

Zoom as a Teaching Tool to Enhance Students' Listening and Speaking Skills: Teachers' and Students' Perceptions

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Abstract

Zoom, an essential tool for online learning, has transformed teaching and learning strategies and made it possible for teachers to adapt to the ever-changing online landscape. The study explores the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the use of Zoom as a virtual tool for speaking and listening classes at private universities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It involves five English language teachers and 15 students, employing qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews. Results indicate improved speaking skills but not listening skills due to issues like power cuts, unstable internet, device unavailability, lack of concentration, and buffering. Despite obstacles, both teachers and students view Zoom favorably for speaking tasks but face challenges with overall listening comprehension.

1. Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic showed the education system that traditional classrooms could be replaced with digital classrooms, and students could be taught effectively through various digital platforms and resources. Due to the epidemic, schools, colleges, and universities had to quickly adapt their in-person courses to remote learning. As a result, teachers worldwide had to convert their courses into live web meetings using tools such as Zoom and Google Meet despite facing some constraints (Lowenthal *et al.*, 2020). For this present study, the researchers took up the Zoom platform and tried to understand how it worked for conducting speaking and listening lessons at the tertiary level in the context of Bangladesh.

Obviously, the pandemic made all educational institutions shift their in-person courses to online platforms (Hodges *et al.*, 2020). Al-Amin *et al.* (2021) mentioned that the Minister of Education ordered all universities to begin offering virtual education after shutting down all educational institutions. As a result, several educational institutions (mostly private universities) in Bangladesh shifted to online classes.

The pandemic called into question established teaching techniques, necessitating a rethinking of delivery times and the role of institutions in education.

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This emphasized the significance of continuing education as a lifelong learning process, as well as the requirement for instructors to take an introspective stance (Shohel *et al.*, 2022). Despite opposing viewpoints, some instructors and students used conventional approaches, while others adopted non-traditional tactics (Lau *et al.*, 2020). Several pedagogical paradigms emerged, with instructors and students serving as key change agents. Distance education and learning were regarded as successful pedagogical strategies.

The Government of Bangladesh closed educational institutions from March 16, 2020, until March 31, 2020, to prevent the spread of infection. The closure was extended multiple times, particularly until January 16, 2021, to manage the second wave of the deadly epidemic (Rouf *et al.*, 2022; Sakib, 2020; Uddin, 2020). The pandemic significantly affected many learners and teachers in Bangladesh, forcing them to stay at home. Rouf *et al.* (2022) noted that due to the pandemic, the online education system had introduced virtual platforms like Google Classroom and Zoom, replacing in-person sessions with webinars. However, according to Crawford *et al.* (2020), this lethal pandemic forced higher education institutions (HEIs) to swiftly transition to online learning despite many unprepared for this change. Bao (2020), as cited in Rouf *et al.*, (2022) noted that the sudden changeover from offline to online education has led to challenges for many faculty members around the world with limited technology knowledge, lack of IT support, and learners with unreliable internet connections, high internet access costs, and lack of preparedness.

Several concerns were raised in Bangladesh due to the move to online learning, particularly regarding the IT system and maintaining the standard of education (Genilo, 2022). The Business Standard (2020) brought the digital divide to attention, revealing that most public undergraduates own smartphones but face difficulties accessing mobile data. Bangladesh's mobile data is expensive and limited, with poor connections in hilly and island areas, particularly in coastal areas, compared to other South Asian nations, which is a great disadvantage. A survey by Islam *et al.*, (2020) found that 55% of Bangladeshi university students faced difficulties in attending online classes due to weak internet connections and 44.7% of device unavailability. 87% of students are dissatisfied with online assessments, and 82% believe online classrooms do not offer the same benefits as face-to-face classrooms. Bashir *et al.*, (2021) explored the challenges faced by Bangladeshi public university students during the transition to online education, focusing on issues like access, equity, infrastructure, curriculum, and psychological concerns. Their research gathered student suggestions to improve online instruction which included ensuring equal access, providing training and digital tools, and implementing changes in curriculum and assessments. The participants shared insights on various obstacles such as issues of access and equity, inadequate logistic support, poor infrastructure, concerns related to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and psychological challenges that surfaced with the shift to online instruction. In another recent study, Khan *et al.*, (2023) examined how Bangladeshi university English teachers coped with the sudden shift to online teaching during the pandemic, highlighting that they lacked prior online teaching experience. Their study found that teachers had to learn on the

job individually and collaboratively using personal and professional networks due to inadequate institutional training, showcasing their resilience and active role in overcoming challenges in online education.

Of course, amidst this entire unpredictable situation, learning and teaching went online, and applications like Zoom and Google Meet came in handy for many Bangladeshi teachers and students. The present study was designed to focus on tertiary-level teachers at private universities who began using Zoom to conduct English language classes online following the announcement that all classes would be conducted online. However, it was not quite easy for Bangladeshi private university teachers and students to manage listening and speaking classes online, all of a sudden shifting from a long-standing traditional mode. This study's researchers, being educators, were also engaged in conducting online classes via Zoom. Bearing all above mentioned factors in mind, this study has two research questions and they are,

1. How did the teachers and students perceive the use of Zoom for their speaking and listening classes in online learning?
2. What were the challenges that students and teachers faced during listening and speaking sessions via Zoom?

2. Review of Literature

During the pandemic, online learning took over the traditional mode of teaching and learning particularly in universities and this has occurred due to the rapid development of technology and the increasing proficiency of individuals in utilizing it. When we mention the development of technology, we have to acknowledge the introduction of several applications and online platforms in our lives. "Zoom" is one of these platforms that took over particularly during the pandemic situation. Zoom is a cloud-based service that offers online meetings, group messaging, and secure recording of sessions. Being a videoconferencing service aiming to provide seamless collaboration, Zoom allows real-time communication via any device such as smartphone or computer. Zoom stands out for its ability to securely record and store meetings without using other software, ensuring sensitive data protection. Other safety features include real-time encryption, user-specific identification, and the ability to back up recordings to local drives or remote server networks, enabling safe sharing for teamwork. (Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016, as cited in Archibald *et al.*, 2019).

With the onset of the pandemic, traditional learning swiftly transitioned to online formats, offering newfound flexibility and convenience (Pajarianto *et al.*, 2020). The transfer of instruction from school to home has significant implications for transitioning from face-to-face to online learning models. The teacher employed free applications (not the paid versions) like Google Classroom, Zoom, and other tools. According to Kabilan *et al.*, (2010), as cited in Putri and Suryaman, (2022), students view Facebook as a useful tool for learning English. However, Pokhrel *et al.*, (2021) mentioned that to engage teachers and students in high-quality

educational experiences, the online learning platform had to be user-friendly and supportive. In line with this, [Mu'awanah et al., \(2021\)](#) Zoom became a reliable pandemic solution in education; esp. the innovative "Breakout Rooms" feature came in handy. This study by [Mu'awanah et al., \(2021\)](#) revealed that Zoom has become a popular platform for enhancing online learning through video conferencing. This study examined the advantages and difficulties of utilizing "Zoom" to facilitate remote English learning using a qualitative approach. Their study highlights the advantages of learning English through Zoom, including improved practice, enhanced teaching, and increased teacher-student interaction. However, students with limited internet access and incompatible devices may face difficulties and additional expenses, so improving government support for online learning, including better internet access, is highly recommended.

Zoom became popular among many teachers and students for fostering a conducive virtual learning environment, especially at the tertiary level. In their study, [Putri and Suryaman \(2022\)](#) examined students' perceptions of using Zoom meetings for online English-speaking skills teaching. A qualitative descriptive method was used, with data collected through a questionnaire. The research included nine students from Singaperbangsa Karawang University's second semester. Results showed that Zoom Meeting applications simplify comprehension of speaking class materials, but many students found online classes tedious and lost motivation and enthusiasm during the pandemic.

A decade ago, and before that, three different studies focused on problems with listening comprehension created by external factors, issues with listening concentration and the connection between listening and motivation. For example, [Hamouda \(2013\)](#) found a correlation between students' listening comprehension difficulties and their concentration and motivation, suggesting they struggle to understand native English speakers. Next, [Renukadevi \(2014\)](#) highlighted the importance of listener concentration in order to improve listening skills in English. Additionally, [Gilakjani and Sabouri \(2016\)](#) found that listening comprehension challenges are influenced by exercise duration and material quality. However, these studies investigated the problems within the classroom context.

Coming to listening skills in a virtual context, a study by [Aldina et al. \(2020\)](#) revealed that students encountered several challenges in online platforms. This qualitative study on fourth-semester English education students at UNISKA Banjarmasin found that students faced six challenges in virtual learning, including limited vocabulary, fast speech, unclear pronunciation, difficulty concentrating, motivation issues, studying from home, and limited access to media, influenced by both internal and external factors. Virtual learning has some potential along with many undeniable issues. [Aldina et al., \(2020\)](#) also noted that external factors like signal issues and high internet data costs can hinder English learning, while internal factors like limited vocabulary and comprehension can hinder learning. To overcome these challenges, teachers should present material clearly and engage students actively. Listening is crucial for language acquisition, especially in English,

enhancing vocabulary, pronunciation, word stress, syntax, and fluency. Hence, educators must be attentive and engaged during virtual learning.

Shifting the focus on Bangladeshi context, we can find that many studies have already been conducted on online learning during and after COVID-19. For instance, [Hossain \(2021\)](#) researched to understand the experiences and perceptions of 50 teachers and 50 students in online English classes nationwide. The study assessed the feasibility of online education in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and the need for this whole new approach. The findings highlight technology and internet issues, suggesting necessary changes to teachers, learners, educational institutions, technological resources, and internet communications for successful online English language teaching in Bangladesh. [Afrin \(2020\)](#) explored the impact of emergency virtual classes in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on a survey of tertiary-level learners at East Delta University, her study revealed that many tertiary institutions in Bangladesh can still not initiate and sustain online classes, unlike other developing countries. The study considers the challenges university students face in online learning, focusing on financial and technological limitations. In another research, [Khan *et al.*, \(2021\)](#) explored the challenges faced by teachers and students in private universities in Bangladesh during the shift to online instruction due to COVID-19. Their study investigated the barriers encountered, such as internet connectivity issues and limited support for teachers, and proposed strategies like teacher training and financial aid to enhance online education access.

There have also been studies on the language teachers who faced issues during online classes. In a study by [Khan *et al.* \(2020\)](#), the researchers aimed to understand teachers' perspectives on online teaching during the pandemic and identify their challenges. All the participants mentioned the major challenges in online instruction related to lack of resources, affordability, and unstable internet. Moreover, the teachers talked about the challenges of online assessment, which encompassed test construction, reliability, plagiarism, and the existing examination system. It was also revealed that the sudden shift to online classes caused negative psychological impacts on both teachers and students, affecting confidence and stress levels. [Rouf and Rashid's \(2021\)](#) study on English language teachers in Bangladesh highlights their challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study, which used a constructivist research paradigm and a qualitative multiple case study approach, revealed several challenges faced by teachers, including device unavailability, declining student interest, poor attendance, limited interaction, lack of technological skills, financial difficulties, unstable internet connections, minimal language practice, absence of online testing schemes, adverse mental and physical impacts, and a general perception of online English classes as ineffective. In line with this, another study in Bangladesh highlighted the difficulties university teachers and learners face, including the teachers' lack of expertise in online teaching methods and evaluation ([Parvej *et al.*, 2021](#)).

The studies reviewed in this section explored different aspects on online education. However, few studies investigate the impact of specific apps like Zoom on English language classes taught by Bangladeshi Private University teachers in remote learning situation. In light of this, the researchers decided to look into the viewpoints of both teachers and students regarding the pros and cons of using the Zoom platform for virtual English language speaking-listening courses.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design and Participants of the Research

The participants of this qualitative research were 5 English language teachers and 15 undergraduates of the English Departments from three private universities based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with both male and female participants in this study. From teachers' side, three female teachers and two male teachers have taken part and from the students' side, 9 females and 6 male students have taken part. Seven open-ended items were distributed among the students via email in the shape of Google forms and follow-up interviews were taken via Zoom platform. All five teachers joined the Zoom meeting for their interviews and they showed up at their convenience. In view of the ethical issues and privacy, the identities of the participants, and the educational institution, remain confidential. Moreover, an informed consent as a PDF format was sent to the participants via emails.

4. Result and Discussion

The student participants will be referred to as St 1, St 2, St 3, St 4, St 5, St 6, St 7, St 8, St 9, St 10, St 11, St 13, St 14, and St 15 respectively. And the teacher participants will be referred to as T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5. First, students' views will be shared and discussed.

The list of questions began with how the students learned about the Zoom platform during the pandemic. All 15 participants shared their experiences: six students heard about Zoom from the university via email, four from their assigned English teachers, two from social apps like Facebook and Instagram, and the remaining three from friends, relatives, or other sources.

Next, students were asked to share their overall experience with Zoom during their online listening and speaking classes, followed by thematic analysis of the collected data, with three comments presented here.

.... The interactive features of Zoom, such as breakout rooms and chat functions, facilitated engaging discussions and collaborative activities during the classes. For example, we had group projects where breakout rooms enabled us to work closely with classmates on assignments, enhancing our teamwork and communication skills. However, one notable challenge was occasional connectivity issues. There were cases when the audio or video quality would fluctuate, causing disruptions in the flow of the class. For example,

during a crucial speaking exercise, I experienced a temporary loss of audio, impacting my ability to participate fully. [St 3]

Most of my experience with the Zoom platform has been positive, although I have encountered some negative aspects as well. On the positive side, the app was user-friendly, allowing us to join classes at our convenience from any location. Additionally, the breakout rooms provided opportunities for both group and individual discussions with our teachers, allowing for personalized assessment of our English speaking and listening skills. However, there were drawbacks, such as occasional slow internet connections during the pandemic, which disproportionately affected students in remote areas. Another limitation was the 40-minute meeting duration, requiring us to create new meetings to continue classes, which proved time-consuming. Moreover, excessive screen time sometimes led to headaches. [St 7]

I have both positive and negative experience with Zoom. Initially, it was frustrating, I had network issues which created obstacles for me. However, both my teachers and batch mates helped me to overcome the odds. I was happy in a way that I could continue with my academic activities through Zoom. But I faced issues like getting disconnected due to poor network or power cut and after 40 min, Zoom went off and the teacher had to restart everything. I also remember if I used mobile data, Zoom worked fine but data cost me a lot of money [St 10]

Both positive and negative factors such as breakout room, recording option, chat function, getting disconnected due to poor internet connection, power cut, excessive screen time, only 40-minute session echoed what the other 12 students stated. Considering these three comments, the researchers have created a table showing the students' overall experience with Zoom.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Easy to use and operate	Too much screen time
Reaction label	Feeling distracted and isolated
Recording option	Technical issues (mic, audio, video)
Quicker groupings for tasks	Sometimes worked better on mobile data (it cost more money)
Easy to access from anywhere	Getting disconnected
No lengthy commute	Just a 40-minute session

Figure 1: *The pros and cons of Zoom in online classes*

After this, the students were asked to share through which kinds of tasks or activities in Zoom platform helped the students improve their speaking skills, and most of them said that for speaking, one-to-one conversation was the best; some of them mentioned presenting online using slides, which helped them a lot to overcome speaking anxiety. A few students mentioned paired tasks, recorded video presentations and recorded audio speeches and submitted them to Google Classroom or via Gmail.

The next two questions focused on listening skills, and here, many issues came up. The fourth item was about what types of tasks were given to the students for listening online. Students mentioned tasks like note-taking, gap-filling activities, vocabulary tasks, true/false tasks, and review writing on a video like TedTalk or short movies. The fifth item was about the process of conducting these tasks online. Here four comments are stated first,

For listening sessions, our course teacher provided tasks about a particular topic to fill in the gaps then she used to give us some ideas on that topic and we had to fill the gaps by listening. However, many of us couldn't hear clearly for technical issues regarding poor network or load-shedding and sometimes, teacher had to replay the contents for several times which consumed more time. Once, we had to watch a video from TedTalk and do tasks on it but due to poor connections, as all of us were at home, the teacher played the video four times to make us understand the main story of it." [St 1]

"The teacher conducted listening sessions on Zoom through a combination of live audio materials, pre-recorded content, and interactive discussions. This approach aimed to simulate real-life listening scenarios and cater to different learning styles. The interactive discussions that followed for the application of listening comprehension skills, as we shared our interpretations and insights. [St 4]

My teacher conducted listening sessions on Zoom by sharing audio and video clips, often used screen sharing to ensure the content clearly. She gave us task based on those audio and video clips. Zoom provides me the opportunity to listen those clips multiple times as it has a recording feature, which allow me to review the speaking sessions. [St 9]

The teacher used to play audio tracks on zoom app and by listening them we had to answer some questions. Most of the students had faced difficulties here. Many of us could not sounds here properly. For that reason, the teacher created a messenger group and provided us the audio there and then we could download the track and then listen to that. Sometimes, the teacher shared both the task and audio on screen. [St 12]

Therefore, it is evident that Zoom presented the teachers with the option of Sharing audio-video files from desktops, websites and YouTube; Zoom also had a

feature like Sharing audio and task sheets on the screen, which benefitted the students during online classes. However, due to some barriers mentioned above, some teachers shared the audio-video clip first and then gave the worksheet via messenger and WhatsApp, which the students could download and do on the screen and return to the teachers. The process seems like a time-consuming route.

The sixth item asked the students about the system of feedback provided by the teachers on Zoom for the listening and speaking sessions. One student commented,

The teacher usually gave us feedback after the sessions and mentioned our lacking and where we could make improvements both in listening and speaking. I would say it was very effective in both speaking and listening sessions greatly. However, I had feedback in the breakout room too where I was given a task with my friend and then the teacher entered the breakout room, checked the task and gave use both real-time comments – this was helpful. [St 2]

One more student said,

The teacher gave a private comment to me for the feedback which was possible in Zoom. Often the teacher would call us individually on Zoom or in breakout rooms and give us the feedbacks we needed. It was very helpful for us. At least, I found it useful as I was not feeling isolated at all. [St 8]

Another comment is stated as well,

Our teacher used to create a separate room on zoom for speaking sessions. Where she would give us the necessary advice to do well in speaking. For listening tasks, he gave general comments to all of us in the live sessions. I once wrote an email asking for more advice on how to do well in listening, my teacher replied to me with some necessary advice and on Zoom he also spoke to me after one session. That was helpful to me. [St 15]

Therefore, be it one-on-one live feedback or feedback to the whole class, students found them useful. Some of them mentioned paired feedback in breakout rooms, which makes it clear how Zoom helped the students and teachers with this virtual feedback.

Finally, the students were asked to choose one or more than one option that they liked about Zoom. The breakout room was the winner, and the screen-sharing option stood second. However, several students mentioned that they liked the recording option because sometimes the teacher could record the whole session, and if one student fell sick and asked for the class recording later on, the teacher would give access to that recording. The students also supported the commenting option, also known as “chat”, and the raising hand option, which is part of the reaction label on Zoom.

For the teachers, the researchers asked about their inclusive experience on Zoom, the challenges they faced, and the assessment procedure on Zoom. For their all-encompassing experience teaching on Zoom, factors like flexibility, user-friendliness, and proactive students came up with issues regarding technology and assessment systems. Teachers also mentioned liking the screen-sharing option and scheduled meet system alongside breakout rooms. However, some teachers stated that they did not like the recording option because that would give some students excuses not to join the classes. They believed that this feature could give students excuses or reasons not to attend live classes, as they might rely on recorded sessions instead.

An assorted of responses came up for the barriers the teachers have faced. All five teachers mentioned that they had to wait a long time for all the students to join the meeting, and there was a delay in starting the class on time. Technical issues and power outages were the common issues the teachers faced alongside the students. Some teachers even mentioned that they ended up bleary-eyed and exhausted. Teachers also stated that several students often did not turn on the video during the class, particularly the tests. The students' common excuse was a network issue over which the teachers had no control.

Then, the researchers asked the teachers to share their experiences on assessment and feedback sessions using Zoom during listening and speaking classes. Teachers found it hard to stop cheating during online tests on Zoom, even when they made students turn on their cameras for speaking tests. To manage listening test answers, some used Google Classroom with deadlines for submissions. They found Zoom useful for giving feedback to large groups, but they were still worried about cheating and the time it took to give individual feedback. These experiences show how challenging it was for teachers to switch to online assessments, balancing the benefits of technology with concerns about fairness and managing their workload.

Here are two comments below,

Conducting tests online wasn't really easy for me and I always had to worry about students' cheating. Well, for speaking and listening tests, I made my students turn their cameras on but for me, alone, it was challenging to monitor everyone. Listening and speaking were both conducted on Zoom as I found it much easier to navigate, but to get the listening answers in document type like PDF, I created google class and added my students there where after the test, and they would upload their answer copies. Of course, there was a time limit to do and failing to upload in time would result in deducting some marks. For feedback, I did it to my whole class as Zoom supported lots of students in one session. [T3]

..... I had to conduct all the tests and exams on Zoom during covid and I was worried about 2 things – One, students could easily cheat in their listening tests as some times were given to them to submit answer copy and they could talk to one another on their personal messenger group, it

wasn't impossible at all. Two, I was so worn out after speaking tests, it took me a lot of time to conduct and complete one session in a day. This also happened when I tried to give individual feedback on one session. [T4]

Thus, it was both stressful and difficult for teachers to provide feedback and assess pupils on a virtual platform.

5. Recommendations

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the experiences of both students and teachers with Zoom in online listening and speaking classes. Students primarily learned about Zoom through university communications, teachers, or social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Their experiences with Zoom were generally positive, highlighting its user-friendly interface, convenience for remote learning, and effective use of features such as breakout rooms and screen-sharing for collaborative tasks. However, challenges such as technical issues, connectivity problems, and the limitation of 40-minute sessions were noted, impacting student engagement and learning experiences.

In terms of speaking skills improvement, students found one-to-one conversations and online presentations beneficial, while tasks like recorded video presentations and audio speeches facilitated practice and reduced speaking anxiety. For listening skills, tasks included note-taking, gap-filling activities, and reviewing TED Talks or short movies, although technical issues sometimes hindered comprehension and required repeated playback of audiovisual materials.

Students generally liked getting feedback on Zoom, whether it was one-on-one or in small groups. Getting feedback quickly and tailored to them helped them learn better. Sometimes, though, technical problems made it harder to give and get feedback smoothly.

In recommendations, universities should ensure they provide sufficient technical support to address connectivity issues and enhance the online learning experience for both students and teachers. This may include organizing workshops or providing resources that help optimize internet connections and troubleshoot common technical problems effectively.

6. Limitations

The research is subject to some potential drawbacks. Firstly, the study does not include any quantitative data, so no generalization may be made about the findings. Also, it is a small-scale study that focused only on three private universities in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh; the researchers could not include private and public universities outside Dhaka in Bangladesh in their study.

7. Conclusion

Zoom gained popularity during the pandemic due to its user-friendly features. Like many other countries, Bangladesh also had to transition to online education. For

some, Zoom was affordable, too, and the present study even saw how students benefitted through Zoom, particularly for the speaking classes. However, things were not the same for the virtual listening sessions. Therefore, Zoom's effectiveness in distance English learning depends on personal motivation, teacher inventiveness, and available support for devices, cost, and atmosphere, particularly at the tertiary level, including both public and private universities.

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Conflict of Interests

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