



Writing as a Skill of Learning English in Bangladesh Education System Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the role of writing as a learning skill in Bangladesh's English education. It assesses writing instruction across primary, secondary, higher secondary, and tertiary levels, focusing on English textbooks by NCTB, class schedules at Willes Little Flower School and Dhaka City College, and question papers from SSC-2017 and HSC-2018. Data from Bangladesh Education Statistics 2017 highlights the shortage of senior teachers in universities. Through this analysis and reference to scholarly works, it underscores the significance of writing as a vital component of English language acquisition within Bangladesh's educational framework. The paper concludes with recommendations for improvement.

INTRODUCTION

This paper has examined writing as a skill of learning the English language in the context of Bangladesh education system. The majority of the student's at all educational levels in Bangladesh are not interested in practicing this writing skill both in their classes and houses. Most of the students are found to take preparation to pass in the exam only. Islam, S. Md., et al., (2020) state that students should be made interested to write on a reflective topic regularly, which should be continued throughout two academic years at the higher secondary level in the writing course and other courses as well. Gyanendra (2017) stated that writing practice in an English language classroom could contribute to improving student's writing skills for the sake of writing, expressing, learning, and being reflective in the language classroom. Writing practice was explored as a significant tool for developing writing skills in writing courses (Heath, 1988 and Gyanendra, 2017). Educational institutions now give importance to English writing skills, and in Bangladesh English is a compulsory subject at the secondary and higher secondary level. And this subject is compulsory for a good many years but student's English writing skill is not satisfactory. The reason is that students do not try to understand grammatical rules and use these for making meaningful sentences. Rather they tend to memorize some common questions or topics because exam questions are made keeping common such questions available in guide books. Teaching the writing niceties properly requires teaching by senior teachers with many years of English teaching experience, but there is a scarcity of senior teachers in universities. English class duration is also a factor here as in all the institutions class duration is equal for all the subjects. All these factors make some long-standing challenges and those should be looked into and solved immediately. Writing is one of the important basic language skills, through which one can communicate with others. These days, people mostly give importance to speaking as this skill is needed most often. But besides speaking, achieving writing skills is also important, especially in the academic field. There is no course for writing but there is scope for teaching writing in some basic language courses. Learners can practice learning the writing-related issues from the primary level as students have to submit a written script in the exam. But primary level education is not enough for enabling a student to write different meaningful sentences in English, and students learn that from secondary level. Actually at the tertiary level, writing English smartly like English-speaking peoples is to be underscored, besides learning some grammatical rules. But students are far away from achieving such expected writing skills and now educational institutions are trying to find out the effective solution. There is no gainsaying that solving existing challenges is not a matter of a day or two as these challenges have emerged for having a good many problems in language teaching.

The objective of this study was to examine writing as a skill of learning English in Bangladesh Education System Perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing as a Skill

Writing refers to the practice of recording daily activities, learning, and feeling. According to Islam, S. Md., et al., (2020), writing is a documented discussion between a teacher and students on a particular topic, including reactions and reflections on what they are reading and hearing. Writing gives many opportunities to the students to develop their skills in English regularly without any fear. Writing can be taken "both as means and an end" (Ur, 1991) of writing as it serves the dual purposes of writing "writing for writing" and "writing for learning" (Harmer, 2007, Gyanendra, 2017, and Islam, S. Md., et al., 2020). The idea of writing seems to be congruent with the expressivity approach, which views that writing can be developed through activities engaging in reflection, expression, and discovery (Thomas, 2017, Gyanendra, 2017, and Islam, S. Md., et al., 2020). Writing is a dialogue with oneself where students give voice to their activities, experiences, observations, events, and learning (Gyanendra, 2017 and S. Md., et al., 2020). Islam, S. Md., et al., (2020) opine that writing practice in English language classroom is a good means of recording and expressing students' feelings and a good rapport can be established between the teachers and the students with this reflective writing practice.

Forms of Writing

Generally, a person is good at all the forms of language used in the case of his mother language. But when it comes to a second language, he cannot write all types of sentences or expressions fluently. Suppose a skill may be needed to run effective communication but that may be unimportant in some other fields. Leki & Carson (1997) described this issue saying- "what is valued in writing for writing class is different from what is valued in writing for other academic courses." (Leki & Carson, 1997, P. 64) When we write about a legal procedure or using a procedure of a machine commonly we don't use any exclamatory expressions, but using such an expression is a must in the case of writing about a tragic scene. Even in some cases, we do not need to use so many forms of sentences or different expressions. Suppose "opinion-based written assignments or essays report personal thoughts in the form of a simple discourse organization that usually meets the expectations of the genre." (Hinkel, 2004, p. 12) So, a student expert in opinion-based writing may not be like that in the case of story writing. The reason is that different requirements have to be fulfilled based on the nature of the writing. Being non-native in English, being an expert in all types of writing is tough. We can express ourselves exactly whatever we think in our mother language that is not possible in any other language like English. To say something in English, we have to think about sentence formation, grammar, the right words to apply, and the like.

Applying Exact Words for Writing

To achieve English writing skills, vocabulary must have to be enriched in all cases. Otherwise, he will not be able to apply the right word depending on what he will write. But, acquisition of vocabulary is not an easy work as pointed out by (Suvin, 2020). Suvin says,

“Vocabulary is an essential aspect of writing skills. The acquisition of vocabulary is an ongoing process requiring the constant repetition and use of words by students to be effectively achieved in long-term memory. It is not sufficient to develop vocabulary by memorizing words from a list; for learners to acquire vocabulary, words must be learned as part of the context in which they occur.” (p. 68).

When a student will be able to accomplish such an acquisition process that will be helpful for him not only to understand the meaning of the word, but that will show him the correct context of using that word. Such an acquisition process may not be like the learning process of other theory courses where memorizing is the right learning way. Though enriching vocabulary requires studying but without practicing acquisition of vocabulary may not be easily possible. Even though vocabulary acquisition is a learner-centered activity in regards to studying and being disciplined to set goals, when done in collaboration with peers students may enjoy the activity more, learning more vocabulary at the end (Mehring, 2006, p. 4).

Impact of the Writing on the Reader's Mind

At the time of writing a writer must be a reader besides being a writer. That means he has to think about what the reader will consider in the time of reading the writing. All the students should consider this issue when they write something as proposed by Paltridge and Starfield (2007). Paltridge and Starfield (2007) say,

Students can be asked to consider the relationship between their readers and themselves as writers and how this impacts what they say and how they can say it. They can also be asked to consider how this relationship changes for other academic texts such as research articles and conference presentations. (p. 5)

When students write without considering the impact on the reader, their piece of writing may lack polish. A writer typically aims to describe, narrate, prove, or convey something specific. Simply stringing together sentences without regard for this goal can result in a disjointed outcome that doesn't effectively convey the intended message. Although it may require additional time, consciously considering the impact on the reader is essential for engaging them and accurately expressing the intended ideas.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this study, the researcher has checked the scope of teaching writing skills in primary, secondary, higher secondary, and higher educational levels in Bangladesh. And to do that, the researcher has examined the English textbooks designed by NCTB for primary and secondary levels. The class routines of Wills Little Flower School and Dhaka City College have been included here to show the English class duration. To examine the standard of question paper, English second paper questions of SSC-2017 and HSC-2018 have been taken into account. The researcher has also mentioned some data from Bangladesh Education Statistics 2019 to show the scarcity of senior teachers in universities. In all the cases of data analysis, the descriptive research methodological approach has been strictly used.

RESULT RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

Language Teaching in Secondary and Higher Secondary Level

Teaching writing in Bangladesh starts from the very beginning- at the primary level. In Bangladesh primary education consists of 5 classes (class 1 to 5), students must study one English subject named "English for Today" where the student mainly studies the meaning of some commonly used terms. Besides such word meanings, students study here some easy communicating terms and their correct spelling. In the book of class 5, some short dialogues have been included to show the students the use of communicating terms. Teaching the writing starts from there as here the students learn which words they have to write to communicate, though grammatical rules are not described in there.

From Class 6, English language teaching divides into two papers- The first and second papers, teaching the writing and maintaining grammar starts from this stage. In the English second paper, there are two parts (Part A and B) and the question of this paper is designed accordingly. Part A contains the questions relating to Grammar and Part B is the composition part where students have to write an essay, paragraph, letter, etc. Such composition writing- like paragraph or letter writing is also included in the question of English 1st paper. And this pattern is followed from classes 6 to 10 and in SSC & HSC Exam. Though questions on the same topic are kept for class 6 to HSC exam, question makers make complex questions commonly for higher classes and simple questions for lower classes.

Such composition writing may be helpful for the students if they write something from their viewpoint without memorizing it from somewhere. But a common trend is that question makers make questions including some common topics and provide a destroying chance of memorizing, to the students. Suppose, SSC English second paper ques. of 2017 includes writing a CV (No. 12), a paragraph on the life of a rickshaw puller (No. 14), etc. HSC English second paper question of 2018 includes questions like writing an application to the principal for increasing book number in the library (No. 13) and writing a paragraph on the importance of female education (No. 15) in the composition part. Such questions are very common and almost all the guidebooks or any books including composition parts contain writings on these topics.

Though English is one of the most hard-to-understand subjects for many of the students in Bangladesh, the class duration of the English 1st and 2nd papers is the same as the other subjects. Neither extra times for the additional English classes, nor extra classes are allotted for the English in secondary and higher secondary level institutions. Suppose for Covid-19, from the middle of 2019, all the secondary and higher secondary level institutions arrange online classes via "Zoom Cloud Meeting Apps." Class duration is not satisfactory though anyone can arrange a Zoom Meeting from anywhere freely.

The online class routine of Willes Little Flower School & College, Dhaka shows that they allotted only 35 minutes (starting class- 10.00 am-10.35 am, ending class- 12.00 pm-12.35 pm) for each class no matter whatever the subject is. Dhaka City College allotted 10 minutes more than Willes Little Flower, meaning the duration is 45 minutes here. In this college, every day the first class duration is 10:00-10:45, and the ending class duration is 01:00-01:45, it is for all the courses including English. It is evident from the class routines that the duration of the class is very short, and it is not for Covid-19, but 45 minutes to 1-hour class was very common in secondary and higher secondary level institutions, before Covid-19.

Developing Writing Skill in University Levels

At university levels, teachers have independence in selecting topics in a given course. But in all the public and private universities, commonly one or two courses on the English language are offered for graduate-level students. In such English courses, teachers are free to take necessary steps to develop the writing skills of the students. But commonly teachers teach some grammatical rules that are just the extension of what the students learned at the pre-university level. So, there is not enough scope for teaching writing skills at the university level.

Teaching writing requires a deep understanding of each student's expertise and their lacuna in writing. Generally, that is the attribute of a senior teacher having many years of English teaching experience. But, Bangladesh Education Statistics 2017 reveals that in 95 private universities of Bangladesh there're 15571 teachers, and among them only 2363 teachers are professors, and 7842 teachers are lecturers. Even many of these small numbers of professors are from different public universities who've not enough time for the private university students.

Marking the loopholes in one's writing is important for developing one's writing skills. But in almost all the private universities there are three semesters (4 months each semester) in a year, and ordinarily mid-term is held on the second month and the final exam is held in the fourth month. That means after completing the exam, a teacher has only a week or two for checking the answer script as he has to start the class after midterm or class of the next semester. In such a short period, marking rightly all the loopholes in the student's answer script is not possible at all. But in the case of public universities, the situation is not like that because public universities follow a 6 months semester system or

year system. So allotting at least one month for checking answer scripts is easily possible there.

Analysis of Current Context

In Bangladesh, students start to learn grammatical rules from the secondary level, but that does not mean primary level English books are grammar-free. Rather the primary level books do not contain such grammatical rules studying which a student can form full sentences in English. In the secondary and higher secondary level, students learn grammatical rules and the use of these rules to make sentences. But the class duration of all the classes is the same, from 45 minutes to 1 hour or so. It is just farcical that the time for teaching English language and teaching other subjects like social science is the same, though, to be good at different subjects different requirements have to be fulfilled.

In the secondary and higher secondary level, English questions keep a good scope where students have to write a good number of sentences (especially in Part-B). But, the question pattern propels the students to memorize some paragraphs, essays, or so and make a good grade. The question paper makers design questions keeping some previous year common questions in there, and that is why students memorize common things and get common in the question papers. If the situation isn't like this, students will have to write a huge number of sentences in English without memorizing.

At the higher education level, students are expected to master sophisticated writing skills, necessitating a deep understanding of pertinent issues. However, many universities, particularly private ones, face a shortage of senior faculty, relying heavily on lecturers. These junior instructors often lack extensive experience in grading answer scripts, making it challenging for them to gauge writing standards or identify underlying issues beyond grammatical errors. Crucially, assessing whether a student accurately conveys their intended message requires years of practice and exposure to diverse writing styles. By reviewing multiple iterations of the same question from different students over time, instructors can discern excellence and guide others accordingly. Such nuanced evaluation processes cannot be rushed, emphasizing the importance of time in cultivating effective writing assessment practices.

Findings

1. Primary level students get familiar with some common words, and from the secondary level, writing skills start to get important. From secondary level, students start to learn how to write meaningful sentences as they learn grammatical rules and the correct use of words in a sentence. But class duration for all the subjects is the same though students are not equally weak in all the subjects.
2. In the secondary and higher secondary level, students have to write different paragraphs, essays or so, and all these can develop the writing skill of students. But making the students skillful through these questions is challenging because the same type of questions are in

question papers over the years. That is why without trying to develop writing skills, students memorize some common questions.

3. At the higher educational level, the scope for teaching writing skills is very limited as students become busy with major courses based on their taken subject. In such major courses, writing qualifications become less important because having some key information in the answer script gets important there.
4. The senior teacher can determine the loopholes in a student's writing that are not equally possible in the case of a junior teacher. But there is a scarcity of senior teachers in universities, and such scarcity is more acute in private universities. And in private universities teachers get only a few days for checking answer scripts and giving numbers, due to the 4 months semester system.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Indeed, there are still many problems in language teaching, and a solution to all these is not possible overnight. It is accepted by all that there is not enough scope of teaching the writing skill in Bangladesh language teaching. But if we can utilize the limited scope properly, developing the writing skills of students will not be challenging. Adopting the following measures must be helpful to overcome the existing challenges.

1. Question makers should not include any previous year questions in secondary and higher secondary level English questions as this will propel students to memorize guidebooks.
2. It is obvious to increase the English class duration in all schools and colleges. It cannot be less than one and half hours, and in English class teaching "how to write different types of sentences in English" should be made mandatory.
3. In the composition part of secondary and higher secondary level questions, there must be questions on such a topic that the students become bound to write something, without memorizing it.
4. It may be made mandatory to take note of the English writing-related loopholes existing in each student's answer scripts and discuss those in class. If we can apply this system effectively that will be helpful for students to identify their shortcomings.
5. Universities must engage senior teachers like Associate Professor, or Professor in English language courses. A teacher's experience in English teaching is also to be taken into account before engaging him in an English language course.

Providing less than one month for checking the student's answer script of a course is not fair. So universities should not allow a teacher to submit mark sheets or checked answer scripts, without properly marking the writing-related loopholes.

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