

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

The data analysis and findings chapter will describe the following things. Firstly, it will describe in brief, data collection tools, procedures, and techniques of data analysis. Then the data collected from different sources and through different tools will be reported as texts or stories. The interviews held at two different phases of the study, i.e., one before the conduct of the course and another after the course yielded different results. The results are presented as themes and subthemes. The pre-course interview results are shown as six themes and the post-course interview results are presented as three themes having a good number of subthemes under each theme. The post-course interview themes are analyzed in the light of three research questions of this study. The subthemes of the post-course interviews which were similar to the main themes of the pre-course interviews are compared.

The data from both the pre-course and post-course interviews and other documents are discussed in the light of the three research questions of the study. Though the majority of data came from the interviews, other sources also yielded some important data. They are analyzed thematically and reported in a narrative way.

The themes and sub-themes as reported in the Findings will be discussed here to compare and contrast with the findings of the previous research and findings. The discussion will be done according to themes and sub-themes that have emerged during data analysis. Interaction and peer feedback, teacher feedback, learning varieties, student satisfaction and motivation, development of employment skills and higher-order thinking, development of technological skills, ease of using technology, quality of education, learning new techniques of writing through the blended course, the impact of the blended course on writing skills development, flexibility, cost-effectiveness and reduction in tuition fees, easing of session backlog, the scope for job and education simultaneously, more admission into universities, expansion of women's education, challenges and benefits of online and face-to-face education, challenges, and benefits of the blended course will be discussed in this section with reference to the previous research.

4.2. Findings. 4.2.1. Pre-course Interview

The pre-course interview centered on main questions like challenges, advantages and experiences with both face-to-face and online education. These results were compared with their experiences with blended education that they had done for the writing course. The pre-course interviews yielded the following results. The views expressed about their experiences with the two methods of education, i.e., online and face-to-face method collected through interviews and posts on the Google Classroom and Facebook revealed the following themes. They are presented in a table below -

1. Scope of Interaction and Peer Feedback in online and face-to-face education.

2. Teacher Feedback.
3. Learning Varieties and Motivation.
4. Flexibility of Education.
5. Continuity of Education.
6. Quality of Education.
7. Constraints and Advantages.

Table-4.1. Pre-course Interview Themes

1.Pre-course Interview Themes regarding Face-to-face and Online Education
1. Scope of Interaction and Peer Feedback in Full Online and Face-to-face
2. Flexibility of Education
3. Continuity of Education
4. Teacher Feedback
5. Quality of Education
6. Learning Varieties and Motivation
7. Constraints and Advantages a. Challenges of Both Online and Face-to-face Education b. Benefits of both Online and Face-to-face Education

The source of data is presented in bracket (first participant no. source of data, whether from interview, Facebook, Google classroom, diaries followed by date and year of data collection). The data from pre-course interviews yields the themes as shown in the table above. The data center around two modes of education, face-to-face and online. The findings show a comparative analysis of these two modes of education in terms of interaction, flexibility, and teacher feedback, quality of education, learning varieties and their constraints and benefits. A comparative analysis of these two modes of education on the one hand and blended method on the other will be done later that highlight the comparative advantages of blended method in most of the areas except a few.

4.2.1. Scope of Interaction and Peer Feedback in Full Online and Face-to-face Education

All responses to the question of online education revealed a common theme: interaction. The lack of engagement of any kind in the online classes was cited by all 15 students as an unpleasant experience. The following subthemes arose under this theme. Online classes lack group work, teacher-student engagement, and student-student interaction. The absence of enjoyment in the classroom was another drawback of online education.

Student A said, *"I could not see my teachers in online and so I could not have any interaction and cordial relationship with my teachers."* (Student A, Interview). Regarding student-student interaction, student D said, *"I failed to see my friends, the talks I had with my friend were very little and I could not make friends with them. Face-to-face learning allows for live interaction between a learner and an instructor. Learners benefit*

from a greater level of interaction with their fellow students as well in the face-to-face classes.” (Participant D, Interview, 7 March 2021). Student F stated, “There is no interaction between the teacher and students in the online class but this interaction is present in the face-to-face class.” (Participant -F, Interview, 9 June 2021).

From Face book post, the following response echoed the same theme where the participants emphasized the lack of interaction in the online classroom. For instance, *“Online class does not develop our communicative skill because there is no interaction in the class.” (Facebook Post, 09 June 2021). Another student in the Face book commented, “While there is much scope of interaction in the face-to-face classes, we could not see our teachers and friends in the online classes. As a result, we faced problems like less attention in classes, asking for solutions, and communication gap.” (Facebook Post, 13 June). Another student in the Face book wrote, “I did not like the online method because I missed the presence of my teachers and friends during the class. Their face and physical presence during the class were not visible to me, their expression and look everything was missing.” (Facebook Post, 11 June, 2021).*

Twelve participants' opinions about the issue of peer assistance in face-to-face classes are good. The advantages of peer support in face-to-face learning are as follows. Through various educational modalities, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, exchanging ideas and perspectives, interacting, developing social skills, and having the opportunity to observe how others behave, the face-to-face classes help to remove boredom. Student B said, *“Conversation allowed me a better exchange of information since both speaker and listener were able to see and interpret body language and facial*

expressions.” (Participant- B, Interview, 01 March, 2021). Student C commented, “I could experience ‘collaborative learning’ because I could experience group work in face-to-face classes.” (Participant,-C, Interview, 02 March 2021). Student P said, “In the face-to-face classes we communicate with teachers easily and can describe our problems and also can ask for solution at ease. Teachers can observe our improvements in education easily. Face-to-face education makes our learning easy.” (Participant- P, Interview, 02 March 2021). A student wrote in Face book,

“Many times, students need to communicate to take guidance but end up getting frustrated due to miscommunication. Students are likely to miss the biggest charm due to the communication barrier in online classes. In many cases, teachers pay less attention and barely pay heed to whether students are able to catch their mentor and the lectures.” (Facebook Post, 10 March)

4.2.2. Teacher Feedback

Teacher feedback is considered a very important component of teaching and learning. The presence or absence of it determines the learning success and achievement of students. One major issue with online education is the dearth of teacher feedback. Twelve out of the fifteen respondents said that online education does not offer fast

feedback. In online education, teachers can only give a limited amount of feedback, and the help they can offer is not uniform or sufficient for everyone. The teacher's presence and support in face-to-face education can be deemed as teacher feedback, and teacher monitoring leading to learning satisfaction. Student I said, *"I can describe problems, also ask questions and solutions at ease. Teachers can observe easily our improvements.....Face-to-face education makes our learning easy."* (Participant- I, Interview, 03 March 2021). This is also supplemented by the idea of hassle-free face-to-face education because students do not need to depend on the internet and other devices. Student G stated, *"Face-to-face class allows me to have instant gratification with answers and help."* (Participant- G, Interview, 04 March 2021). On the other hand, while discussing the drawbacks of online education, student H said, *"Many times students need to get guidance but they end up getting frustrated due to miscommunication. Students are likely to miss the biggest charm due to the communication barrier in online classes. I could not always connect with my teachers."* (Participant-H, Interview, 05 March 2021). Student D said,

"I could access more information and richer understanding through the teacher and other students' body language and voice. I had the opportunity to connect with friends and teachers, solve the problem, and network with other students. So, I feel better in face-to-face classes above all." (Participant-D, Interview, 7 March 2021).

The benefits of face-to-face classes are further mentioned by many students. Student L mentioned the benefits of teacher support in face-to-face classes. He commented, *"If I do not understand anything, I can easily ask the teachers and peers the*

next time for help in the face-to-face classes.” (Participant- L, Interview, 6 March 2021).

Student M believes that teachers and peers will give more innovative thoughts and ideas during face-to-face classes. On the other hand, while describing the disadvantages of face-to-face education, student D said, *“In the face-to-face classes, teachers cannot give feedback to all students individually if required. In that case, teacher feedback to an individual student is possible in online classes because the 24/7 nature of online education is helpful in this regard.” (Participant- D, Interview, 07 March 2021).*

4.2.3. Learning Varieties and Motivation

Learning varieties mean the multifarious ways of learning activities and platforms used for learning. They might be group works, pair works, individual activities, and platforms like in-person, offline, Learning management System(LMS), multi-media and internet sources etc.

Six students criticized face-to-face instruction for the low level of student learning achievement. Students have a tendency to depend on teachers more and more in face-to-face learning. Additionally, there is less of a predisposition for independent study and self-exploration. Additionally, shyness prevents extroverted students from asking questions in-person class. Student H said, *“Shy students may have trouble approaching the instructor with questions.” (Participant- H, Interview, 07 March 2021).*

In face-to-face classes, the range of learning options is a recurrent theme. Nine respondents (A.C.E.H.I.) expressed the opinion that the variety of learning experiences in in-person sessions inspires them to learn. C wrote,

“I really liked my teachers’ interesting lectures, chats with friends, taking regular classes, class performances etc. The face-to-face classes are better than online classes because students have access to various learning activities on campus. Before the corona pandemic in face-to-face classes, I felt more comfortable and learned easily in a familiar, traditional classroom situation. It is a really effective way to acquire knowledge and skills because it often combines different ways of learning including writing, reading, discussion, presentations, projects and group work etc.” (Participant-C, Facebook post, 09 March 2021).

Another student wrote in Google Classroom, *“I liked the different types of activities and materials used in the face-to-face classes to make our learning effective by our teachers. I did not find such varieties of activities in the online classes.”* (Google Classroom Post, 11 March).

In comparison with face-to-face education, a good number of students also find the learning varieties of the online method a motivating factor. Five students opine that online education also relies on a variety of materials. On the other hand, student J said about the multifarious ways of learning in online classes. He said, *“Online classes are really effective for using different platforms for learning.”* (Participant-J, Interview, 10 March 2021). However, it's important to note that three respondents believe their desire for online education has improved as a result of the employment of various educational platforms in online classrooms. One benefit of this online schooling is increased motivation. The use of many platforms for learning, a gain in confidence due to the use of technology, and greater opportunities for self-exploration due to using a variety of

platforms for learning are the causes of the increased motivation in online education. Student M mentioned, *“I felt more motivated when I was able to use different types of technology for the online classes.”* (Participant- M, Interview, 10 March 2021).

4.2.4. Flexibility of Education

Flexibility is the learning opportunities offered by technology for a learner to learn from any place and at any time with the help of a digital device that can be connected to the Internet, such as a mobile phone, laptop, or iPad. Flexibility of education has become a prized advantage of the 21st century education system because it ensures learning enhancement, satisfaction and quality.

The following benefits of online education can be broken down into more specific advantages. They include the ability to study and work at the same time, self-paced learning, no session backlog, on-time study completion, and help at any time from peers and teachers. Classes can be taken at anytime and anywhere. 14 students said that inflexible face-to-face instruction was a drawback. While pointing out the advantages, student C said, *“I had a lot of advantages from this. It was easy for me to attend classes from home and was easy to communicate with classmates and teachers. Mostly, it kept my learning on track during the time of the pandemic.”* (Participant- C, Interview, 03 March 2021). The fixed class time ensures greater chances of course completion in time, and ensures discipline, another opined. (Participant- F, Interview, 04 March 2021).

All students cited the continuity of education during the pandemic and other natural calamities as an additional benefit of online learning. Student K stated, *"We were not cut off from the typical route of education because of online schooling."* (Participant-K, interview, 5 March 2021). According to Student J, there isn't a session jam and she can complete her course on time. She continued, *"I have not experienced a session snag during this pandemic. A perk of my online education is that I won't experience session congestion."* (Participant-J, interview, March 6, 2021). Student K stated that since we didn't miss any classes, online education was a blessing for us.

Conversely, the scheduled class time of in-person classes might be perceived as a drawback in that students are unable to work because they must physically attend lessons in accordance with the timetable during class time. If they pursue face-to-face schooling, they (A, D, H, and J) will be unable to both work and study. Another significant drawback of face-to-face instruction is managing time. Student D said, *"Although face-to-face education is very effective, it has some disadvantages, such as travel time and cost. Attendance time can also be restrictive or inconvenient."* (Participant-D, Interview, 10 March 2021). Student G mentioned, *"Some students cannot come to university because of a part-time job."* (Participant-G, Interview, 11 March 2021). Due to the difficulty of scheduling face-to-face classes, Student L prefers online classes. All students cannot be attended to by teachers. Since attending face-to-face lessons in person is difficult for students who live far away, Student M also enjoys taking classes online. Online courses, on the other hand, provide greater flexibility and better time management opportunities. He said,

"I attended classes from my place and time." Student J says that the disadvantage of face- to-face class is the "inability to attend class on time because of traffic jams. We come to class late most of the time." (Participant-M, Interview, 10 March 2021). Student J reported, *"As a result of face-to-face classes, those who work part-time cannot take regular classes. Those who are away from the campus cannot come to the class on time."* (Participant-J, Interview, 11 March 2021).

4.2.5. Continuity of Education

Continuity of education means the uninterrupted flow of learning/ teaching in any circumstances. The break in continuity works as a de-motivator for students at any level. Concerns about educational continuity are shared by parents, teachers, and students in all circumstances. In Bangladesh, political turmoil in universities hinders the continuation of education.

Student O stated, *"I found it simple to take lessons from home and communicate with teachers and classmates in the online classes. Most importantly, it kept my studies on pace during the pandemic."* (Participant-O, interview, March 11, 2021) Another student posted on Facebook, *"I was relieved that the pandemic did not interfere with my study. Therefore, online learning can be beneficial for our colleges when they must stay closed due to political instability."* (Facebook Post, March 15, 2021). Student J said, *"For online education, I have benefitted because I am able to finish the semester without session gap as a result of online education."* (Participant- J, Interview, 11 March 2021). Student K said, *"By not going to varsity during the lockdown I have done the online classes from home."* (Participant- K, Interview, 14 March 2021).

4.2.6. Quality of Education

Quality of education is a burning issue for any kind and level of education. It is to be ensured so that money, time and efforts invested by students and parents are worth the quality. All stakeholders are concerned about this issue.

A great disadvantage of online education as mentioned by seven students in this study is the quality of education. The replies yielded the following subthemes, all of which are related to the standard of education (A, D, H, and J). It is impossible to avoid cheating in online education, there is a lack of true learning, and there is cheating on exams. Student H said,

"Full online education provides room for plagiarism and other forms of cheating, such as copying, in exams. Lessons are not as effective online as they are in person for students. Additionally, because there is no connection with other students in online education, pupils' communication skills do not improve. (Participant- H, interview, March 11, 2021) "Through these online programs, we are just going from one semester to the next, but our level of education has worsened," a different student remarked. Online classes suffer from a lack of attention as well. (Participant-C, Google Classroom, March 15, 2021).

More students also stated the drawbacks of taking lessons online. Student M, for instance, brought up the issue of cheating on the online test. J, a student, claimed that online classes are not taken seriously. Quality cannot thus be guaranteed. Student L said that in online learning students cannot fully understand any subject. He added, *"They feel*

uncomfortable to ask the second time if they do not understand anything in online classes.” (Participant-L, Interview, 11 March 2021). Two students (G and F), in an interesting and opposing statement, believed that online education improves learning. The individual learning style of online education and the range of technological skill development result in improved learning. Student F commented, “I could feel the richness of my learning because I could search for different sources to acquire knowledge.” (Participant-F, Interview, 11 March 2021). Student C said, “I was happy with the varieties of online materials and activities that were used by teachers to make my learning effective.” (Participant-C, Interview, 12 March 2021).

Six students criticized face-to-face education for the poor learning success of students because they think that in face-to-face education students tend to rely more and more on teachers. This also leads to less tendency to self-exploration and autonomous learning. Many of them opine that introverted students also skip asking questions in the face-to-face classes. Student H stated, *“Shy students may have trouble in approaching the instructor with questions.”* (Participant-H, Interview, 12 March 2021). Student K said,

“In online classes, there is no interaction between teachers and students which is present in face-to-face classes. I noticed that in online classes, there is no seriousness to study. But in the face-to-face class, there is no lack of attention. However, we have to face many distractions such as call, and message notification. For this reason, I am often disconnected from the class. But in the face-to-face classes, we do not have to face any distractions.” (Participant-K, Interview, 12 March 2021). On the other hand, two students say that both face-to-face and online method can ensure the quality of education.

4.2.7. Constraints and Advantages of Face-to-face and Online Education

Any method of education is not without its constraints. Though online education is deemed to have a lot of challenges, it is not without its advantages. Similarly, face-to-face education is not completely without disadvantages. The following sub-themes evolved as a result of the analysis of the resource problem with these types of education. These are both the drawbacks and advantages of online learning. Resource limitations were noted by almost all respondents as a problem for online education.

Constraints of both Online and Face-to-face Education

The first sub-theme is on the difficulties with resources, such as electricity, technology, the internet, and remote living. These resources have a connection to both price and accessibility. Student G said, *"We cannot do classes for the internet problem. Many students cannot do classes because they do not have a smartphone. Living in the village makes it difficult for many to attend classes."* (Participant-G, Interview, 12 March 2021). Students L and M had grudges about the internet problem in online classes. Students become disconnected for network issues. Student M stated, *"Online classes cost a lot for mobile data. They need to spend 15 dollars a month for mobile data."* (Participant- M, Interview, 12 March 2021). The majority of students (eleven) cited the following issues in their comments when asked about the risks associated with online education. According to the answers, online learning is mentally and physically stressful. Online learning causes a number of illnesses, such as inertia and poor vision. On a mental level, it causes despair, discouragement, and eventually demotivation in academic

pursuits. Student G said, *“Our brain and eyes are affected due to attending long time classes in front of mobile or laptop screens. Mostly, it makes us physically lazy.”* (Participant- G, Interview, 13 March 2021). Student D stated, *“Online education has disadvantages such as the eyes and brain are affected owing to attending classes for long time in front of mobile or laptop. Our learning cannot be effective because poor connectivity hampers our learning. Mostly, it makes us lazy.”* (Participant- D, Interview, 15 March 2021). Student D added, *“I find that this online class is getting too boring day by day.”* Student F said,

“Due to online class mobile addiction has increased which is dangerous for us. I agree that for this online class we don’t have to face any vehicle problem and jam. And for this pandemic we don’t have to face any year drop. But other problems have increased such as insomnia, depression, vision loss, irritable mood.” (Participant- F, Interview, 15 March 2021). A student wrote, *“We cannot give concentration to studies in online classes”* (Face book post, 19 March 2021). However, the drawbacks of face-to-face instruction include long commutes and traffic jams, high travel and lodging costs, difficulty obtaining a ride, and jet lag. Student L said, *“You know in our country there is traffic jam in cities. Moreover, public transports are crowded during class time. So, it is difficult for students to attend classes every day in the campus.”* (Participant- L, Interview, 17 March 2021).

Advantages of Online and Face-to-face Education

Though face-to-face education might have some problems such as travel time, cost, and inflexibility and so on, its benefits are universally recognized. The benefits are

much more than the disadvantages. Therefore, I will highlight some of the advantages of online education.

The main theme is the affordability and convenience of online education. The following advantages can be categorized under this theme. These include no compulsion to commute, paying for transportation, paying for food, hassle to get a bus, paying for lodging, and dealing with traffic. Students (B, D, E, F, and I) believe that online programs are more affordable than face-to-face education. Though the students require money for internet access, they do not have to pay for other things. However, majority of them mentioned advantages of face-to-face classes such as more student interaction, teacher feedback and learning varieties.

In response to my question, if they have any perception about the blended course, only one said that it is the blending of both face-to-face and online education. Only three said that they have heard the term before. I asked them if they are confident about their technological skills to do the blended course. Nine of the fifteen told me that they had no idea about what level of skills they would need to do the course. They, however, told me that they had been doing online zoom classes and sitting for online examinations for the last year owing to the Covid-19 lockdown. When I asked them why they wanted to do the blended course in English writing, they said that they wanted to experience something new and innovative.

4.3. Post- Course Interview

After they have attended the blended course for 12 weeks, the interviews with the students and two teachers were conducted. The interview excerpts and other texts from Facebook, Google Classroom, and student diaries revealed the following themes. The following research questions were taken into consideration while designing the interview protocol for the students and teachers.

1. What is the effectiveness of blended learning in the 21st century?
2. How do teachers and students experience the blended learning method in an English Writing Course at the undergraduate level?
3. How can the blended method increase tertiary learning opportunities among Bangladeshi students?

4.3.1. Theme-1 Effectiveness of Blended Learning Method to Facilitate 21st-century Graduate Skills

This theme can be discussed in relation to the following subthemes such as, teacher feedback, peer feedback, interaction with teachers and students, self-paced learning, self-exploration, student satisfaction and motivation, development of employment skill and higher order learning, development of technological skill, ease of using technology and quality of Education and Assessment. Firstly, they are presented in the table below.

Table-4.2. Post –course Interview Themes

Post- Course Interview Theme-1. Effectiveness of Blended Method
1. Teacher Feedback
2. Peer feedback
3. Interaction with Teachers and Students
4. Self-paced and self-explored Learning
5. Student Satisfaction and Motivation
6. Development of Employment Skills and Higher Order Learning
7. Development of Technological Skill
8. Ease in Using Technology
9. Quality of Education and Assessment

4.3.2. Teacher Feedback

Any teaching-learning strategy can be made more effective by incorporating teacher feedback. It ensures the achievement, direction, and motivation of students. Ten students expressed satisfaction with the input they received from teachers during the in-person and online classes. Student M said, *“After submitting for the first time, teachers would give us feedback about our essays. Moreover, teachers would rewrite our errors*

and motivate us how to write an essay in the best way” (Participant- M, Interview, 16 June 2021). Student L reported, “Teachers would individually tell us where our mistakes were during not only the face-to-face but also the online classes. They also gave us feedback in the blog” (Participant- L, Interview, 18 June 2021).

They all expressed interest in enrolling in other blended courses at the university. 12 of the 15 respondents believed that teacher feedback from the required face-to-face classes was the main factor in their decision to take a blended learning course. They were able to clarify and work out any issues they had during the online section of the course by having face-to-face discussions with their lecturers during the in-person classes. For example, student G said, *“The feedback that I got during the face-to-face classes helped to eliminate the problems that I faced during the online classes”* (Participant- G, Interview, 17 June 2021). Student-E stated. *“The best aspect of the blended course is having feedback from the teachers. After submitting my essays, teachers explained what was wrong in my essays. For example, mistakes include grammatical mistakes and spelling mistakes. Then I was able to edit the essays. As a whole, I liked the feedback.”* (Participant-E, Interview, 18 June 2021). Student L said, *“Individually teachers would show where our mistakes were in the online and offline classes”* (Participant- L, Interview, 18 June 2021). However, student N had some reservations about the teacher feedback. He commented, *“It would have been better to give the feedback on the fourth essay because it has to be written based on a literary piece.”* (Participant- N, Interview, 19 June 2021). Student B said,

“First of all, I would like to highlight on the facility of giving individual feedback. For this feedback we have been able to correct many subtle mistakes, given a chance to correct my mistakes and resubmit again, opportunity to submit the essays on the new platform, being able to discuss the problems face-to-face with the teachers, we could interact with some classmates (Participant B, Interview, 19 June 2021).” Student F reported, *“After the teacher feedback, I could correct all my mistakes. This is what I liked most of the blended method.”* (Participant-F, Interview, 20 June 2021). Student N mentioned, *“What I liked least about the course is the scope of feedback. It would have been better to have more feedback on the first and fourth essays in a better way, especially the fourth one because it has to be written based on a series.”* (Participant- N, Interview, 23 June 2021).

4.3.3. Peer Feedback

Peer feedback was a common advantage of blended learning as mentioned by 12 students, i.e., the same number of respondents mentioned this advantage regarding face-to-face classes. Student F said, *“My friends could give me feedback on my essays. Discussion with friends helped me to correct my mistakes”* (Participant- F, Interview, 20 June 2021). Student C stated, *“The feedback my friend would give me helped to spot my mistakes and rectify them with fun”* (Participant- C, Interview, 22 June 2021). Student B said, *“Everyone has the opportunity to read another’s essay and there is opportunity to give feedback.”* (Participant- B, Interview, 24 June 2021). Student A commented, *“I also understood in better way how to practice group work skills and how to give useful feedback and how to make use of feedback etc.”* (Participant- A, Interview, 21 June

2021). Student-D said, *“Writing in blog was a great experience for me. My friends could read my essays and could send me feedback which was very useful for me.”* (Participant-D, Interview, 22 June 2021). Student M reported, *“However, I was able to meet every one because some of the classes were done on campus. One could give feedback to other about the essays. So, I am satisfied with the course.”* (Participant- M, Interview, 27 June 2021). Student F said, *“I enjoyed face-to-face most, followed by blended method. Online was the least favorite to me.”* (Participant- F, Interview, 20 June 2021). However, Teacher -02 has some reservation about the student feedback. The teacher said, *“It was not much useful as it should have been because a good number of students did not give feedback on one essay assigned by me.”* (Teacher-2, Interview, 3 July). A student wrote in his reflection logbook, *“I enjoyed the feedback I got from my friends regarding my essays. I also gave a number of comments on my three friends’ essays. They accepted the comments and put them in his essays.”* (Participant-G, Diary, 23 June). Another student wrote in the Face book, *“I got the best pleasure when my essays got comments from my friends. Three friends gave comments on my two essays.”* (Facebook Post, 2 July).

4.3.4. Interaction with Teachers and Students

It is regarded as an important advantage of the blended course. Twelve students find the face-to-face portions of the blended course as a relief because they can meet their teachers for feedback and support in the face-to-face classes. Student E said, *“The classes on campus were very enjoyable. As a result of doing classes on campus, I was able to communicate with everyone.”* (Participant- E, Interview, 18 June 2021). Student G stated, *“I felt that human touch was missing in the online classes. In the face-to face classes, we*

could talk with one another. In contrast to online classes, face-to-face classes were a relief to me. They were enough to remove my boredom with online classes.” (Participant - G, Interview, 21 June 2021). Three students said that interaction in the face- to-face classes was better than online classes because they removed boredom. Student-F said, “I did not build a good relation with the teachers and classmates when I was studying online class. But when I was doing face-to-face classes in the campus, I met with my teachers and classmates. I felt very happy.” (Participant- F, Interview, 20 June 2021). Student-I reported, “My interaction was good. Going to the campus for face-to-face classes was the best part of the course.” (Participant- I, Interview, 26 June 2021).

12 students also mentioned the scope for interaction with teachers and peers during the face to-face classes. Student D said, “I will join in a blended course at the university in future because in this method I will be able to use technology and during the face-to-face classes I will be able to improve my communication skills.” (Participant- D, Interview, 24 June 2021). The two teachers also highlighted on the interaction opportunity in the blended method. Teacher-1 and teacher-2 found better interaction in the blended than in the face-to-face because they say that in the blended method, the online portion offers more scope for interaction between teacher and students. Teacher-1 commented,

“Student-teacher communication is better in the blended method than in the face-to-face because teachers have to remain connected with students through different social networking sites. Students can easily talk with teachers through different media. Reaching

out to students is easier in online than in the face-to-face. Blended is better than full online in terms of interaction.” (Teacher-1, Interview, 1 July2021).

The following long quote illustrates their liking for blended course. Student F wrote, *“There are two key points usually associated with blended: students who can share information and work with other students directly in a group setting have a richer learning experience, and interaction between students can be increased if group activities depend on information collected from online resources or lessons. Students who do online coursework in pursuance of interactive, face-to-face class activities have better educational experience.”* (Participant -F, Google classroom post, 23 June 2021). Student-G wrote, *“Now, I have a proper idea about blended learning because, I am taking the course for some time. And, it is the best way to complete a course with comfort. Blended learning reduces failure rates, improves learning, and enhances engagement.”* (Participant- G, Google classroom post, 22 June 2021).

4.3.5. Self-paced and Self-explored Learning

Self-paced learning was mentioned as a strong reason for students’ liking the blended course because they think they can manage their studies, leisure, and work in a better way in this method. Student A said, *“Blended learning blends the best things of face-to-face teaching and online instruction in ways that help students to learn at their own pace. For example, a student in a blended learning course who gets a concept earlier than his classmates can proceed without having to wait, and on the other hand, a student who needs more time is not compelled to move forward before fully*

mastering the subject. I could go forward in my course before others when I finished the previous materials.” (Participant- A, Interview, 24 June 2021). Student D reported,

“I liked most the flexibility and the pace with which I could do the course. I could read the materials in the website whenever I got time to do them. I could submit my essays any time I wanted. I also could utilize my free time to study the materials and submit assignments.” (Participant D, Interview, 24 June 2021).

Student H wrote, *“Blended learning is an approach to education that blends online educational materials and opportunities for interaction in online with traditional classroom methods. I could study as and when I could manage time for that. This is what I liked most of the course.” (Participant H, Google classroom post, 23 June 2021).*

Regarding self-exploration students have a positive attitude to it. Five students said that they could explore their own materials for study in the online platforms. They had searched for something that was new and noble. Student F said, *“I continuously looked for sample essays on the topics I was assigned. I studied a good number of them and deeply studied their forms, structure, and mechanics of writing.” (Participant F, Interview, 20 June 2021).* Another student wrote on Facebook, *“I enjoyed my navigation across websites to search for essays that I have similar topics. I read them once and again but I was forbidden by my teachers not to copy from them. I have just used the format, thesis statements and techniques of those essays. Thus, I benefitted much from the course.” (Participant B, Facebook Post, 23 June 2021).* Another student F said, *“I was befitted from the way I was encouraged to look for myself what models were there in the*

book and internet for the essays we were going to write upon. So, I could differentiate between the appropriate, reliable write up and the unreliable unacknowledged write-ups on the internet. The skill to differentiate between reliable and unreliable materials on the internet was good learning for me from the course.” (Participant E, Interview, 20 June 2021).

4.3.6. Student Satisfaction and Motivation

Student achievement is related to student satisfaction in any course. If students feel that they are achieving something, they feel satisfied with the course. The reasons for student satisfaction with the blended course in English writing skills accrues from factors like teachers’ feedback, peer feedback, learning something in new and innovative way. 14 students agreed that teachers’ feedback is what made them most happy. 11 students said that they were satisfied with the course because it offered them the opportunity to do a course by using different platforms and resources. Student C said that this course gave a new experience to me.” student D stated, *“I am quite satisfied because I have learned the proper way of writing essays on different topics.”* (Participant- D, Interview, 24 June 2021). One student wrote in Facebook,

“I expected this class to help prepare me to become a successful writer for university as well as for the world of work. What I didn’t expect was to have a collaborative writing assignment with other students, yet it was interesting to combine our writing styles to come up with a unique essay to present. Throughout this semester we have learned various styles of writing. To be specific, through the course I have learnt how to easily write English essays.” (Participant C, Facebook Post, 23 June 2021). A

student wrote in diary, *“When asked to give feedback after writing the essay, a lot of fear was there at work. But after the teacher’s motivation, I got the courage and dared to write. It has removed my fear of making mistakes. I started to write for public reading.”* (Participant F, Diary, 23 June 2021). Student-G said, *“Group work and discussion helped me to find a solution to my problem of understanding.”* (Participant-G, Interview, 21 June 2021). Student I reported, *“However, I would have benefitted more if my writing skill could develop more. If more blended course in writing were offered, it would have been better.”* (Participant - I, Interview, 26 June 2021). Student-J said, *“I could not understand every subject well in the online classes. In the face-to-face classes I could understand them better.”* (Participant -J, Interview, 29 June 2021). Student L wanted more courses on writing in blended form where the number of face-to-face classes will be more.

4.3.7. Development of Employment Skills and Higher Order Thinking

Employment skills of the 21st century are the prerequisites for jobs for the university graduates. Employment skills and higher-order thinking can be ensured through the educational method which promotes the nurturing of both critical thinking and analytical skills and soft skills together. 12 students agreed that the blended learning method develops the employment skills such as communication skills, group work skills, critical thinking skills, self-management skills, time management skills of university graduates. Student B said,

“As in blended learning students have to use technology to communicate in the online and face-to-face classes, they will become skilled in technology. They will also need to talk with one another for communication and design project through group work

and it will definitely improve their communication and group work skill. Besides, the necessity to use online resources will help them to become critical explorers of resources in the online.” (Participant -B, Interview, 19 June 2021).

Teacher-1 commented, *“Full online classes cannot boost up the employment skills because there is no scope for interaction and communication. The online method cannot be alternative to the face-to-face method but the blended method is better than online in terms of developing employment skills.”* (Teacher-1, Interview, 1 July 2021). Teacher-2 agreed, *“If students do the blended method, they can also learn the etiquette of online communication.”* (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021).

Student- F said, *“Blended learning is enhancing my communication and group work skills. Through this course, I have become skilled in technological skills, group work, creativity and critical thinking skills because I had to explore new materials, sources and decide what would be good for me through the Internet.”* (Participant -F, Interview, 20 June 2021).

Student N reported, *“I could do part time job, I could gain skill while studying.”* He adds, *students doing blended course will be in a position to get job earlier than those who are full time students due to their previous job experience. Technological skill can lead to better career.”* (Participant -N, Interview, 1 July 2021).

Student C said, *“I could manage my time, write on my own but critically while doing the course. I was also able to communicate with my friends online and face-to-face and sometimes I had to plan my essays and share ideas with my friend on the topics of*

essays.” (Participant C, Interview, 22 June 2021). Student G commented, *“I realize that blended learning can promote the skills such as socialization, problem-solving skills, and technological skills among the graduates of this time. At present, the Bangladeshi students lack these skills.”* (Participant G, Interview, 17 June 2021). A student wrote in the Google classroom, *“I learned how to plan, brainstorm, research, and finally write essays without memorizing them. This made me highly excited about my learning.”* (Participant -G, post from Google classroom, 22 June 2021).

Teacher-1 said, *“Blended learning method will help to increase the critical thinking and communication skill and analytical skill of the graduates because by doing learning through this method students can decide what material and resources will be suitable for them.”* (Teacher-1, Interview, 1 July 2021). Teacher -2 commented, *“While writing the essays, they could decide upon what to include in their essays and the total texture of the essays as well.”* (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021).

4.3.8. Development of Technological Skills

As the blended learning method requires basic technological skills, it will also help to develop the technological skills of the students. 11 students in this study said that for the necessity of using technology in blended learning, their technological skill has developed. They said that this new method had given them a new experience of using technology and the internet. Student J said, *“While doing this course, the new experience that I have gained in various technologies such as mobile, Google classroom, blog, and other social media is incomparable. I learned new functions by using these apps and using different platforms.”* (Participant J, Interview, 29 June 2021). Student G stated, *“I*

have learned about the new technology. By doing the course, I got creativity.” (Participant -G, Interview, 21 June 2021). Student K agreed, *“I learned how to share essays online though I had to face a lot of problem in online. I have suffered difficulties and I have learned to use a new apps and how to share through it.”* (Participant -K, Interview, 2 July 2021). Student H said, *“I have learned to use new apps and how to share and write on the blog though initially, I had some problems.”* (H, Interview, 23 June). Student E agreed, *“This course has increased my experience in using technology in addition to the subject or topic.”* (Participant -E, Interview, 18 June 2021).

Student N said, *“Blended learning will be helpful for students now because it will increase the efficiency of the students in the use of technology and there is now no alternative to using technology.”* (Participant -N, Interview, 1 July 2021). A student wrote in Google Classroom, *“I felt very confident when I saw that I could easily handle the online platforms, devices and apps for doing the course after a few days in to the course. Initially I had problem with using the platforms but after a week’s use, I got confident about my skill.”* (Google Classroom post, 12 July). Teacher-2 said, *“Technological skill is important for both teachers and students.”*

4.3.9. Ease in Using Technology

Many students said that the technology used for doing the blended course was simple. They could comfortably use the technology for doing the course. Eight students were comfortable in using this new technology. Six said that they had initial hurdles but they could overcome it very easily.

Student-F said, *“Obviously I feel excited about the technical component of the blended course because of using new technology. I have learned the use of blog and Google classroom. Using different platform was really pleasant.”* (Participant -F, Interview, 20 June 2021). Student G stated, *“Initially I had problem in using new technology. I have learned to write an essay by myself without memorizing.”* (Participant -G, Interview, 21 June 2021). Student H said, *“First I was scared of using blog and new apps. I could not figure out how to use the app. I had to take help of friends. So, it was a challenge for me.”* (Participant H, Interview, 23 June 2021).

Student N commented, *“Though I used wix for the first time, I did not face any difficulty. I was able to log into it very easily. As this is a new platform for us, everyone has the opportunity to read others’ essays and there is an opportunity to give feedback.”* (Participant-N, Interview, 1 July 2021). Student O said, *“Though initially, I faced some problems, I could easily adapt to the technology. I could easily write rewrite on the blog and the Google classroom I could read the feedbacks from the friends and the teachers instantly.”* (Participant -O, Interview, 3 July 2021). Student O added, *“I felt better for using two types of technological components, wix and Google classroom. This was the best experience I had from the course. I could easily use these platforms and find ways to utilize all the features of these two platforms.”* (Participant -O, Interview, 3 July 2021).

Teacher-1 said, *“Initially I had a doubt. I was not sure about the capability of writing on the blog because most of them did not have any idea about blogging. But students proved us wrong. They quite comfortably could write on blog. That was the most memorable teaching experience.”* (Teacher-1, Interview, 1 July 2021).

He also said that the most important thing for teaching is the positive mindset of the teachers. If teachers cordially accept it, they can teach a blended course. Using different platforms of technology was also an exciting experience for students. Seven students have positive attitudes about that use.

Teacher-1 added, *“By using different platforms such as, Google classroom, Facebook, WhatsApp, and blog, students sought any support and could reach out to teachers which is not possible in face-to-face classes. Giving and getting instant feedback through these media was beneficial for them.”* (Teacher-1, Interview, 1 July 2021). Teacher-1 complained, *“Designing a blended course requires expertise. So, the skills and training of teachers who will design the course are necessary. Otherwise, the course may become ineffective.”* (Teacher-1, Interview, 1 July 2021).

4.3.10. Quality of Education and Assessment

Quality of education is a matter of concern at any level and mode of education. Parents spend money for their children which must be worth the amount paid. It is applicable for blended and online education as well as face-to-face education. Five out of 15 students opined that the quality of education might decrease in blended education. Student D said, *“Blended education will degrade the quality of education.”* (Participant - D, Interview, 24 June 2021). Student K agreed, *“The real learning is not happening and student will not properly concentrate on education.”* (Participant- K, Interview, 2 July 2021). Many believe that blended learning will improve the quality of education by enhancing learning.

But student F said, *“Blended education will be better because students can attend both face-to-face and online education. They will have to use the best of both types of education and experience with both. That is, real education does not happen in blended education.”* Student F added that in blended education students learn more than in online and face-to-face education. (Participant- F, Interview, 20 June 2021). Student L agreed, *“Blended learning will be better because students can attend both face-to-face and online education. Exposure to different modes of education will develop their skill.”* (Participant -L, Interview, 18 June 2021). Teacher-1 said, *“Blended learning ensures effective education because it uses the best of both face –to-face and online.”* (Teacher-1, 1 July 2021). Student M stated, *“In a blended course, much more can be done online in addition to the main materials. We can get acquainted with different devices. Ideas are available on various education sites. Various topics can be discussed with others in the class.”* (Participant-M, Interview, 11 June 2021). Student N agreed, *“We can interact with our teachers face-to-face. We can discuss our problems with them which decreases our nervousness and aloofness. In the online classes, we cannot interact properly with our teachers.”* (Participant- N, Interview, 1 July 2021).

However, all agreed that face-to-face education ensures the best quality of education because students can have contact with teachers all the time. Student D said, *“I feel that face-to-face education is better than both blended and face-to-face education because I can ask for help all the time.”* (Participant -D, Interview, 24 June 2021). In the follow-up question, I asked him if he got the feedback and support from teacher all the time because there are many say 40 students in a class, he said that he cannot get teacher’s help all the time but feels the teachers’ presence as a plus point. Another student

K agreed, *“I liked the face-to-face most because I could see my friends. I could learn many things from them in face-to-face classes which was not possible in the online and blended classes. So, face-to-face classes were best opportunity for me.”* (Participant - K, Interview, 2 July 2021).

Copying is a burning issue in online assessment in many countries. Teacher-1 said that examination should be face-to-face. Teacher-2 agreed with teacher-1. However, she opined that if assessment tests only the memorization skill, it would not be effective whether offline or online.” However, teacher-1 said, *“As there is a lack of qualified teachers in higher education in Bangladesh, blended learning can be useful because in this method internationally competent teachers can offer classes in the online portion and teaching assistants can conduct the offline classes physically.”* (Teacher-1 Interview, 1 July 2021). Teacher-2 also agreed with the recommendation of teacher-1 regarding international teachers in the blended course. She, however, said that full online classes cannot be the alternative to face-to-face classes. But blended education is better than full online and face-to-face education. Employment skills can be developed by face-to-face but if we go for full online, the employment skills cannot be well developed (Teacher-2 Interview, 8 July 2021).

A short discussion about the research question no. 1. What is the effectiveness of blended learning in the 21st century? is again done here. Teacher feedback is found to have an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of any teaching-learning method. It ensures student success, guidance and motivation. Ten students in my study were happy with the teacher feedback they got during the face-to-face and online classes. All agreed

that they are interested to join in more blended courses at the university. Among the 15 respondents, 12 opined that teacher feedback found in the face-to-face classes of the blended course was the greatest motivating factor for them to join this type of course. Regarding the peer feedback in the blended course, it was found as a common advantage of blended learning as mentioned by 12 students. Regarding the interaction of teachers and students, it was regarded as an important advantage of the blended course by the majority of students here. Twelve students found the face-to-face portions of the blended course as a relief because they could meet their teachers for feedback and support in the face-to-face classes.

Self-paced learning was mentioned as a strong reason for students' liking the blended course because they thought they could manage their studies work and leisure in a better way in this method. Regarding self-exploration students had a positive attitude to it. Five students said that they could explore their own materials for study in the online platforms. They had searched for something that was new and noble. It was found in the study that the reasons for student satisfaction with the blended course in English writing skill accrued from factors like teachers' feedback, peer feedback, learning something in new and innovative ways. 14 students agreed that teachers' feedback made them most happy. 11 students said that they were satisfied with the course because it offered them the opportunity to do a course by using different platforms and resources. 12 students agreed that the blended learning method develops the employment skills such as communication skills, group work skills, critical thinking skills, self-management skills, and time management skills of university graduates. 11 students in this study said that for the necessity of using technology in blended learning, their technological skills had

developed. They said that this new method had given them a new experience of using technology and the internet.

Eight students were comfortable with using this new technology. They could comfortably use the technology for doing the course. Six samples said that they had initial hurdles but they could overcome them very easily. 10 students had positive opinions about the quality of blended learning method for varieties of learning activities and platforms. However, only five students opined that the quality of education might decrease in blended education whereas all were positive about the quality of face-to-face education for the teachers' support and presence all the time in the class. The follow-up question of this issue however, indicates their pre-conceived opinion about the quality.

4.4. Theme-2. Using a Blended Course to Develop English Writing Skills

The second research question attempts to investigate whether the blended method can develop the writing skill of students at the undergraduate level of a university. Hence, a blended course titled, English Writing Skill, was designed and offered to the sample of the research. The interviews about the blended course express the following results that ultimately yield the sub-themes such as learning new techniques of writing through the blended course and the impacts of blended course on writing skills development. The subthemes will be first shown in a table and then discussed.

Table-4.3. Post-course interview Theme-2

Theme-2. Using Blended Learning to Develop English Writing Skill
A. Learning New Techniques of Writing through Blended Course
B. Impact of Blended Course on Writing Skill Development

4.4.1. Learning New Techniques of Writing through Blended Course

A course was designed to introduce students to the process method to writing. The majority of students claimed that planning, brainstorming, writing the initial draft, receiving comments, editing, etc. helped them improve their writing abilities. Editing and brainstorming, according to 11 students, were beneficial. Student O said, *“I found activities such as brainstorming, free writing, outlining, draft, revision, final copy, how to give useful feedback, and how to make use of feedback most effective in achieving learning outcomes.”* (Participant -O, Interview, 3 July 2021).

A student wrote on Facebook, *“Keep in mind that you can’t learn how to write overnight. It’s a process and the more you write and receive feedback on your written work, the stronger you will become.”* (Participant- B, Facebook Post, 11 July 2021). Student L said, *“I have spent 10-12 hours writing the four essays in the blog. Though it took more time to write the four essays, I benefitted because I did not have to memorize.”* (Participant -L, Interview, 18 June 2021).

Ten students said that this course reinforced their writing skills. Student F said, *“I have mastered the skills to write essays without memorizing. Hence, I was benefitted.”* (Participant-F, Interview, 20 June 2021).

Another student wrote in her diary, *“Teachers encouraged us not to memorize. They discussed the techniques and organization of the essay.”* She also wrote, *“If we get more courses on writing skills in the future in blended form, we will be benefitted. I found the most satisfying thing in the course. discussion with friends about any topic and step-by-step writing. I could get enough time to write my own essays.”* (Participant -D, Diary, 13 June 2021). Student B said, *“Teachers have tried their best to enhance our writing skills by correcting mistakes and the opportunity to edit was the best side of the course.”* (Participant B, Interview, 24 June 2021). Student G agreed, *“I did not have to memorize. The step-by-step process of writing essays was the best achievement of the course.”* (Participant -G, Interview, 17 June 2021).

Student E said, *“I have benefitted a lot from doing this course. The most satisfying thing regarding this course is getting feedback from teachers. After submitting the essays, I liked the teachers’ feedback. I have been able to read everyone’s essays on wix. I enjoyed writing essays online at home. Since the pandemic is going on now, I am benefitting from doing this course. I was able to discuss with the teacher how to write an essay and give feedback.”* (Participant E, Interview, 18 June 2021).

Student H agreed, *“I benefitted because I could rewrite my essays based on the good feedback I got from my teachers and friends not only in the online but also during the face-to-face classes.”* (Participant -H, Interview, 23 June 2021). A student wrote in

Facebook, *“I liked most the new techniques of writing essays from the course. It was not the traditional technique I was familiar with. The teachers taught us how to write through several drafts, correction, modification, and finalization through comments from teachers and friends.”* (Participant -D, Facebook Post, 28 June 2021).

The process approach to writing that the two teachers employed was subject to slight disagreement among them. Many students, according to Teacher 1, correctly followed the process approach. But instructor 2 reported that four or five of the students didn't write independently or edit or provide criticism for each other's writings.

4.4.2. Impact of Blended Course on Writing Skill Development

Currently, technology affects how well teaching and learning go. But when the course is offered as a hybrid or online course, the impact of technology on the development of writing skills is more noticeable. This holds true for this particular course as well. Eleven students mentioned the positive impacts of blended learning on their writing skills development.

Student I said, *“We could easily do collaborative works in Google classroom and blog. In the Google classroom, I could comment on another’s essay. We could do corrections instantly without wasting time. This was possible only for technology. We never did it before.”* (Participant -I, Interview, 26 June 2021). Student H stated, *“It was interesting because I have learned how to write an essay without memorizing them correctly with the help of a blog. The blog was very helpful in achieving my desired objectives in writing skill development.”* (Participant H, Interview, 23 June 2021).

Student A said, *“I felt better for using two types of technical components; those were Google classroom and blog hosted by wix. In the blog we were giving each other comments on the post. And we could easily discuss, and collaborate on wix and this opportunity was the best for us as technological support. In Google classroom, we would submit our particular essay and after submitting, the teacher would give us feedback on our essays.”* (Participant A, Interview, 24 June 2021).

A student wrote in Google Classroom, *“I could easily myself observe that my writing skill was improving after I was trying to include the suggestions and comments made by my teachers and friends in the Google classroom and the blog. I was also feeling that my writing skill was much more advanced in two months’ time than I was just starting to write.”* (Participant -D, Google Classroom post, 28 June 2021).

Teacher -2 commented, *“My students found it very useful to discuss, write, rewrite, give and have feedback on the Google classroom and blog.”* (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021).

4.4.3. Analysis of Students’ Essay Scores

A comparative study of the fifteen students’ scores in four essays was done. The essays of those fifteen students were selected for evaluation who gave interviews to the researcher. Though all students’ essays were checked for the assessment of the course, the essay scores of these fifteen students were analyzed to have an unbiased idea of their achievement and performance in the course. It indicates their gradual progress in their

writing skill following the process approach of writing. So, the fifteen students' scores in all of their four essays are presented in the following table below.

Table-4.4. Essay Scores

Students' ID	Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	Essay 4
1	67%	67%	79%	80%
2	66%	69%	77%	82%
3	67%	68%	78%	81%
4	65%	60%	68%	68%
5	66%	61%	63%	60%
6	65%	69%	79%	79%
7	67%	67%	76%	80%
8	66%	65%	67%	63%
9	67%	67%	63%	61%
10	68%	70%	80%	82%
11	67%	72%	81%	83%
12	70%	73%	77%	81%
13	66%	68%	76%	79%
14	66%	67%	69%	70%
15	56%	63%	71%	80%

38 learners submitted four essays utilizing the blog set up for them with the aim of learning process writing. But the essay scores of only those 15 participants of my study are used here as data. The table shows the students' final essay grades after revision and editing. 12 out of 15 purposive participants received greater grades in essay 2 than in essay 1 and it gradually improved throughout the remaining essays. 10 students achieved

almost 80% marks in their last essays. Only the marks of 3 students declined by 3 to 4 marks. 2 students progressed slightly by 3 to 4 marks.

The data shows that over 80% of participants improved their writing with each successive essay they wrote on the blog after they submitted their first essay on the blog, despite the few instances where students got comparable scores in two consecutive essays. Therefore, even if the data show that students' writing abilities have improved steadily, thanks to the blog; the fact that 3 out of 15 students have regressed suggests that the effectiveness of the blogging activities is a bit questionable. Despite the fact that two students' scores in the subsequent essays didn't significantly improve, the writing performance of 10 students showed a consistent improvement. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the score data supports the favorable effects of blogging on their successful achievement of writing abilities. In other words, blogging exercises significantly enhanced the students' writing abilities.

Again, a short discussion about research question no. 2, How do teachers and students experience the blended learning method in an English writing course at the undergraduate level? The findings indicate a positive impact of the blended course on the students' writing skills development through the process approach to writing. The majority of students claimed that planning, brainstorming, writing the initial draft, receiving comments, editing, etc. helped them improve their writing abilities. Editing and brainstorming, according to 11 samples, were beneficial. Ten students reported improved writing abilities as a result of this training. Eleven students mentioned the positive impacts of blended learning on their writing skill development. The essay scores of the

fifteen students were analyzed to have an unbiased idea of their achievement and performance in the course. It indicates their gradual progress in their writing skills following the process approach of writing. 12 out of 15 purposive samples received greater grades in essay 2 than in essay 1 and it gradually improved throughout the remaining essays. 10 students achieved almost 80% marks in their last essays. Only the marks of 3 students declined by 3 to 4 marks. Two students made marginal gains of three to four marks, which suggests conflicting results about the efficacy of the blogging activities. Despite the fact that two students' scores in the subsequent essays didn't significantly improve, the writing performance of 10 students showed a consistent improvement. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the benefits of blended courses that used blogging as an online platform for efficiently practicing writing had a substantial impact on the development of undergraduate students' writing skills.

4.5. Theme-3. Blended Learning to Increase Opportunities of Tertiary Education for Bangladeshi Students

Blended learning is assumed to create opportunities for Bangladeshi tertiary students. It will lead to the easing of session backlog, reduction in tuition fees, reduction in the cost of higher education, promotion of women's education, continuity of job and education, and more scope for admission into tertiary institutions. On the other hand, these advantages are not all without any challenges. Both blended and online educations have a lot of challenges in almost all countries though the intensity of the problems may vary from country to country. The challenges that the students faced while doing the

blended course will be discussed here. They will be first presented in a table and then discussed in detail.

Table-4.5. Post-course Interview Theme-3 and Subthemes

Theme-3. Blended Learning to Increase Opportunities of Tertiary education for Bangladeshi Youth
1. Easing of Session Backlog
2. Reduction in Tuition Fees
3. Reduction in Cost of Higher Education
4. Women's Education
5. Job and Education Simultaneously
6. Flexibility of Education
7. More Admission into Tertiary Institutions
8. Constraints in Implementing Blended Learning a. Institutional Support b. Training of Teachers in Technology and Blended Method b. Cost of Device d. Internet Problem e. Physical and Mental Stress

4.5.1. Easing of Session Backlog

All students opined that blended learning will help to reduce session backlog in the universities because classes would not stop during student unrest, natural disaster, or pandemic. Student E said, *“University students, especially public university students will have less session jam.”* (Participant -E, Interview, 18 June 2021). Student B stated, *“If the university cannot remain open for any political issue every day a week, the educational activities can be continued through blended learning.”* (Participant -B, Interview, 19 June 2021). Student M said, *“Blended course will cut down session jams in universities because classes will not remain suspended for any political or other issues.”* (Participant -M, Interview, 11 June 2021). Student K agreed, *“Blended learning method will reduce session jam because universities do not need to stop classes for a long time for political unrest and the cost of education can be reduced.”* (Participant -K, Interview, 2 July 2021). Student L agreed, *“Blended courses will reduce session backlog by keeping the continuity of education during political unrest, natural emergency, and other satiations.”* (Participant -L, Interview, 18 June 2021). Student D said, *“The tradition of session backlog will be removed to a great extent if the blended course can be run in universities because in universities classes will continue in all situations.”* (Participant -D, Interview, 24 June 2021). Teacher-1 said, *“For blended learning, the session will not be lost by students because classes will go on even during the pandemic by introducing rotation and shifting system in the institutions.”* (Teacher-1, 1 July 2021).

4.5.2. Reduction in Tuition Fees

Reduction in tuition fees will happen for the blended courses at universities because the institutional cost of running this kind of education will go down. All fifteen students agreed that blended course will reduce all kinds of costs. Student B said, *“Many needy students can do their studies at a low cost for blended learning. The tuition cost at private universities will come down.”* (Participant -B, Interview, 19 June 2021). Student O agreed, *“It will cut down the cost of education because less space will be required.”* (Participant -O, Interview, 3 July 2021). Student-G said, *“As cost of education will go down, poor students can continue higher education.”* (Participant -G, Interview, 17 June 2021). Student L agreed, *“The cost of education in higher education will come down for the blended method because institutions will have to spend less for teachers, spaces, and services.”* (Participant -L, Interview, 18 June 2021). Student J said, *“The cost of education will be reduced for the blended method because expenses of all types will go down in the blended method.”* (Participant -J, Interview, 29 June 2021). Teacher-1 admitted that blended learning would minimize the cost of education. It will not only minimize tuition fees, but also reduce travel costs, food costs, accommodation costs and other education related costs.

4.5.3. Reduction in Cost of Higher Education

The cost-saving benefit of blended learning was cited by a sizable percentage of respondents. They believed that by staying close to the college and taking their meals outside, they wouldn't have to travel to it every day. Because it would be more affordable,

students (B, D, E, F, and I) said they would enroll in a blended course at the university level.

Student G said, *“As students do not need to travel every day, their travel costs, food costs, accommodation costs, and other costs will not be incurred. It costs us a lot of money to come to campus every day. So, we will be able to do this course at a low cost. We also do not have to suffer from traffic jams hour after hour in the city.”* (Participant - G, Interview, 17 June 2021).

Student N agreed, *“In the blended course students do not need to reside in dorms. So, they will be relieved of spending money for accommodation.”* (N, Interview, 23 June). Student L said, *“My travel cost will be reduced if I can do the blended course. I will also be free from traffic jam in the street which wastes my time.”* (Participant L, Interview, 18 June 2021). Student B stated, *“Students will get rid of extra expenses like travel cost, food cost, accommodation cost and other things through the blended method.”* (Participant B, Interview, 19 June 2021).

4.5.4. Women’s Education

According to eight students, blended learning would help more women in the nation pursue higher education. Since they are not required to attend a class every day, students are free to study while still caring for their families at home. Student M said, *“In Bangladesh women can study through the blended method as they do not need to go to campus every day and can remain at home.”* (Participant -M, Interview, 27 June 2021). Student B said,

“In Bangladesh, many girls cannot do higher studies for safety or other religious issues and they do not like co-education. If they need to come out less from home, they will be motivated to pursue higher education. The blended course will help women to continue their studies after marriage or having children. It will increase the rate of higher education in the country.” (Participant -B, Interview, 9 June 2021).

Student C agreed, *“In Bangladesh, as women cannot pursue higher education for some religious and social restrictions, they can continue their studies because they do not need to go to campus every day. They need to go to campus fewer days in the blended method because 50 percent of classes will be held online in the blended method.”* (Participant -C, Interview, 22 June 2021).

Student F stated, *“Through blended method, women can have the opportunity of higher education by managing their families and household chores, babies etc. because they can go to fewer days to campus in this method.”* (Participant -F, Interview, 20 June 2021). Teacher-1 said, *“Higher education for women will be facilitated if it is fully online. The Blended course might have a slight impact in terms of the safety or religious issue for women’s education. But to do the blended course, the technological skill of girl students is to be ensured”* (Teacher-1, Interview, 1 July 2021). Teacher-2 agreed, *“If the blended course can be offered at universities, many more women will get the opportunity to continue their higher education and contribute to the development of society.”* (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021).

4.5.5. Job and Education Simultaneously

Blended education is conducive for those who want to pursue both job and education at the same time. Thirteen students opined that the blended method would help students to continue their education because it allows them to continue their job while working. Student A said, *“By doing a blended course, we can continue our studies. Those who do the part-time and full-time job, can also easily continue both.”* (A Participant-, Interview, 21 June 2021). Student B said, *“Those who work part-time will not have any problem with their jobs. There will be no problem with time management for class. On the one hand, it will give job experience and on the other hand, education will continue.”* (Participant -B, Interview, 24 June 2021). Student G agreed, *“For students who do part-time jobs and tuition, the blended course will be effective for them. Through blended learning, we will be able to attend classes at any time from home and earn during the day.”* (Participant -G, Interview, 21 June 2021). Student E said, *“Those who do part-time job benefit from doing the blended course, many students who are studying Honors and Masters are employed. As a result, they cannot take regular classes on campus. But as a result of a blended course, they are able to do things they cannot do on campus.”* (Participant -E, Interview, 18 June 2021). Student M agreed, *“Students who want to both study and work, can do it easily.”* (Participant -M, Interview, 27 June 2021).

A student post on Facebook mentioned, *“Acquiring a degree may lead to a promotion that may also involve increased salaries. Besides tangible career benefits, most online degrees and certificates also allow learners to continue working while they study. Students can work during the day and complete coursework in the evenings or on the weekends. Additionally, learners who work can apply new knowledge and skills to*

their job immediately. I also have to work because I have to manage my tuition fees. This kind of course would be useful for me." (Participant -D, Post, 21 July 2021).

A student wrote in his diary, *"Blended courses will help university students to continue both their job and education at the same time. I felt secure with this course because I could easily do my job while doing the classes of this course. That is why, I would like to suggest all to do this kind of course and request that universities will offer more such courses."* (Participant -C, Diary, 28 June 2021). Teacher -2 said, *"In the blended course students do not always have to do face-to-face classes. They can do the part-time job for managing their tuition fees."* (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021).

4.5.6. Flexibility of Education

The flexibility of blended learning comes from the use of technology in education. Adult students want flexibility in terms of timing, place, and work in their studies. Because of technology in online classes of the blended method, flexibility is achieved. Fifteen students agreed that online learning ensures the most flexibility followed by the blended method as mentioned by 12 and none agreed that the face-to-face method ensures flexibility. Student-A said, *"I will participate if I have the opportunity to take a new blended course because it is not possible to attend all the classes on campus every day. If it is a blended course, the classes that cannot be done on campus, can be done online."* (Participant -A, Interview, 21 June 2021). Student- I agreed, *"As I cannot attend all the classes on the campus, in the blended course, I can attend some classes on campus."* (Participant -I, Interview, 26 June 2021). Student K said, *"I am satisfied with doing the*

English Writing Skill course in a blended method because for the blended learning method we could save a lot of time. It costs us a lot of money to come to campus every day. So, we were able to do this course at a low cost. It is not possible for students to go to campus every day in a pandemic situation. So, the blended method is very effective for students in that situation.” (Participant -K, Interview, 2 July 2021).

Student-L stated, *“In the blended course, I can do some classes online which I cannot do in full face-to-face. Again, in the online I miss face-to-face classes. That is why, I like the blended course.”* (Participant -L, Interview, 18 June 2021).

Student M said, *“In blended courses some face-to-face parts are there, So, we can visit classes. And in the online part, we get the extra benefit of not spending our time going to campus. We can attend fixed classes by remaining at home.”* (Participant -M, Interview, 11 June 2021). A student wrote in Google Classroom, *“I had the opportunity to download the reading materials from the Google classroom or read them any time I wanted to. So, I did not have to bother if I missed any class.”* (Participant -K, Google Classroom post, 3 July 2021).

Again, a student wrote on Facebook, *“As all the learning materials were uploaded onto the Google Classroom, I could access them at any time and read them myself. This helped me to keep in touch with my studies even if I missed some of my classes.”* (Participant -L, Facebook Post, 7 July 2021). Another student wrote in her diary, *“I could find everything in the Google classroom to read myself. So, even if I missed face-to-face classes, I did not have to worry about studies.”* (Participant -F, Diary, 9 July 2021).

Again, a student wrote on Facebook, *“As all the learning materials were uploaded onto the Google Classroom, I could access them at any time and read them myself. This helped me to keep in touch with my studies even if I missed some of my classes. Again, another advantage is that if I could not understand anything in the online classes or downloaded materials, I could get support from my teachers in the face-to-face classes to ask them.”* (Participant -G, Facebook Post, 7 July 2021).

Teacher -2 said, *“If teachers upload materials and if it is 24/7, students can access them any time. If the online portion is only through zoom class or synchronous, it will not help much because many students might not be able to attend classes according to schedule.”* (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021).

4.5.7. More Admission into Tertiary Institutions

It is the biggest advantage that a blended course can offer to the intuitions and students. It will increase admission into good tertiary institutions in Bangladesh. Fourteen students and two teachers opined that blended courses will increase the number of students in tertiary intuitions because fewer classrooms, fewer student dormitories, fewer teachers and infrastructural facilities than the face-to-face mode will be required for offering a blended course.

Student A said, *“As a result of the blended education system, we are able to complete our course at home so that the institution does not need more seats. They complete their lessons through online classes. So, they don't have to come to the class. Due to the small number of students, they don't need too many seats which can solve the*

problem of seats in higher education institutions in Bangladesh.” (Participant -A, Interview, 21 June 2021).

Student B stated, *“Those who do not get the opportunity to study at renowned and public universities for limited seats, will get the scope for the blended method because these universities will be able to double the number of seats.”* (Participant -B, Interview, 24 June 2021). Student D said, *“More and more students will get admission in their desired institutions as everyone will not have to be present physically at the same time.”* (Participant -D, Interview, 24 June 2021). Student- E agreed, *“A number of students are currently interested in getting admission into public universities in Bangladesh. But not all of them can get the opportunity due to a low number of seats. There are fewer classrooms and teachers than the students who want to study. If the blended course can be introduced, then universities can increase the number of seats.”* (Participant -E, Interview, 18 June 2021). Student G said, *“Admission of more students can be possible because fewer classes and teachers will be required for the blended course.”* (Participant -G, Interview, 21 June 2021). Student-M agreed, *“Public universities will not need more classes and teachers if they can introduce blended courses. So, then more students can be admitted.”* (Participant -M, Interview, 11 June 2021). The student I wrote, *“Many private universities with good reputation and quality can offer blended and online courses to students to help them doing part-time job and business.”* (Participant- I, Diary, 11 July 2021).

Teacher -1 said about the rotation system that can be introduced as a result of a blended course. He said, *“I think we can hold classes on alternate days for offline and online classes. Hence, we can double the number of seats because we can accommodate*

more students then. He adds that international faculties can also conduct blended courses. The online classes may be conducted by the international faculty and the face-to-face classes may be conducted by teachers or teaching assistants working at the course-offering institutions. They will help to increase the quality of education by exposing the students to international academia.” (Teacher-1, Interview, 1 July 2021).

Teacher-2 agreed, “The number of seats may be increased not only in public universities but renowned private universities can also take the advantage of blended learning. However, in this case, the integrity of the degree providers should be ensured.” (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021).

4.5.8. Constraints in Implementing Blended Learning

A subtheme of the third theme is the challenge of technology which can be considered as a downside of the blended course because it depends on the use of technology. Besides being a facilitating factor, technology can also be a debilitating one if it is not available and handy to the users. As blended learning is dependent on technology, it involves the cost of devices and the internet. Hence, financial issues, institutional support, teacher training, the cost of devices and the internet, and other challenges accruing from the use of technology or exposure to it, must be considered as they pose as challenges in implementing the blended learning method in higher education in Bangladesh. These constraints and factors are the followings-

It is also an important factor for conducting a blended course. If the teachers and students need any technical support while doing the course or running LMS, they need the support of a digital education expert. Institutions also need proper internet facilities.

Student D said, *“It is essential to train both teacher and students not only in the use of technology, but also in the right choice of technology for the right teaching techniques.”* (Participant -D, Interview, 14 June 2021). Student F stated, *“When I faced a technical problem, I could not talk with anybody in the university for support. If the universities cannot provide us technical support, we cannot do a blended course.”* (Participant -F, Interview, 20 June 2021). Technology and gadgets are to be made available to all to make the blended method effective. Student K expected more teacher training and mentioned that teacher and student training in technology are also important here.

Teachers need to have not only technological skills but also pedagogical skills in designing blended courses. The proper combination of online and face-to-face resources and materials is important.

Teacher-1 said, *“Training of students is very important. As far as training is concerned, we need to train our students in the blended method because it is a new concept and a lot of our teachers are not familiar with this form of learning and many teachers have no idea about blended learning. So, it is very important to organize a workshop to familiarize students with blended learning. I also felt that during the course, I felt the need for advanced technological software.”* (Teacher-1, Interview, 1 July 2021).

Teacher-2 agreed, *“Teachers should be trained in basic technology in teaching. Teachers can join in-person virtual workshops. They can have online training from Coursera, Google, and Udemy.”* Teacher - 2 also added, *“While conducting a blended course for the first time, teachers should consider the literary background, interest, and*

language skills. Designing blended course needs training in course design because it is different from traditional course design.” (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021).

The cost of a device for doing a blended course is a major problem among Bangladeshi students. Eleven students mentioned it as a formidable hindrance to blended learning. Student B said, *“Everyone does not have an android phone, laptop, and a good quality network. In this case, blended learning does more harm than good. Further, I think, lab classes cannot be completely done for one or two days a week.”* (Participant -B, Interview, 24 June 2021). Student L agreed, *“Many students will have device problems in doing the blended course.”* (Participant -L, Interview, 18 June 2021). Teacher-2 said, *“Even some of the students living in city areas did not have access to smart mobile phones to attend all online classes. Two found it difficult to manage phones after their phones got stuck.”* (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021). Student L complained, *“The biggest issue for me was to have a modern device to do classes. I had lost mine. So, I felt trouble in getting another shortly.”* (Participant -L, Interview, 18 June 2021).

Seven students mentioned the internet problem as a hindrance to both online and blended methods. Student E said, *“Since parts of the course are done online, I had some problems with the internet connection while taking the class. The mobile phone hanged sometimes while writing the essays.”* (Participant -E, Interview, 18 June 2021). Student N stated, *“As I live in the village, there are a lot of internet problems which are disadvantageous for me. I could not submit my essays in time.”* (Participant -N, Interview, 23 June 2021). Teacher-2 said, *“Since the country is a developing one, our students do not have internet facilities. In blended courses, students have to be both online and face-to-face. Moreover, in our country students are reluctant to use the internet for academic*

proposes.” Teacher-2 added, “I faced some technical issues, Students had poor network quality in some areas. Even in city areas, some students did not have access to smartphones.” (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021). A student wrote on Facebook, “I frequently had to stop writing my essays and searching for the site because I could not remain connected for long with the internet. The area I live in has the weakest internet power.” (Participant -H, Post, 11 July 2021).

4.6. Physical Hassle and Mental Stress of Face-to-face and Online Education

It is a known fact that online education creates different types of physical and mental problems for students and teachers. Fatigue and physical and mental stress are mentioned as problems by many interviewees. 8 students mentioned the mental stress suffered as a result of doing an online course.

Student-L said, *“I had to travel 40 miles for the face-to-face classes and spent a lot of money for going to the campus.” Though mental stress that students go through while doing full online classes is much higher than in blended courses, a blended course might also create some kind of mental stress among the students due to long time exposure to the gadget during the online classes.” (Participant -L, Interview, 18 June 2021).*

One student wrote in her diary, *“I had mental depression and insomnia due to prolonged exposure to mobile phone.” (Participant -F, Diary, 11 July 2021). Another student wrote on Facebook, “Sometimes while looking at the mobile phone for long one hour, I felt headache, depression, and inertia. As a result, I cannot concentrate in classes*

for a long time.” (Participant- H, Facebook Post, 13 July 2021). However, eight students said that the mental stress suffered from online classes was much more than that suffered from the blended course.

Student-A said, *“In a blended course, some classes are face-to-face, and others are online. When we do some classes face-to-face, we need to spend a lot of time on a class, we spend our time going to and coming from campus to home. On the other hand, when we do online classes, there is no need to prepare for the class and with a fixed schedule, we can accomplish our classes. This is the best part of a blended course.”* (Participant -A, Interview, 21 June 2021).

Student C stated, *“I was almost distracted with my studies and could not concentrate on studies because I could not focus for long on the laptop for doing the course. I normally do not use the computer for studies. So, while studying on the computer, I suffered from an eye problem and mental unrest.”* (Participant -C, Interview, 22 June 2021). However, one student wrote on the Facebook page, *“Though I had to spend a sufficient amount of time in online for doing the blended course, I felt relieved during the face-to-face classes on campus because I could mix with my friends and say hellos to them.”* (Participant-D, Facebook Post, 13 July 2021). Another student wrote in her diary, *“I felt relaxed in the face to-face classes on the campus for my Writing course because it was a kind of relaxation for me and I had the opportunity to see my green campus, greet teachers and friends.”*(Participant -H, Diary, 12 July 2021).

Now the answer to the third research question, how can blended learning increase tertiary learning opportunities among Bangladeshi students? can be discussed as a

summary in the following paragraphs. In the majority of areas and themes derived from the findings, it can be seen that the blended method has a significant impact on removing many critical issues of the Bangladeshi higher education sector, such as session backlog, the crisis of seats in renowned universities, traffic jams, continuity of education in all situations, flexibility, expansion of education of women and working youths of the country. The findings are summarized below.

All fifteen students opined that blended learning would help to reduce session backlog in the universities because classes would not stop totally during student unrest, natural disaster or pandemic. Reduction in tuition fees will happen for the blended courses at universities because the institutional costs for running this kind of education will go down. All fifteen students agreed that a blended course would reduce all kinds of costs. Teacher-1 admitted that blended learning would minimize the cost of education and it would not only minimize tuition fees, but also reduce travel costs, food costs, accommodation costs and other education-related costs.

Many respondents mentioned the cost-saving benefit of blended learning. They believed that they wouldn't have to travel to it every day which would save their money. Eight students opined that blended learning would facilitate higher education for women in the country. As students do not need to go to class every day, they can study while staying at their homes and looking after their families. Thirteen students opined that the blended method would help students to continue their education because it allows them to continue their job while working.

Fifteen students agreed that online learning ensures the most flexibility followed by the blended method as mentioned by 12 and none agreed that the face-to-face method ensures flexibility. Fourteen students and two teachers opined that blended courses would increase the number of students in tertiary institutions because fewer classrooms, fewer student dormitories, fewer teachers, and infrastructural facilities than the face-to-face mode would be required for offering blended courses. However, many of them mentioned the cost of the device for doing the blended course as a major problem among Bangladeshi students. Eleven students mentioned it as an important problem of blended learning. Seven students mentioned the internet problem as a hindrance to both online and blended methods. 8 students mentioned mental stress suffered as a result of doing online classes. However, the majority said that mental stress suffered in the blended method was much less than that in online education.

4.7. Comparison between Pre-course and Post-course Interviews and Discussion

A comparison between the results of the pre-course and post-course interviews will help us to find the differences between the student experiences of online and face-to-face education on one hand and blended learning on the other. This comparison will help to compare my findings vis-à-vis online, face-to-face and blended method with previous research in this area. The following subthemes will be compared to investigate the differences and then they will be discussed from the perspectives of previous research. They are- interaction, peer support, teacher feedback, learning varieties, flexibility,

quality of education, and constraints faced in the three modes of education. At the same time, the findings will be discussed with reference to previous research in blended learning method.

Research Question Number One and Discussion

The discussion will highlight the answer to the three research questions of this study on after another. The first research question, ‘What is the effectiveness of blended learning in the Bangladeshi higher education sector in the 21st century?’ will be discussed now in the light of the findings and previous research.

4.7.1. Interaction and Peer Feedback

All replies about online education revealed the common sub-theme of interaction. All students who have taken online courses have expressed frustration with the lack of engagement of any kind. According to the results of the pre-course interview, the challenges with online classrooms are the lack of teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, group work, and fun. The students said that online classes did not develop their communicative skills because there was no interaction in the class. The lack of peer support in online classes was found in the responses of all participants during the pre-course interview. On the other hand, there was peer support in face-to-face education, the students opined. Peer support and collaborative learning were the best things in face-to-face classes. After doing the blended course, their attitudes have changed. Twelve students reported that interaction in the face-to-face classes of the

blended method was better than online classes and the interaction removed their boredom and it was full of fun.

Limited instantaneous engagement is undoubtedly a problem in online learning. The literature on online education also shares this point of view. Online learning's absence of synchronous engagement has a negative effect on both learning and teaching, and consequently, on students' ability to learn new abilities. Because they have more opportunities for physical engagement with their teacher and other students, it is believed that students who participate in face-to-face programs perform better than those who take online courses (Arviso, 2019). Student D's opinion supports this view. He said, "*I will participate in a blended course at the university because in online education I will be able to use technology and during the face-to-face, I will be able to improve my communication skills.*" (Participant-D, Interview, 24 June 2021). Therefore, blended learning is helpful since it gives students access to both in-person and online learning opportunities. The two teachers in my findings also highlighted the opportunity of interaction in the blended method. Teacher-1 and teacher-2 have acknowledged the scope for better interaction in the blended than in the face-to-face classes because they said that in the blended method, the online portion offered more scope for interaction between teachers and students. Twelve students claimed that the blended course increased their interactivity and communication. Sorbie's (2015) study shows that blended learning takes into account students' learning preferences, encourages collaboration among learners, and involves both students and instructors in discussion and practical learning, and student-student interaction. Dumont and Raggo (2018) confirmed Kintu et al.,'s (2017) assertion

that blended learning fosters a strong sense of cooperation among students by finding greater favorable academic achievement as a result of the interaction in this method.

The two teachers also highlighted the interaction opportunity in the blended method. Teacher-1 and teacher-2 acknowledged better interaction in the blended than in the face-to-face classes because they said that in the blended method, the online portion offers more scope for interaction between teachers and students. Teacher-1 opined that teachers remain connected with students through different platforms. He found the blended method better than full online in terms of interaction. So, from the above discussion, it comes out that in terms of peer feedback and interaction, face-to-face education is better than online, and the blended method is better than face-to-face in many respects as is evident from the positive responses of 11 students during post-course interviews.

4.7.2. Teacher Feedback

The absence of teacher input was cited by respondents as a major issue with online education during pre-course discussions. Seven students stated that online education does not offer fast feedback. In online education, teachers can only give a limited amount of feedback, and the help they can offer is not uniform or sufficient for everyone.

On the other hand, there was reported better teacher feedback in the blended course. The combined feedback got from both the face-to-face and online portions of the blended course was more effective than the solely face-to-face or online. Ten students were happy with the teacher feedback they got during both the face-to-face and online

classes. Student M said, *“After submitting for the first time, teachers would give us feedback about our essays. Moreover, teachers would rewrite our errors and motivate us how to write an essay in the best way.”* (Participant-M, Interview, 11 June 2021). Student L said, *“Teachers would individually tell us where our mistakes were during not only the face-to-face but also the online classes. They also gave us feedback in the blog.”* (Participant-L, Interview, 18 June 2021).

In this study, eleven students reported that their blended course provided them with more teacher help and feedback. In this study, more student-teacher interaction was cited as a benefit of blended learning. As demonstrated by prior studies, blended education offered more opportunities for student-teacher and student-student engagement than online education. They all expressed a desire to enroll in more blended courses at the university. 11 of the 15 respondents believed that the teacher feedback they got in the face-to-face classes of the blended course was the main achievement from the course. The chance to interact with their instructors in person during the in-person classes helped them to work out any issues they encountered during the course's online component. Interactions between students and content, students and instructors, and students themselves are three sorts of interactions that can occur in blended learning environments, according to Kurucay and Inan (2017). As the blended course is asynchronous, teachers can provide comments at any time. According to Garrison's (2017) research, faculty contact has the greatest influence on students' satisfaction with teachers' responsive behaviors (Garrison, 2017).

Vaughan and Cloutier's (2016) study to assess the effectiveness of a blended four-year education program emphasized expanding the online activities of teachers through virtual office hours and social media for cooperative assignments (Vaughan & Cloutier, 2016). The combined feedback of teachers and peers worked as a strong factor in increasing students' motivation for the blended course in my study. In spite of a few exceptions, the majority of students had a positive opinion about the efficacy of teacher feedback. Student F said, *"After the teacher's feedback, I could correct all my mistakes. This is what I liked most of the blended method."* (Participant-F, Interview, 20 June 2021). So, from the above discussion it is evident that in terms of teacher feedback, a blended course is better because here students get feedback not only during the face-to-face classes but also during the online classes.

4.7.3. Learning Varieties and Motivation

The pre-course interview results show that nine of the respondents mentioned the varieties in the learning activities of the face-to-face classes that motivated them for learning. They found the effectiveness of different ways of learning including reading, writing, and presentations, sharing of views, projects, and group work. On the other hand, six students mentioned the poor learning achievement of students in the face-to-face classes because students tended to depend more increasingly on teachers, and that guided to less tendency to self-exploration and self-learning by students.

But the post-course interviews indicate that the majority of students have found the online portions of blended course very satisfying because there were multifarious

ways of learning in the online classes of the method. They said that in the blended method they could find different types of learning activities in the face-to-face classes. Again, during the online classes, they could use varieties of online platforms and resources. That is why; the learning varieties in the blended course were much more than in either face-to-face or online classes. The results indicate more learning varieties in the blended method compared to either face-to-face or online method.

The blended course, according to 14 students, provided them with a wider range of learning opportunities than both online and in-person instruction. Student M said, *“In a blended course, much more can be done online in addition to the main materials. We can get acquainted with different devices. Ideas are available on various education sites. Various topics can be discussed with others in the class.”* (Participant-M, Interview, 11 June 2021). Although the majority of survey participants valued face-to-face education for the diversity of learning activities it offered, many of them also cited the multifaceted activities of online education as one of its attractions. This view is also stated by Martin et al. (2020) who say that detailed recording of student performance such as participation in courses, projects, quizzes and exams in the system through Learning Management System (LMS) is very advantageous in terms of evaluation of the education (Martin et al., 2020). Students can enjoy the benefits of employing a variety of learning systems in the blended learning's online activities. Neither face-to-face learning nor online learning alone offers the chance for deeper learning. The participants gain additional learning benefits from the combination of in-person and online activities. According to Sorbie (2015), blended learning accommodates students' learning preferences, encourages student participation,

and involves both students and instructors in interactive discussions and hands-on learning exercises (Sorbie, 2015).

The better learning is the reason why the participants in this study liked the blended education. In my study, practically all participants agreed that the blended course's use of technology had improved their proficiency with technology and problem-solving tasks. The majority of respondents stated that since everything is centered around technological improvements, enhancing a course through technology may help to produce an effective teaching and learning environment. This view is comparable to Vaughan, et al. (2017) and (Wornyo et al., 2018). According to Vaughan et al. (2017), blended learning improves student engagement and learning, which results in better performance. Since the learning objectives are met through improved learning abilities with a greater emphasis on reflecting experiences as modern technologies start to play a part in education through blended learning, the learning experience feels better and more realistic for learners (Wornyo et al., 2018). The ease in using technology comes from the technological skills of the learners, which in turn, leads to the exploration of and enjoyment of learning varieties. The technological skills and the ease with which learners can use technology can create satisfaction among exploratory learners in modern times.

4.7.4. Student Satisfaction and Motivation

The reasons for student satisfaction with the blended course titled English Writing Skill, accrued from factors like teachers' feedback, peer feedback, and learning in a new and innovative way.

10 students agreed that teachers' feedback made them the happiest. 11 students said that they were satisfied with the course because it offered them the opportunity to do a course by using different platforms and resources. Student C said, *"This course gave a new experience to me."* Student D stated, *"I am quite satisfied because I have learned the proper way of writing essays on different topics."* (Participant-D 24 June 2021). One student wrote in the Diary, *"When asked to give feedback after writing the essay, a lot of fear was there at work. But after the teacher's motivation, I got the courage and dared to write. It has removed my fear of making mistakes. I started to write for public reading."* (Participant-F, Diary 23 June 2021). Student-J said, *"I could not understand every subject well in the online classes. In the face-to-face classes, I could understand them better."* (Participant-J Interview, 29 June 2021). So, here it is seen that a strong correlation exists between satisfaction and learning varieties and techniques of learning.

These views are reflected in other previous studies. Chin (2015) demonstrates the Asian students' high success rate and satisfaction with blended learning. Feleae, et al.,'s (2017) research found positive attitudes of Romanian students toward blended learning. According to Dumont and Raggo (2018), teachers have seen better levels of student satisfaction and enrollment in a blended course. Students' strong sense of teamwork is strengthened through blended learning (Kintu et al., 2017). When students are exposed to the blended learning instructional methods, there will be effective learning experiences for learners to significantly increase learning outcomes (Ebadi & Ghuchi, 2018).

4.7.5. Development of Employment Skills and Higher Order Thinking

Though Bangladesh has 6.5 million unemployed people, 2 hundred thousand foreigners are working in mid-level and upper-level positions in private companies. The employers hold the faulty higher education system accountable for this (Islam &Uddin, 2019). Our university graduates lack higher-order employment skills.

Employment skills and higher-order thinking and thinking can be ensured through the educational method which promotes the nurturing of both critical thinking and analytical skills and soft skills together. 12 students in this study agreed that the blended learning method helped develop employment skills such as communication skills, group work skills, critical thinking skills, self-management skills, and time-management skills of them.

Student F said, *“Blended learning is enhancing my communication and group work skills. Through this course, I have become skilled in technological skills, group work, creativity, and critical thinking skill because I had to explore new materials, and sources, and decide what would be good for me through the internet.”*(Participant-F Interview, 20 June 2021). Student C said, *“I could manage my time, and write from my own critically while doing the course. I was also able to communicate with my friends online and face-to-face and sometimes I had to plan my essays and share ideas with my friend on the topics of essays.”* (Participant-C, Interview 22 June 2021).

Teacher-1 stated, *“Blended learning method will help to increase the critical thinking and communication skill and analytical skill of the graduates because by doing*

learning through this method students can decide what material and resources will be suitable for them."(Teacher- 1, Interview, 1 July 2021).

These opinions are in tune with those of Shand and Glassett (2017), who claim that blended learning concentrates on teaching higher-order thinking abilities like creativity, evaluation, and critical thinking. According to Shand and Glassett (2017), blended learning gives students the socialization skills they need to feel as if they are a part of a larger learning community. The idea of the 21st-century classroom gets expanded through blended learning. The research mentioned that advanced technology and the introduction of various Learning Management Systems (LMS) have improved learning activities in a blended environment (Horvat, et al., 2015).

Margolis, Porter, and Pitterle (2017) concluded that the blended course included advantages such as flexible scheduling, teacher support, and classroom activities that could be applied to 21st-century real-world problems (Margolis, et al., 2017). So, it can be said that advanced technological skills and exposure to new technology will have a positive impact on developing the employment skills and the higher-order learning of university students.

4.7.6. Development of Technological Skills

As the blended learning method needs the basic technological skills of users, it will naturally develop the technological skills of the students. 11 students in this study said that owing to the necessity of using technology in blended learning, their technological skills had developed. They said that this new method had provided them

with a new experience of using technology and the internet. Student E said, *“This course has increased my experience in using technology in addition to the subject or topic.”* (Participant-E, Interview, 18 June 2021).

Teacher-2 said, *“Technological skill is important for both teachers and students.”* (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021). So, it is seen that blended course enhances the technological skills of the students to a great extent. These technological skills are priced qualifications and skills of 21st-century graduate. Our graduates must be technologically literate in the twenty-first century, as well as keep up with rapidly evolving technology. Therefore, the need for cross-skilling, up-skilling, and re-skilling is greater than ever. They are crucial to keeping jobs once obtained as well (Habib, 2019). Technology must be integrated into teaching and learning in order to increase the employability skills of university graduates in Bangladesh and around the world. Because of the use of technology, online and blended learning methods can help students develop these skills.

4.7.7. Quality of Education and Assessment

The pre-course interview findings indicate the lack of quality of online education in terms of real learning, cheating in online education, slow development of communication skills of the students, and the lack of attention in an online class. Some students, on the other hand, criticized face-to-face education for the low success rate of student learning because this method tends to have students relying on professors more and more.

The majority of students in my study expressed concern about the quality of online education, and this concern is echoed by (Irvin et al., 2011), who claim that quality is a pressing issue. The following studies also lend credence to this opinion. Online education is inferior to conventional face-to-face instruction in terms of quality. Peers cannot cooperate with one another in learning if the system is not designed to actively facilitate this. When online learning is the only choice, the effects of bad learning design are more obvious (Arviso, 2019). Marcia's studies of online courses in some institutions revealed a 45% dropout rate due to a lack of support from the institution, but only 11% of face-to-face students experienced the same problem (Ryan et al., 2016). However, it is anticipated that the face-to-face component of the blended learning approach would make up for the quality gap that online education is thought to have. The vast majority of my participants shared this opinion.

In my study, the majority of students agreed that blended learning will enhance learning and raise the standard of education. The majority also agreed that the opportunities and advantages the blended method offers students in terms of enhanced learning, higher-order learning, and technological skills are assumed to ensure better learning in the blended method, even though all participants agreed that face-to-face instruction is the most effective of the three. Student F said, *“Blended education will be better because students can attend both face-to-face and online education. They will have to use the best of both types of education and experience with both.”* (Participant-F, Interview, 20 June 2021). Research shows that blended learning ensures a better quality of education for the use of technology in teaching-learning. According to Wornyo, Klu, and Hlavisio (2018), as newer technologies get involved in education through blended

learning, learners report that the learning experience is better and more useful because the learning objectives are met through improved learning skills with a greater emphasis on reflective experiences with the face-to-face classes.

The results of Nasser's (2020) study also showed that the blended approach successfully fosters the development of the following crucial qualities: accessibility, visualization, motivation, social skills, and critical thinking. In their study, Margolis et al.(2017) also discuss the use of in-class exercises that may be applied to problems in the real world of the twenty-first century.

4.7.8. Ease in Using Technology

Most students said that the technology used for doing the blended course was simple. They could comfortably use the technology for doing the course. Half of the students were comfortable with using this new technology whereas the remaining participants said that they had initial hurdles but they could overcome them very easily. Student G said, *“Initially I had a problem in using new technology. I have learned to write an essay by myself without memorizing.”* (Participant-G, Interview 21 June 2021). *The teacher also reported the students' comfort in using technology for doing the blended course.*

Teacher-1 said, *“By using different platforms such as Google classroom, Facebook, WhatsApp, blogs, students sought any support and could reach out to teachers which is not possible in face-to-face classes. Giving and getting instant feedback through these media was beneficial for them.”* (Teacher-1, Interview, 1 July 2021). This

phenomenon is reflective of the fact that students have the adaptability and natural skills to adopt any new technology that is requisite for doing a blended and online course. Self-exploration and self-learning through critical thinking are the most valuable qualities of 21st-century graduates.

As higher education aims at the graduates' employability, then it is to be considered what graduate attributes are truly required in the twenty-first-century job market. Accenture Volatility and Agility study 2014, Accenture ranked the following skills for future leaders as problem-solving (78%), leadership (75%), communication (73%), and technology (73%). So, the blended course is expected to fill in the demand of the 21st -century graduate skills by imbining the graduates with critical thinking, problem-solving and technological skills on the one hand and cooperative and group work skills on the other. So, there is a strong relationship between students' comfort with using technology and the development of their writing skills through brainstorming, critical thinking, and creativity.

4.8. Research Question Number Two and Discussion

The discussion will center on the research question, how do the participants experience blended learning as a method to develop their writing skills. This question will be discussed in the light of findings matching the area.

4.8.1. Contribution of Technology to Writing Skills Development

These virtual platforms like Google classroom, blogs facilitated the scope for more collaborative activities in blended method than in face-to-face method. In the face-

to-face method teachers and students do not get sufficient time to engage in collaborative activities because of the fixed schedule of classes. But the asynchronous nature of the blended method especially blog is conducive to more collaborative learning. Student D said, *"In the face-to-face classes, teachers cannot give feedback to all students individually if required. In that case, teacher feedback to an individual student is possible in the online method because the 24/7 nature of online education is helpful in this regard."*

The course was designed to introduce students to the process method of writing. The vast majority of students claimed that planning, brainstorming, writing drafts, receiving comments, revising, etc. helped them improve their writing abilities. Editing and brainstorming, according to 11 students, were beneficial. Student O said, *"I found activities like practice brainstorming, free writing, outlining, draft, revision, and final copy, as well as learning how to offer helpful feedback and how to use feedback, to be most beneficial in reaching learning outcomes."* Student L stated, *"I wrote the four pieces for the blog over the course of 10 to 12 hours. The four essays took more time to write, but since I didn't have to memorize anything, it was to my advantage."* (Participant- L, Interview, 18 June 2021).

Ten students reported improved writing abilities as a result of this training. Student F stated, *"I've learned how to compose essays without having to memorize. I thus benefited from the course."* Student H stated, *"I gained because I could revise my essays on the blog based on the helpful input I received from my teachers and friends not only during the face-to-face courses but also while we were interacting online."* (Participant-

H, Interview, 23 June 2021). *These views are reflective of previous findings.* The usage of a blog to build writing skills using the process approach can be highlighted here since I have used it as a platform for the writing course.

Despite the accessibility issues caused by restricted access to and experience with technology, Mabuan (2018) found that learners still view blog writing as a useful tool. He observes increased online communication between students and more freedom for them to express themselves in a blog. In a similar vein, blogging enhances students' essay-writing abilities, according to Ralmi et al. (2015) study. Additionally, it discovered that blogging promoted idea generation more effectively than other types of writing. Akdag and Ozkan (2017) asserted that as blogging fosters a love of writing and promotes learner autonomy, it has the potential to enhance students' writing skills. The vast majority of participants in Ahmed's (2018) 14-week study of a group of university students in Bangladesh enrolled in a course designed to teach academic writing through blog writing activities found that their negative attitudes toward writing were transformed into positive ones.

Consideration should be given to the slightly different opinions of the two teachers on the writing process approach. Many students, according to Teacher 1, correctly applied the approach method. But teacher 2 claimed that four or five of the students didn't write independently and didn't revise or provide each other feedback on their writings. This view is expressed in previous research as well. It has occasionally been observed that the participants' passion and interest in learner-centered blogging on paper did not translate into their actual blog writing activities for a variety of reasons (Lin, 2015).

It can be surmised from the discussion done above that the learning activities and the learners' overall academic success in this blog used by my participants were significantly impacted by this novel method of writing skill development through blogging. This method helped the students gain graduate-level capabilities including brainstorming, critical thinking, collaboration, and interpersonal abilities for the twenty-first century.

4.9. Research Question Number Three and Discussion

The third research question 'how can blended learning increase learning opportunities for Bangladeshi universities' will focus on discussion regarding the opportunities to be created by blended learning as found in the results of this study.

4.9.1. The Opportunity of Tertiary Education through Blended Method

The following advantages of blended method for the higher education institutions of Bangladesh will be discussed here with reference to previous research.

More Admission into Universities

It is a fact that Bangladesh's state universities are unable to accept all of the students who pass the HSC each year. Those who cannot afford the costly tuition rates cannot consider attending private universities. Ninety-five percent of higher-education graduates in Bangladesh cannot get into the best public universities due to the lack of available seats (Trines, The number of higher education institutions now in existence cannot handle this enormous rise in the number of students. Bangladeshi

students are denied access to high-quality higher education due to the shortage of seats and other facilities in prominent public and private universities.

Against the backdrop of this situation, the blended learning approach has a greater potential to increase access to high-quality higher education in Bangladesh. Online and blended modes of education may be able to partially meet the demand for higher education (Al-Masum & Chowdhury, 2013). According to Akhtaruzzaman (2021), more than a million students pass the HSC exam each year, but it is difficult to improve the physical facilities overnight. Student A said, *“As a result of the blended education system, we are able to complete our course at home so that the institution does not need more seats. They complete their lessons through online classes. So, they don't have to come to the class. Due to the small number of students, they don't need too many seats which can solve the problem of seats in higher education institutions in Bangladesh.”*(Participant – A, Interview, 21 June 2021). Thus, the blended approach provides educational institutions with ample opportunity to raise student intakes.

Easing of Session Backlog

Concerns about educational continuity are shared by parents, teachers, and students in all circumstances. An urgent problem in Bangladesh's public institutions is the backlog of sessions caused by on-campus political turmoil and delays in the results announcement. In seven or eight years, students at public universities with session backlogs finish their four-year graduate program. At Comilla University, Rajshahi University, Jahangirnagar University, Islamic University, and the National University,

there is severe session congestion, according to the University Grants Commission (Wadud, 2013). The government and parents both face significant financial costs as a result of the session backlogs. According to Sarkar and Hossain's (2016) empirical study, engineering universities had the highest session backlog resulting in additional cost per student (BDT 230,801), followed by agricultural universities (BDT 211,846), general universities (BDT 209,794), and science and technology universities (BDT 209,794). (BDT 1,79,293). In terms of the additional costs incurred because of the session jam, general universities accounted for 25.77 percent, agricultural institutions for 13.86 percent, engineering universities for 23.84 percent, and scientific and technology universities for 21.68 percent (Sarkar & Hossain, 2016). The Annual Report of UGC (2019) shows that per year expenditure on public university students by Government is 1,49,940 BD taka (Annual Report of UGC, 2019). If the session backlog is there, the expenditure is to be multiplied by the year even though the academic activities are not held. Hence, like the online method, the blended method will help to minimize expenditure. Aoyag, et al (2021, October) mentions that more than 18 months have now been lost for many children. They say, "To ensure continuity of learning whilst schools are closed, the delivery of education is radically changing today through distance education: digital, blended or hybrid learning have become part of the new learning reality which all Governments, teachers, and learners will have to adjust to" (p.5). This view is expressed by my participants.

Student E said, *"University students, especially the public university students will have less session jam."* Student B said, *"If the university cannot remain open for any*

political issue every day a week, the educational activities can be continued through blended learning.” (Participant-E, Interview, 18 June 2021).

So, blended learning can play an important role in alleviating this problem because it facilitates a considerable portion of education through distance mode. Blended learning will also help sustain the flow of education in all situations. Realizing the necessity and precarious condition, and people’s negative perception about the quality of online education, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has taken steps to introduce a blended learning system for higher education in Bangladesh. Salman (2021, May 31) reports that the UGC of Bangladesh on May 19, 2021, formed a 12-member committee led by a UGC member for the introduction of a blended system for higher education. The working committee formulated an initial draft after going through the policies of various countries in this regard. Bangladeshi culture, skills, socio-economic context, and global standards will be taken into cognizance in forming the policy (Salman, 2021 May 31). This method will help universities not only during the pandemic but also in normal situations as well. This will help the universities which have a shortage of teachers to offer courses (Hybrid learning at universities: UGC finalizes draft, 2021, August 26). So, it can be expected that as blended learning helps to continue education at all odds, additional costs of the government in the public universities that may be incurred as a result of session backlog, will not be required, and similarly, parents’ financial load for the high tuition fees in the private universities will be eased to a great extent.

Cost-Effectiveness and Reduction in Tuition Fees

All participants found blended learning more cost-effective than the face-to-face method in this study in terms of travel, food, and accommodation costs. This point of view vehemently supports the value of blended learning as a remedy for traffic congestion in Bangladeshi cities in the country's educational system. According to Chakraborty (2016), traffic delays are a constant threat to Bangladeshi city inhabitants. Traffic jams waste over 5.00 million working hours daily and cost the nation 370 billion tk. on average each year. According to MCCI & CMILT (2010), traffic jams cost people 8.15 million working hours, of which 40% are business hours (Chakraborty, 2016). Therefore, it is rational to assume that students taking blended courses will have to pay approximately half as much as those doing face-to-face courses because the costs of tuition, meals, travel and lodging will be reduced.

Jashim (2021) says that according to a 2019 World Bank survey, students of the most affluent section of the population are mostly reading in tertiary education. The survey "Bangladesh Tertiary Education Sector Review Skills and Innovation for Growth" showed that 65% of public university students and 57% of private university students come from the most affluent families. The public colleges also enroll mostly the richer group. Blended courses will open opportunities for students from less affluent families because in the blended method, tuition fees will go down and they can study while working. So, the reduction in tuition fees and other costs is assumed to help students though institutional expenditures might increase for infrastructural investment. It will also help to alleviate the accommodation crisis in student dormitories. The same report by UGC (2019) states that the dormitories of private universities can accommodate only 3% of students. So, to alleviate the problem of accommodation in student dormitories,

students have to commute every day to the campus for classes. According to Barker (2015), “Hybrid courses provide an alternative to spending time on campus; it reduces commuting.” Crawford and Jenkins (2017) mentioned that new solutions through blended learning may be handy as a solution to the cut-down of government funding to Australian universities. This approach will facilitate the maximization of faculty, library and classroom facilities and resources through technology.

More research authenticates the claim. The blended method can help to reduce the pressure on the costs of higher education. Blended learning has become popular owing to its potential for providing additional access to content and instructions that are flexible and barrier-free (Kastner, 2019). The Stanford research strongly suggests that using the blended method could have a profound effect on overall completion rates by helping institutions to radically raise the return from their current investments in self-paced content (Singh & Reed, 2001). Research by the University of Tennessee’s Physician’s Executive MBA (PEMBA) program for mid-career doctors has shown that blended learning programs can be completed in approximately one-half the time, at less than half the cost.

Flexibility

In my study, the students strongly preferred blended learning to face-to-face instruction for its flexibility. Ten participants felt that the blended course was more flexible than the face-to-face sessions even though all of the participants preferred online classes to face-to-face and the blended method because it allowed them to meet their

friends and teachers once or twice a week. Numerous research such as those conducted by Afip (2014), support this viewpoint, “Blended learning allows the learners to make choices about their learning on time and place of their learning, what and how they want to learn and their goals in learning” (p.5). Similarly, Barker (2015) says, “The major advantage of hybrid classes is that this forum allows some flexibility to students with multiple responsibilities to maximize their time” (p. 144). The flexible learning schedule, alternate educational pathways, and many motives to enroll in a blended learning program are also highlighted by Tarvyd's (2019) study.

Job and Education Simultaneously

Thirteen students opined that blended method would help students to continue their education because it allows them to continue their job while working. As a huge number of Bangladeshi youths are interested to pursue higher education, blended method will positively fulfill their expectations. Many Bangladeshi youths do need to do part-time jobs for meeting up their tuition fees and other educational expenses. Though the public universities charge affordable tuition fees, they have limited facilities for higher education for students as the seats and other physical facilities are limited there. On the other hand, tuition fees in private universities are high. So, many students need to do part-time jobs and other income-related works to manage their tuition fees. In this context blended method will be plying a very significant role in spreading higher education to Bangladeshi youths who are being deprived of it in the prevailing problems of Bangladeshi higher education.

This view goes in tune with Barker (2015) who says, “The major advantage of hybrid classes is that this forum allows some flexibility to students with multiple responsibilities to maximize their time” (p. 144). Al-Amin et al. (2021) show that several respondents in their study thought that blended learning would be beneficial for slow learners, would promote digital literacy, and would cut down on the amount of time spent in traditional classes. In Bangladesh, there are few opportunities for students to receive an education loan from either public or private sources. Therefore, it will meet their expectations if they may work and study at the same time. So, it is clear from the description above that blended course will pave the way for higher studies and job simultaneously and thus reduces the chances of student dropout from the universities of Bangladesh.

Women’s Education

Half of the participants opined that blended learning would facilitate higher education for women in the country. As students do not need to go to class every day, they can study while staying at their homes and looking after their families.

In Bangladesh, the female dropout rate in tertiary education is very high owing to factors like early marriage, early childbirth, and conservatism regarding female education in the country. Islam and Pavel’s (2014) study found that out of 18 female dropouts, 14 have dropped out due to marriage. So, to reduce female dropout in tertiary education, blended learning can be a good solution because girls would be able to continue their higher education in blended mode even after marriage. Teacher-2 said, “*If the blended*

course can be offered at universities, many more women will get the opportunity to continue their higher education and contribute to the development of society.” (Teacher-2, Interview, 8 July 2021).

The expansion of women’s education in Bangladesh is a priority agendum of the Bangladesh government for attaining the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). Bangladesh has achieved gender parity in primary as well as secondary education. The literacy rate of women has increased remarkably to 71.2% in 2020 from 31 % in 2006 (The Global Gender Gap Reports 2020). Female secondary students are more than their male counterparts in 63 of the 64 districts which are 54:46. But the participation of women in higher education is still not satisfactory. In 2014, female students in tertiary education in Bangladesh were 41.7 percent and it is growing at an average annual rate of 5.96% (Bangladesh - Female students in tertiary education, 2021). But the SDG Goal no.4.3 (Quality Education) stipulates that by 2030, countries “ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. Bangladesh also aims at achieving it.” (UN Sustainable Development, 2021). Women’s empowerment and development can be achieved if they can get higher education. So, the blended method is expected to be the most appropriate alternative to ensure higher education for women in Bangladesh which will help to achieve the sustainable development goal of Bangladesh.

Flexibility of Education

The fixed schedule of face-to-face classes was mentioned as a disadvantage of face-to-face education by all the interviewees of the pre-course interview. Six of them

said that they could not work as well as study if they did face-to-face education. Teachers cannot attend to all students in the face-to-face classes. Face-to-face classes are difficult for students living far away because they have to travel, and spend money and time. On the other hand, online classes offer more flexibility and a better scope for time management, 15 students remarked. In response to my follow-up question, 6 students said that they were engaged in the part-time job though not from 9 am to 5 pm. Two samples said that they were engaged in part-time tuition to support their studies.

The post-course interviews indicate that the flexibility of blended learning due to the use of technology in education facilitates higher education for all, even for working students. As students do not need to attend all the classes on campus in the blended course, they can use this time for jobs. 10 students mentioned that their satisfaction with the blended course accrued mostly from the flexible nature of the blended learning method. They opined that it also saves a lot of money and time. Teachers also found the 24/7 characteristic of the online portion of the blended course very helpful.

In my study, the students strongly preferred blended learning to face-to-face instruction for its flexibility. Numerous research such as those conducted by Afip (2014), support this viewpoint, “Blended learning allows the learners to make choices about their learning on time and place of their learning, what and how they want to learn and their goals in learning” (p.5). Similarly, Barker (2015) says, “The major advantage of hybrid classes is that this forum allows some flexibility to students with multiple responsibilities to maximize their time” (p. 144). The flexible learning schedule, alternate educational pathways, and many motives to enroll in a blended learning program are also highlighted

by Tarvyd's (2019) study. According to Enrichsen et al. (2013), students report feeling satisfied with a course when they see flexibility, the instructor's involvement, engaging communication, and a variety of assignments.

Blended learning can also be a solution to cut down students' costs because in a country like Bangladesh it will help to reduce session backlog which will save the additional costs incurred by both the government and parents due to the session backlog in Bangladeshi public universities. In order for a student to complete graduation and post-graduate, a significant amount of additional money is spent by both the government and the parents due to session backlog, reports Sarkar and Hossain's (2016) empirical study. The Annual Report of UGC (2019) shows that per year expenditure on public university students by Government is 1,49,940 BD taka (Annual Report of UGC, 2019). If the session backlog is there, the expenditure is to be multiplied by the year even though the academic activities are not held. Hence, like the online method, the blended method will help to minimize expenditure. It will also help to alleviate the accommodation crisis in student dormitories. The same report by UGC (2019) states that the dormitories of private universities can accommodate only 3% of students. So, to alleviate the problem of accommodation in student dormitories, students have to commute every day to the campus for classes. According to Barker (2015), "Hybrid courses provide an alternative to spending time on campus; it reduces commuting." Crawford and Jenkins (2017) mentioned that new solutions through blended learning may be handy as a solution to the cut-down of government funding to Australian universities. This approach will facilitate the maximization of faculty, library and classroom facilities and resources through technology.

4.9.2. Challenges and Other Benefits of Blended Education

During the post-course interviews, many students mentioned almost similar kind of challenges of blended learning like the online method. Teacher-2 also said that even a number of students living in the city areas did not have access to smart mobile phones to attend all online classes and two found it difficult to manage their phones after their phones got stuck. Similarly, half of the students said that the internet problem was a disadvantage for them to do the blended course. Some of them could not submit their essays on time.

Teacher-2 also mentioned the poor network quality in some areas even in city areas. They believed that the cost of the device for doing the blended course was a major problem among Bangladeshi students. Half of the students mentioned it as an important problem of blended learning. Research in the Covid-19 context of Bangladesh reveals similar findings. Khan's (2021) study identified certain obstacles to blended learning, such as poverty, a lack of familial and institutional support, limited internet access, teachers who are not tech-savvy, and power outages in rural and coastal locations. However, 71.43% of research participants expressed support for blended learning and flipped classrooms in the wake of the pandemic though the majority of participants believed that Covid-19's online education was not as successful as anticipated. Such viewpoints suggest that it is difficult to execute blended learning or the flipped classroom in Bangladesh. Eighty-nine percent of the participants questioned if the current teachers are prepared to use technology.

The participants in my research agreed that they had to spend less internet data for doing the blended course than the online courses. They had to spend 4-5 dollars on the internet for doing the blended course. But on the other hand, they had to spend 5-6 dollars every day for attending the face-to-face classes of the blended course. So, the costs for face-to-face classes once a week were almost the same as the amount spent for online classes. But the academic benefits they derived from the face-to-face classes once a week were much greater than those of doing full online classes. More than half of the students agreed that teachers' feedback made them the happiest. Many students said that they were satisfied with the course because it offered them the opportunity to do a course by using different platforms and resources. Student C said, *"This course gave me a new experience to me."* (Participant-C, Interview 22 June 2021).

The majority of students agreed that the blended learning method develops the employment skills such as communication skills, group work skills, critical thinking skills, self-management skills, and time management skills of university graduates.

Student B said, *"As in blended learning students have to use technology to communicate in the online and face-to-face classes, and they will become skilled in technology. They will also need to talk with one another for communication and design projects through group work and it will definitely improve their communication and group work skills. Besides, the necessity to use online resources will help them to become a critical explorer of resources on the online."* (Participant-B, Interview 09 June 2021).

While comparing the challenges and benefits of the three methods of education, the issue of costs and availability of device was taken into consideration. Though the

face-to-face education had no issue with device and internet, online and blended method involved this issue. It was found from the analysis that the hassles and challenges of the blended method in terms of device and internet were much less than those faced in the online method. The costs were less; the issue of internet access was less acute in the blended method. The problems with academic issues, teacher-student and student-student interaction and feedback were much less in blended than in the full online because the blended method kept the scope for both the face-to-face and online interaction and teacher feedback. So, they opined that the blended method could be effective if the issue of the digital divide is resolved by the government.

4.9.3. Physical and Mental Hassles of Online and the Blended Education

During the pre-course interviews, the majority of interviewees mentioned that online education was taxing for eyes and brain. Because students spent so much time in class in front of mobile or laptop displays, online education caused various problems like loss of eye-sight, lethargy and depression, laziness, and finally de-motivation in studies. Additionally, it made them lazy, which caused them to focus less on their studies.

During the post- course interviews, half of the students mentioned some physical and mental problems suffered in the blended course. Fatigue, physical and mental stress were mentioned as problems by many interviewees. A few students said that they had to travel 40 miles for the face-to-face classes and spent a lot of money for going to the campus. However, the majority of students said that the mental stress suffered from online classes was much more than that suffered in the blended course. One student complained that she had mental depression and insomnia due to prolonged exposure to

mobile phones during the classes and other online activities for the blended course. A student said that in the blended course, when he did some classes face-to-face, he needed to spend much time for a class for going to campus. On the other hand, when he did online classes, there was no need to prepare for the class and with a fixed schedule, he could attend his classes. But he got the benefits of both the face-to-face and online classes in the blended course. This was the best part of the blended course that he liked.

One student wrote on Face book page, *“Though I had to spend a sufficient amount of time online for doing the blended course, I felt relieved during the face-to-face classes on the campus because I could mix with my friends and say hellos to them.”*(Participant-J Facebook Post, 23 June2021).

4.9.4. Challenges and Benefits of Online and Face-to-face Education

While discussing the challenges and benefits of blended education, it is also important to discuss the challenges and benefits of online and face-to-face education as well for a comparison among face-to-face, online and blended education. The majority of participants in my study mentioned the resource constraints in online education during the pre-course interviews. Resource limitations were identified as a problem for online education. The first theme is the difficulties with resources, such as the internet, devices, and electricity. These resources have a connection to both price and accessibility. Student G said, *“We cannot do classes for the internet problem. Many students cannot do class because they do not have a smartphone. Being in the village makes it difficult for many to attend classes.”* (Participant-G, Pre-course Interview, 12 March 2021). It is true that every less developed nation might experience a variation of this situation. There are

growing worries across the board that students from underprivileged backgrounds or institutions with limited funding may be excluded from online learning opportunities. With the further deprivation of students from campus resources, i.e., libraries, computer facilities, and common rooms, the economic and technological divide in Asia has become more apparent than ever before (Lau, 2020). Studies conducted in Bangladesh have also supported this point of view. Shrestha et al., (2022) find that the majority of teachers and students in Bangladesh have difficulties in using technology such as slow internet connection, system crashes, power failure, the lack of devices to attend class, getting distracted by social media, being unused to working in the online environment, costly data packages and the fear of online assessments. Tasneem mentions a survey that found that 11 samples from low-income homes had difficulty obtaining a smart device or an internet connection, which points to a greater digital gap in the country. As a result, this can further widen the gaps in access to education that already exist (Tasneem, 2020, May 01).

The primary reasons for the limited participation in online classes in rural and distant places, particularly among students from low-income families, are a bad or no internet connection and expensive mobile data (Jashim & Sajid, 2020). The advantages of online education are low cost, less travel, and less hassle. However, the problems of face-to-face education as mentioned in my findings were travel time and traffic jams, travel cost, accommodation cost, the hassle of catching transport, and tiredness from travel. But all respondents mentioned that compared to the costs of face-to-face education, the costs of online education were much lower. Students from marginally situated nations will also

face challenges due to the resource issues involved with blended learning. Eleven study participants in my study shared this opinion.

4.10. Positing the Theoretical Framework of CoI in the Study

The choice of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) as the theoretical framework of this study has been justified in the light of results of this study. The basic tenets of this theory and how it fits well with the study and how the findings of this study support this, will be discussed now.

Community of Inquiry consists of three constituent elements: social presence - “the need to allow students to communicate and collaborate, cognitive presence - the development of an environment where deep learning can take place identified through the development phases of inquiry, and teaching presence - providing leadership throughout the course, allowing for the design, facilitation and direction of the community of inquiry.” (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

The need for students to communicate and collaborate is at the heart of CoI framework. Effective and meaningful communication between students paves the way for reflection on the content of a course, which, in turn, allows for the exercise of higher-order learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). The teacher’s presence provides leadership throughout the course, allowing for the ‘design, facilitation, and direction’ of the Community of Inquiry. The teacher’s presence unifies the remaining two elements of the CoI framework to create an effective educational platform. The cognitive presence is the ‘development’ of an environment where deep learning can take place and is identified

through the development phases of inquiry. The question whether a blended. course, or an online course, could offer the scope for social interactions, or then formation of a Community of Inquiry, sufficient to permit deep learning for the lack of visual hints within the format in comparison with a traditional face-to-face course (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2003; Vaughan & Garrison, 2005), has been affirmatively answered because they have been positively found to be present while teaching blended courses at college and university levels.

CoI helps students to gain a deep understanding of the material taught and thus promotes higher-order learning (Akyol & Garrison, 2011; Swan et al., 2009). After the completion of higher-order learning, the quantitative and qualitative learning outcomes, and perceived levels of learner outcomes, would be increased (Akyol & Garrison, 2011). Surface learning means the reproductive and unreflective exercises, such as rote-learning whereas deep learning promotes the students' comprehension of the true meaning and implications of all the material that is being taught. CoI is an accepted framework for assessing the impact of the blended learning platform. In a subject of inquiry, participants develop the attitudes and abilities to become critical thinkers and to sustain their learning beyond the confined scope and time-limit of a formal educational experience (Garrison, & Vaughan, 2012). An academic community is viewed as a formally formed group of persons who's 'connection is that of academic purpose and inter As the blended learning facilitates the cooperative and interactive learning as well as self-directed learning, my choice of COI as a theory for this study is justified. My participants, who did the blended writing course, went through a collaborative learning process for writing their essays.

They gave each other feedback and corrected their own essays with the feedback from peers and teachers.

The recent research has shifted focus to teaching presence of CoI framework. In a review of the CoI literature, Garrison has demonstrated that learners in an online CoI expect strong teaching presence. Perry and Edwards (2005) state that talented online teachers form a Community of Inquiry that consists of a strong 'social, cognitive and teaching presence'. Conrad (2005) states that the scope for face-to-face interaction can increase connectedness and satisfaction. Similarly, according to Arbaugh (2007), teaching presence is a strong indicator of perceived learning and satisfaction with the mode of delivery. The unifying force of teaching presence is assumed to help to form and sustain a CoI in a blended environment where students are shuttling between direct and coordinated communication. Similarly, blended learning communities form a new learning relationship that can go beyond the fixed time of the class and course even without teachers' direct presence (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

The findings in my study reported that students had satisfaction with the feedback they got during both online and face-to-face classes. They felt that in addition to the teacher guidance, blended learning course provided them with the scope to socialize and communicate during the face-to-face classes. They also felt the attainment of higher-order learning outcomes such as brainstorming, reflection, and critical thinking while writing the essays and searching for resources online and choosing the right resources and utilizing them carefully.

The findings indicate that most of the respondents felt that face-to-face communication provided them with an opportunity to create a sense of community and

connectedness more quickly. While a face-to-face classroom dynamic provided them with opportunity to begin the formation of a community, online communities expanded the opportunity for prolonged and flexible communication (Garrison & Vaughan, p. 12, 2012).

Both face-to-face and online educations are confined by limitations. Hence, their merging is beneficial for both modes. The face-to-face classroom is collaborative before being reflective. Here students lack the time to reflect and offer a thoughtful opinion in face-to-face mode. Similarly, online learning should be reflective before it is collaborative. The advantage of online learning is the opportunity for thinking and reflection. It takes more time to write a message and communicate clearly and concisely so that others may read and answer to. So, a CoI would benefit from the combined advantages of blending face-to-face and online learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2012). This aspect of advantage is mentioned by the participants of this study.

The post-course interviews indicate that the majority of students also found the online portions of blended course also very satisfying because there were multifarious ways of learning in the online classes. They said that in the blended method they could find the different types of learning activities in the face-to-face classes. On the other hand, during the online classes they could use varieties of online platforms and resources. That is why; the learning varieties in the blended course were much more than in either face-to-face or online classes or that had enhanced their motivation. The use of different platforms for education and more chances of self-exploration by using a variety of platforms for learning were the main motivators for them in the blended course. The

learning varieties in the blended method were much more varied and multifarious compared to either face-to-face or online method. Student F said, *"Students will benefit more from blended learning because they can participate in both in-person and online courses. They will need to make use of their combined education and experience, utilizing the best of both. In other words, blended learning does result in genuine education."* According to Student F, *"Students learn more in mixed learning environments than they do in traditional classroom settings."* (Participant-F, Interview 20 June 2021) *"Blended learning will be better since students can attend both in-person and online education. The exposure to various educational modalities would help them strengthen their skills"* remarked student L Teacher-1 said, *"Blended learning ensures effective education because it uses the best of both face-to-face and online."* (Teacher1 Interview 01 July, 2021). Thus, it can be said that my choice of Community of Inquiry as the theoretical framework of this study is also supported by the findings.

4.11. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study found that the majority of students interacted more effectively in the blended course. They were pleased that they could communicate with peers through both face-to-face and online means, and they could receive peer comments while they wrote their essays online. The study also shows that using a blended approach gave students greater teacher input. Another significant finding of the study was that students were engaged in a greater variety of learning activities while using a blended learning approach as opposed to simply face-to-face or exclusively online instruction. In

comparison to face-to-face and online sessions, they claimed that using technology for the blended method's online lessons had improved their technological and problem-solving abilities. They found the online option to be more flexible than the other two, with the blended option coming in second due to the requirement of attending in-person classes one or two days a week. They had high hopes for the blended approach's ability to help Bangladeshi higher education institutions to reduce session backlogs. Even if online education is the best solution to solve this issue, blended learning was preferred to both online and face-to-face learning due to other disadvantages of the latter two. They believed that blended learning would help to solve the issue of accommodation in university residence halls.

Regarding the quality of education, all participants opined that face-to-face education had the best quality followed by blended in ranking because the blended method also ensures the quality of education by enhancing learning, which is, however, reflective of the fact that the blended method is perceived to be good by the second majority of respondents in my study. Online education occupied the last position. Since people have negative perception of online education, it was believed that the blended learning approach would compensate for its drawbacks by helping students through peer and teacher support during the face-to-face course components.

Everyone agreed that Bangladesh's digital divide was a barrier to online education. Although not on the same scale, it might be a similar problem with the blended method. All participants agreed, however, that face-to-face instruction might not be affected by the digital divide. So, a blended course can partially compensate for the

problem of the digital divide because in the blended method, half or at least 35-40 percent of the total classes will be held face-to-face. However, both online and blended education will be less expensive than in-person instruction, assuming the device and internet issues are resolved. It won't be a major issue if institutions or the government offers devices and internet access to students at a discounted price. Except for a few remote places, practically the whole country has access to private mobile phone providers' internet service.

It has become evident from the responses of students that blended method would facilitate the scope for tertiary education for the Bangladeshi youths through the following facilitating factors such as reduction in tuition fees, easing of session backlog, expansion of female education, the continuation of job and education simultaneously and scope for more admission into universities. What matters is that blended courses will have lower tuition costs than traditional classroom settings since the institutions will have to invest less in infrastructure and faculty members. Therefore, it is anticipated that tuition costs will decrease, allowing students who are self-sufficient and work part-time to continue their education.

All participants in my study opined that blended learning would help to minimize session backlog in the universities because classes would not stop during student unrest, natural disasters, and the pandemic. Continuity of education in all situations, a matter of concern for students as well as teachers and parents, will be less hampered in the blended method. The potential of blended method to facilitate higher education for women in comparison with face-to-face method is much higher in Bangladesh in the context of

present socio-economic and cultural reality. The majority of students opined that blended method would help students to continue their education because it allowed them to continue their job while working. It is the biggest blessing that blended course can bring for the higher education intuitions and students. It will raise the image of tertiary institutions of Bangladesh at home and abroad.

Additionally, more students are anticipated to enroll in public universities through blended learning. Teachers can use the time that will be saved in the blended method for research, innovation, and industry involvement, while students can use it for research, independent study, or, in cases of financial difficulty, part-time work or tuition work. The Higher Secondary Certificate Examinations are passed by more than a million students annually, however, it is challenging to increase the physical infrastructure overnight. Therefore, it can be claimed that colleges and universities may greatly expand student intakes because the blended method offers both students and teachers a great deal of flexibility.

So, considering all the opinions of the samples, it can be summarized that except a few constraints, blended learning will have a significant impact on the Bangladeshi higher education system by bringing in many substantial improvements and changes. The opportunities it might create for the Bangladeshi higher education sector are continuity and flexibility of education in all situations, more admission into universities, more scope for women's education, reduction of session backlog, tuition fees and other costs of education, enhancement of higher-order thinking, and technological and other employment skills among university graduates. The constraints in its implementation may

be minimized by facilitating infrastructural development and pedagogical improvement and interference at the institutions. The contribution this method is supposed to have to higher education in Bangladesh is much more significant than the challenges to be faced in its implementation.

