Online Learning and Teaching Experiences During the COVID19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Bangladeshi Students Receiving Chinas Higher Education

# Abstract

While facing the COVID19 pandemic attack worldwide, international students are forced to turn to online instruction for academic study. Based on a longitudinal ethnography with a cohort of Bangladeshi students who study in Englishmedium degree program at software engineering, this study reveals a series of challenges confronting both Chinese teachers and Bangladeshi students for their online interactions. Data were collected through online classroom observation, semistructured interviews, audiorecording and online interactions. From the perspective of Chinese teachers, they lacked of control on their students class participation given the poor network infrastructure in Bangladesh and the time gap between China and Bangladesh; in terms of Bangladeshi students, they felt frustrated in access to Chinesemediated online teaching applications due to their insufficient Chinese proficiency; their inaccessibility to operate their subject learning also made the online learning tedious. Based on the findings, the study offers several suggestions to respond to teachers and students difficulties and challenges in online lessons and sheds some lights on improving online education.

**Keywords:** online learning and teaching, COVID19 pandemic, Bangladeshi students, Chinas higher education

# Introduction

The novel coronavirus (COVID19) has been declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization. Since its outbreak, the pandemic has saturated the headlines of various international media channels that disseminate information to global citizens (Zheng & Goh & Wen, 2020). In such particular time, people have been stuck at homes for several months. As COVID19 has been restricted effectively, in China, only those graduation classes have been allowed to return school in March until present time. Successively, some universities in different provinces have announced the opening time of new semester. However, for those regions and countries where the pandemic is prevalent, universities and educational institutions have set out to adopt new ways to reach the students in different levels through online teaching.

The global learning landscape of the twentyfirst century is being transformed and shaped by the uptake of digital communication tools and onlinenetworked applications, along with the changing characteristics, demands, and challenges of teachers and students (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). Meanwhile, online teachers and students are confronted with unprecedented difficulties and challenges as well. To be more specific, online courses require the instructor and learner to be online at the same designated time using technology that offers real time communication and instant feedback (Charlton & Law, 2014).

In poor countries, international students who study in Chinese universities might be unable to attend online classes in their own countries as their Chinese teachers because of internet problem and time difference. This is particularly true with Bangladeshi students who are stuck in Bangladesh due to the COVID19 pandemic. In response to the challenges and difficulties of online instructors and learners and the increasing significance of online education, this article attempts to explore the teaching and learning experiences in online lessons in light of Chinese teachers and Bangladeshi students, and investigates their attitudes and expectations towards online education.

# Previous Studies on Online Instruction

A bulk of literatures concentrate on online education have been conducted on different thematic topics from various aspects. Accordingly, topics such as students experiences, perceptions, expectations, needs and difficulties in online lessons are the most prevalent (Hamann & Pollock & Wilson, 2012; Charlton & Law, 2014; Thompson & Ku, 2005; Bourdeaux & Schoenack, 2016; Joyner & Fuller & Holzweiss & Henderson & Young, 2014). Specifically, Joyner et al (2014) studied online graduate students perceptions of best learning experiences, revealing that students desire a deeper level of learning that requires more instructional forethought and planning in light of constructivist theory. Similarly, students writing skills in English, insufficient and deferred feedback and the lack of cultural exchange are the major concerns regarding online learning (Thompson & Ku, 2005).

Furthermore, some scholars focused on the influencing factors and strategies in promoting the efficiency and quality of online courses. For instance, Akcaoglu & Lee (2018) asserted that Facebook groups can create supplemental social spaces, indicating that students felt more positive about social presence and learning interactions with other classmates and their instructors, as well as perceiving the course as having more sociability after they joined the class in Facebook groups. In the context of historically Black colleges and universities, Alston & Moore & Thomas (2017) suggested that educators must embrace the inherent potential of online teaching and learning while guarding against its tacit disempowering features (Maidment, 2005) and a need for a reliable and effective information technology department, more staff, additional computers, and software for faculty in order to improve online teaching.

In addition, Ni (2013) conducted a comparison study of the effectiveness of classroom and online learning, suggesting that persistence in an online environment may be more challenging in research methods classes than in other public administration classes, and students participation may be less intimidating, and the quality and quantity of interaction may be increased in online classes. However, few researchers have focused on the online teaching and learning experiences of instructors and learners in the particular time of COVID19 pandemic. Different from above studies, this article attempts to explore Chinese teachers and Bangladeshi international students online class experiences as well as their attitudes and expectations of online lessons.

# Methodology

* 1. *Participants and Setting*

The participants for this study are online instructors and students recruited from Yunnan university in China. A total of five instructors participated: three of them are from school of software, the other two from the school of international studies. They have different educational backgrounds different from master to PhD. In turn, student participants are also solicited from these instructors classes. A total of fifteen Bangladeshi international students have participated in the online classes from the beginning of March in 2020 to present time. Among the student participants, four are female students, while the rest of them are all male students. They are the first year of undergraduate students major in software engineering, studying in China around 5 months. Since the outbreak of the COVID19, they all go back to Bangladesh. Owing to the long duration of the outbreak, Chinese universities and educational institutions have decided to adopt online teaching for students. Based on fourmonthethnography, both teacher and student participants educational trajectories are also listed in the following table together with the above information (see Table I and Table II below).

* 1. *Data Collection and Analysis*

The data were mainly collected through online classroom observation, semistructured interviews, audiorecording as well as online interactions. In the initial period of online classes, I was permitted by the subject teachers to enter into the online classroom observing how Bangladeshi students interact with their teachers and classmates. I paid special attention to students language use and performances in online classes. I also showed interests in teachers feedback and evaluation to students performance and focused on what difficulties and challenges online instructors and learners have encountered. All the data were collected by taking field notes and audiorecordings.

After conducting the field work for almost one month, informal and semistructured individual and group interviews with Bangladeshi students and Chinese teachers were conducted in WeChat groups and through voice calls. The advantage of group interview is that it is a socially oriented research procedure (Krueger, 2014). With the agreement of the participants, 15 students and 5 teachers received indepth interviews and each interview lasted for at least 30 minutes. The semistructured interviews concentrated on their online learning and teaching experiences, such as difficulties, attitudes, expectations and needs in online courses. This approach allowed individuals to be able to respond in their own ways. Also, researcher was able to explore new ideas about the topic based on the respondents emerging world view (Merriam, 1998). Interviews with Bangladeshi students were conducted in mixing languages of Chinese and English and they could answer questions in either language. Interviews with the five instructors were conducted in Chinese language.

A thematic analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes and patterns in present study. According to Braun and Clarke (2017), Thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns. It is a powerful yet flexible method for analyzing qualitative data that can be used within a variety of paradigmatic or epistemological orientations (Kiger &Varpio, 2020). The data was first aggregated into categories and then collapsed into meaningful patterns. Techniques for direct interpretation and detailed description of the case were also used throughout the data analysis (Thompson & Ku, 2005).

In order to explore the online teaching and learning experiences of Chinese teachers and Bangladeshi students and understand their attitudes and expectations of online class, I have asked two research questions in present study:

1. What are Chinese teachers and Bangladeshi students online class teaching and learning experiences?
2. What are teachers and students attitudes and expectations for online courses?

# Findings

The above two research questions are addressed in this section, which is consist of three subsections, including instructors online teaching experiences, students online learning experiences and their attitudes and expectations of online classes.

* 1. *Instructors Online Teaching Experiences*

The teacher participants in the study mainly use Ding Talk and Zoom for online classes. Ding Talk is a multiterminal platform for free communication and collaboration created by Alibaba group for Chinese enterprises. It provides PC version, Web version, Mac version and mobile version, supporting mobile phone and computer file transfer. On April 8, 2020, Ding Talk (Chinese language) was officially released overseas version named Ting Talk Lite, supporting traditional Chinese character, English, Japanese and other languages, mainly including video conference, group broadcast, chatting, schedule arrangement and other functions, as well as free use for users around the world during the outbreak of COVID19. Likewise, founded in Japan, Zoom originally makes recording equipment. It has a variety of functions, such as participating in the conference without limitations of time and place, supporting PC/MAC version, iPad, Android and iOS, and providing the conference room system. Similarly, through Zoom, local documents, videos, computer desktops, and mobile desktops can be shared with attendees. Attendees can also make realtime multiparty comments and notes. The network meeting is simple to operate in Zoom, the meeting number up to 100 guests and 10,000 audiences can carry on the realtime interaction (Retrieved from Wikipedia). Due to their helpful and multiple functions and simple operation, the teachers claim that they are the best choices for online teaching currently.

According to the authors class engagement and observation as well as interviews of teachers, teachers unpleasant teaching experiences are founded, mainly including poor network; understanding barriers caused by language problem; students less participation and less interaction and feedback in online classes.

* + 1. Poor Network Infrastructure in Bangladesh

It is generally known that Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. Owing to its poverty and huge amount of population, Bangladeshi development lags behind. This is very evident in its infrastructure. That is why most of Bangladeshi international students are unable to use internet as same as Chinese students. This has seriously affected the online classes both for teachers and students.