

Schools in bangladesh

[Parts of the World](#), [Asia](#)



Abstract

In Bangladesh many of the classroom hours in schools are spent teaching grammar in English classes. Students memorize the rules of grammar and are able to write answers easily while doing grammar exercises.

Unfortunately these same students fail to apply the same grammar rules while writing longer sentences. At universities while these students write assignments, theses or answers during the examinations, except for few, teachers struggle to give good marks because of the grammar errors in the sentences. This is a common scenario with students' writing skill everywhere in Bangladesh at tertiary level. This article focuses on the reasons behind this situation. The study was conducted among few of the undergraduate students at NDUB with a view to find out the probable solutions in order to minimize both students and teachers' struggle. The research was conducted by giving written tasks to students, through questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussion.

Introduction

What does writing mean to all of us? To an ordinary person writing is expressing what we want to say using paper and pencil. However, writing has far more significance than only expressing our thoughts. Developing accuracy in writing prepares a person to achieve success in examinations, job, research, business, media and many more.

Scholars associate writing with literacy, social prestige and power

According to Harmer writing is related to literacy. “ We judge people as literate, in other words, if they can read and write in certain situations and

for certain purposes, some of which are more prestigious than others.” (Harmer, 2007: 323). Tribble (1996: 12) suggests if we do not write then we are prohibited from playing certain social roles which are associated to prestige and power in advanced societies. Ur (1991: 162) states “...teaching writing in a foreign language is to get learners to acquire the abilities and skills they need to produce a range of different kinds of written texts similar to those an educated person would be expected to be able to produce in their own language.” Brown and Lee stated (2015: 426) that the psychologist Eric Lenneberg (1967) explained that we can belong to a literate society only if we learn to write. To Edge and Garton (2012: 150) “ The most important language production skills are an ability to develop meanings logically and clearly, express unambiguously the function of the language, use language appropriate to the people being addressed.”

In Bangladesh almost all the job places require their employees to be efficient in English. Unfortunately, our university students still struggle to develop efficiency in writing English although majority of them enter the job world after they graduate. Bangladeshi students start learning English very early in their lives, when they first start going to school. The learning continues till they finish high school and sit for Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) examination. At school they attend English classes every day for 45-60 minutes. In his study Hoque (2008) mentions that English has been taught to students in Bangladesh at every level of their education since British came in power. He also mentions that up to graduate level Bangladeshi students learn English mandatorily in order for them to earn

academic proficiency and enter the job world with ease. Even such endeavor couldn't improve the present frustrating scenario of English among students.

At tertiary level students are required to demonstrate their writing skills as majority of their skills are tested through writing, such as assignments, reports, thesis, answers in the examinations, etc. (Haque, 2017) in his article mentions, “ In Bangladesh students are required to read English for about twelve years. But the level of proficiency they reach is very low. No wonder that most of them fail in their English tests. People taking the Civil Service Examinations are also tested on their knowledge of English, but the results are equally disappointing although almost all the candidates have presumably master's degrees in various disciplines. Even those who pass or qualify are seldom able to write a free composition in acceptable English.”

This study aims to find out the reasons behind university students' low level of competence in writing in English despite their exposure to the language for 12 years in school and will investigate whether it is possible to improve the situation at tertiary level and what roles teachers can play to support students' learning.

Literature review

Afrin (2016) in her study of the tertiary level students finds out that students face many problems when writing English. Her “ analysis of the students' paragraphs revealed that various kinds of mistakes made students' writing weak. Sentence levels grammatical mistakes committed by the students, namely spelling, subject-verb agreement, articles, preposition, capitalization, fragments, punctuation, tense, etc. they have also problems with paragraph

structure, coherence and cohesion, etc.” Her study also finds that 90% of the students cannot organize their ideas. While writing they show more concern for language related problems.

Tina(2016) in her research finds out from questionnaire and her observation of the written scripts of the tertiary level students that “ The common mistakes that were from the questionnaire have been in subject-verb-agreement, using correct parts of speech, right form of verbs, punctuation, spelling, article, etc.”

Findings of Karim, Maasum and Latif (2017) elaborates that Bangladeshi EFL learners find it difficult to plan a piece of writing in different stages. The problem of planning starts from the very beginning of the paragraph writing as they cannot generate ideas. The difficulty increases as they proceed with the paragraph and cannot connect their ideas with the type of paragraph. Their findings state that “ The Bangladeshi EFL Learners face difficulty in overall planning of paragraph writing before their paragraph writing starts. Additionally, the vocabulary related sub stages for example, idiom, vocabulary, synonym, antonym and word collocation are mostly at the top of the list and the sentence related sub stages for example, writing correct sentence, topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence mostly tend to be less difficult. The third stage of writing a paragraph is revising stage which is more difficult for the Bangladeshi EFL learners than the planning stage and less difficult than the writing stage.”

Fahmida (2010) finds from the analysis of the collected data that most of the students at tertiary level have significant amount of difficulty in writing as

they have problem initiating ideas to write. The reason for the poor efficiency in writing is that they cannot write proper sentences as they are not experts in the target language. “ Students face serious problems in developing sentences while expressing thoughts. Some syntactic errors were so unique that it became difficult to comprehend. Firstly, the sentences did not make any sense. In some sentences the meaning is unclear but if we translate in Bangla it become lucid. There by we can say that students are making literal translations from Bangla. It is a kind of mother tongue interference. It also says that their vocabulary is very weak. Students think in Bangla but shows inability while producing the required words. It was also noticed that, students face problem while using vocabulary. As they have a limited stock of words, they could not find the proper word they need while writing. Use of wrong word and wrong form of word are common errors that students made.”

Chowdhury (2015) finds from her observation of the secondary level EFL students’ writing classes, “ As their writing performance is valued based on the correct use of grammatical rules, they focus more on this aspect. They believe that if they can produce a writing piece without any grammatical error then they are good in writing. On the other hand, some of the students thought that they are bad in terms of organizing the information; some students thought they are not good in creative writing because they are much used to in controlled writing and some of the students thought they face problems while doing translation due to the differences in sentence structures between the two languages.”

Apart from the problems in actual writing tasks Afrin (2014) finds other problems related to writing classes. “ Teachers may have to face a lot of distractions in classroom daily. They may have to deal with uninterested students or they may suffer from burden in absence of parents support. But good teachers always remain committed to their profession and try solving these problems.

The most common problems faced by teachers in classroom include the following:

1. Students become overly dependent on teacher
2. Persistent use of first-language in the classroom
3. Student is defiant, rowdy, or distracting of others
4. Students “ hijack lesson” – The lesson doesn’t go where you want it to
5. Personalities between students clash
6. Students unclear what do to, or do the wrong thing
7. Students are bored, inattentive, or unmotivated
8. Strong student dominance
9. Students are unprepared
10. Tardiness.”

Methodology

Participants

Forty-seven students from the department of English at Notre Dame University Bangladesh (NDUB) were the subjects of this study. These students have learnt English for 12 years as a compulsory subject in school. Majority of them have achieved remarkable marks in Secondary and Higher Secondary School Certificate Examinations. Moreover, after taking admission

at NDUB they took two courses in English Grammar and Oral and Written Communication respectively. Their overall proficiency in English is pre-intermediate.

Data Collection

Writing sample

A group of 5 students were first given few grammar exercises on tense and then asked to write a paragraph on a given topic within 250 words using the same tense they used in the grammar exercises. They were asked to sit without teacher's supervision and were given no time limitation. This gave them a relaxed atmosphere where they could write without any kind of pressure.

Questionnaire

A written questionnaire was given to the students with 10 questions which tried to elicit answers regarding their experience of learning English. They took approximately 30 minutes to answer those questions. A total number of students responded to the questionnaire.

Interview

After the questionnaires were filled out, the same group of students was interviewed to ensure the validity of their answers in order to measure the reality of the claimed answers. Also the interview clarified some of the incomplete answers.

Focused Group Discussion (FGD)

17 students participated in a Focused Group Discussion who discussed about similar issues which were answered in the filled out questionnaires. However,

discussion was more detailed and they had the opportunity to add on to the opinions of other students.

Limitations

Due to the lack of time only 5 written samples could be collected. Only 47 students could be taken as subjects. Students answered their questions in a very informal setting which might have prevented them from producing well-thought and in-depth answers of the questions asked.

Findings from sample writing:

When grammar exercises were given (fill in the blanks, corrections, writing sentences with proper tense) students could answer most of them correctly.

When they were asked to write a paragraph, various errors were marked, such as, jumbled sentences, wrong use of articles, prepositions, tense, run on sentences, wrong vocabulary, spelling mistakes.

Findings from questionnaire, interviews and FGD

- All students reported that they learnt English through deductive approach used in Grammar Translation Method.
- All students claimed that they memorized the rules of grammar through rote learning.
- At school students were given lists of vocabulary to learn, which they did through rote learning without the least idea of their use.
- There was no conscious process to apply the grammar rules in longer pieces of writing.
- They never got enough time to practice writing. Teachers mostly taught grammar.

- Paragraphs, essays were learnt by memorization.
- There was a section for creative writing but teachers encouraged memorized answers for tests and examinations in order to minimize errors.
- Returned writing tasks seldom had any feedback. There was no farther discussions on the feedback if ever they were given any.
- In large classrooms there was little opportunity for the students to have one-to-one sessions with teachers. Therefore many of their problems remained unnoticed.
- Even if there was opportunity to talk to the teach