concern, as they were uncomfortable when it comes to using technology. Hence, one segment of the academic stakeholder (i.e. students) are yet to become efficient with technology-enhanced learning.

Discussion and Conclusion

The result of the study suggests that blended learning (i.e. blend of face-to-face and online teaching and learning) would be preferred, as it would be convenient for English graduate students of private universities of Bangladesh. Teachers also agreed that a blended learning approach to higher education might be accommodating to stakeholders like graduate students and potential employers. The HR personnel and admin officers of English medium schools, corporate offices and NGOs, where English department graduates work, said that fresh graduates are updated with the latest academic methods, approaches and techniques, and tend to have innovative ways of teaching. Moreover, they believe that employees who work and study at the same time bring fresh ideas to their respective workplaces and have the desire to work hard; they also seek less remuneration as they have not graduated yet. Thus, they expressed that if the student workers are given a congenial atmosphere where they can balance work and study, this would be a win-win situation for all the stakeholders. Moreover, dropout housewives from the English departments also mentioned that blended learning approach to university education would pave the way for them to continue their higher education and take care of their families at the same time. Hence, findings from the study suggests that there are practical implications of incorporating blended learning in graduate programmes of private universities which have been expressed by all the stakeholders. However, it should be mentioned that though private universities tend to have the infrastructure to offer blended learning, the cost of implementing this approach to teaching and learning would be expensive. The extra expense would have to be borne by the learners.

The findings also seem to be in line with previous studies (Mahmuda, 2016; Haque, & Akhter, 2014) regarding incorporation of technology in higher education in private universities of Bangladesh, as they already have the basic ICT infrastructure in place (Haque, 2016). The views of the HR and admin personnel welcoming blended learning to minimize the stress of working and studying their young employees is reflected in Lalima and Dangwal (2017), who tend to talk about the benefits of stakeholders in the Indian situation. It should be kept in mind that Bangladeshi workplace and private higher education system is somewhat similar to that of India.

Blended learning tends to offer a more efficient and flexible learning process for both teachers and graduate students of Bangladesh, particularly those pursuing education in the English departments of private universities. The study implies that if implemented effectively, blended learning can afford better opportunities for working students to balance their professional and academic life by reducing some of the challenges that they encounter while pursuing graduate studies in Bangladeshi private universities. Blended learning can also be beneficial to employers, and dropout housewives. Such assumptions lead us to believe that technology is an indispensable part of the 21st century higher education and the workplace, which this country recognizes, and it is working towards achieving Digital Bangladesh-Vision 2021.

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