



Teachers' Classroom Practice to Develop Student's English Writing Skills at Primary Level of Bangladesh

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Abstract: Teachers' classroom practice to develop student's english writing skills at primary level of Bangladesh. Objectives: The present qualitative study investigates teachers' classroom practice to develop primary level students English writing skills in Bangladesh, India. **Methods:** Five-government primary school and five teachers were chosen conveniently from each school in Dhaka. Randomly three English classes of each teacher were chosen to observe their teaching-learning practice. The study used a lesson observation protocol and interview protocols as an instrument of data collection. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. **Findings:** Teachers used traditional teaching-learning methods emphasizing students' rote learning and used Bangla as a medium of instruction. The study also found teachers' challenges like large class size, extra workload, lack of teaching aids etc. in developing students writing skill at the elementary level. **Conclusions:** The study explored that teachers' current practice in Bangladesh does not help students to develop their writing skill at all.

Keywords: Teacher classroom practice, english writing skills, primary students, Bangladesh.

Abstrak: Praktik kelas guru untuk mengembangkan keterampilan Bahasa Inggris siswa SD di Bangladesh. Tujuan: Penelitian kualitatif ini menyelidiki praktik kelas guru untuk mengembangkan keterampilan menulis Bahasa Inggris siswa sekolah dasar di Bangladesh, India. **Metode:** Lima sekolah dasar negeri, lima guru dipilih dari setiap sekolah di Dhaka dan tiga kelas bahasa Inggris dari masing-masing guru dipilih secara acak untuk mengamati praktik belajar-mengajar mereka. **Temuan:** Guru menggunakan metode belajar mengajar tradisional yang menekankan pembelajaran hafalan siswa dan menggunakan Bangla sebagai media pengajaran. Studi ini juga menemukan beberapa tantangan guru seperti ukuran kelas yang besar, beban kerja ekstra, kurangnya alat bantu mengajar dan sebagainya dalam mengembangkan keterampilan menulis siswa di tingkat dasar. **Kesimpulan:** Praktik mengajar guru di Bangladesh saat ini tidak membantusiswa untuk mengembangkan keterampilan menulis Bahasa Inggris mereka sama sekali.

Kata kunci: Praktik kelas guru, keterampilan menulis Bahasa Inggris, siswa SD, Bangladesh.

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■ INTRODUCTION

The English language plays an important role in the educational world as global language or lingua franca to communicate in locally and worldwide. The demand for English language and English language education has also exploded with economic globalization (Nunan, 2003). Writing is one of the language skills, which is considered an influential mode of communication. Like speech, writing helps to produce the language. When someone writes, he or she goes through a mental process, which is more complex. They have to think, organize the idea, write, revise and edit to get perfect writing and thus they can concentrate on language use more precisely (Akhter, 2014).

Those who do not have enough and necessary writing skills in English will face difficulties to get good opportunities in education and employment. Acquiring strong writing skills at an early age help students as an important tool for learning, communication, and self-expression. Therefore, students should develop their early foundation in writing, and effective writing instruction practices provide the opportunity for students to build the skills (Graham et al., 2012).

Writing is a skill where different cognitive processes are involved such as planning, translating (Text generating) and reviewing (editing and revise). Young children face particular challenges in different writing stages. Because communicating their thoughts and ideas through writing, they need to use lower level skills for example grammar, punctuation and spelling. The development of writing skills do not happen automatically rather requires repeated explicit demonstration, plenty of opportunities for practice and experimentation (Kennedy et al., 2012). Effective writing instructions in early age and adequate time to write help elementary grades students to develop strong writing skills (Graham et al., 2012).

The English language has been taught from kindergarten to university level in Bangladesh. In the National Education Policy 2010, the revised primary curriculum emphasizes learning English as an international language for the medium of communication globally and locally (Milon, 2016). To develop the four basic skills-listening, speaking reading and writing in English, our primary curriculum mentioned Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach for teaching English, which will enable students to communicate properly in real life situation (Sultana & Ahsan, 2013). Writing is one of the basic skills and an essential part of literacy development. Writing needs to develop concurrently with the other three skills of language (listening, reading and speaking) to create a balance in language literacy. The students learn by listening and reading but show their competency in Speaking and writing. English writing skill is not only needed for express oneself correctly, but it also requires most attention because students are assessed by this skill in the examination in the education system of Bangladesh (Hasan, Rahman & Masum, 2016).

English has always been a compulsory subject in the primary and secondary curriculum of Bangladesh and the most importance is given to its teaching and learning rather than other subjects (Sadek, Ahmed & Begum, 2006; Yasmin, 2007). Still, most of the students are unable to achieve the basic competencies. Maximum Bangladeshi students have great fear in writing English in their own words and face many difficulties, as it is a foreign language. Students have this fear because of – lack of vocabulary; words have multiple meaning, words having different syntactical functions and varieties of ‘inflectional endings,’ lack of concentration, improper classroom activities, etc (Sikder, 2013). Therefore, students face more challenges to cope up writing skills than other three because it

involves the appropriate and correct use of grammar, combining ideas and thoughts into the form of sentence and express the message clearly in a comprehensive way rather than only putting sentences together (Akhter, 2014).

The primary level is the foundation of improving writing skill. The purpose of teaching English at the primary level is to help students develop competence in all four language skills in English through meaningful and enjoyable activities (NCTB, 2012). According to Hussain (2006), the average situation of the writing English as our communicative skill has not been developed from primary level in Bangladesh. The students of primary education in Bangladesh are accustomed to memorize the paragraph and write that memorized paragraph on exam script for lack of creativity or free handwriting. (Hasan et al., 2016).

According to the Introduction of English Textbooks of grade 1-5, teachers will play the role of facilitator instead of traditional teachers and teach the all four skills of English language through songs, role-play, game, stories, reciting rhymes, and different interactive activities by ensuring students' active participation in individual work, group work and pair work (Hossain, Nessa & Kafi, 2015). In English classrooms, student participation and activities are very poor (Roshid, 2009; Yasmin, 2007). As there is no subject wise teacher in primary schools (Sadek et al., 2006), most of the teachers sometimes make reading and writing practice in class which is questionable because they conduct the class in Bangla and not well known about the proper ways of practising the skills (Hossain et al., 2015). Our English teachers do not have a very clear knowledge or idea about Communicative Language teaching (CLT) to teach English (Abedin, 2012). Therefore, most of the teachers use traditional lecture method in English classroom. This study is aimed to find out the teaching-learning processes of English writing

skills and challenges in teaching English writing at the primary level of Bangladesh.

To achieve the purpose of this study, more specifically, intends to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers teach English writing skills to their students in a primary school classroom?
2. How do the teachers assess their students' English writing skills in primary school classrooms?
3. What challenges do teachers face during teaching English writing skills to their students in primary schools?

■ METHOD

This is a qualitative study which explores teachers classroom practice to develop students English writing skill and the challenges teachers face in their classroom practice at the primary level of Bangladesh. Qualitative research is useful for describing and answering questions about participant and context (Gay & Airasian, 2003). Johnson and Christensen (2004) mentioned that "qualitative research relies primarily on the collection of qualitative data (i.e., non-numeric data such as words and picture)" (p.134). As this research seeks a descriptive answer about the teaching-learning process of English writing skills in the primary school of Bangladesh, the data will be qualitative data and so the qualitative approach was the best way to conduct the study.

The study was conducted in the primary schools situated in Dhaka City of Bangladesh. The study included only Government schools. The population of this study consisted of teachers who teach English at primary level in different primary schools of Bangladesh. A sample of five English teachers was selected from five government schools using convenience sampling. One English teacher was chosen from each school using purposive sampling. Three English

periods (classroom) of each teacher was observed to understand the practice of their teaching-learning in classes. Total 15 English periods (classroom) were selected using random sampling. One in-depth interview was conducted with each teacher after observing their three English classes.

A lesson observation protocol for observing the teaching-learning process of English was used in selected classrooms. The observation protocol followed a field note approach for getting a detailed description of the English writing tasks as well as any other significant evidence related to the study. A semi-structured interview schedule was used for an in-depth interview of the selected teachers. The interview schedule consisted of 16 questions related to the teaching-learning process of the English classroom. The qualitative data obtained through interview was analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The sources were coded for analyzing data. In this case, two types of coding were used: alphabetic coding for schools and alphanumeric coding for participants. Table 1 shows the coding of the data.

Table 1. Coding of research data

Categories	Coding Number
Schools (5)	S _A , S _B , S _C , S _D , S _E ,
Interview participant	IT ₁ , IT ₂ , IT ₃ , IT ₄ , IT ₅
Teachers (5)	

■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of the study are presented based on the research questions:

A. Teaching-learning process in English class

Different approaches for teaching English writing skills in grade 3 are used at Government

Primary Schools in Bangladesh such as 'Penmanship' where teachers model, students copy from teacher's dictation, books, etc. ; Rule-based approach, where teachers teach different grammatical rules; Genre Approach and Creative Writing, etc. This study found that most of the teachers used controlled writing tasks such as fill in the blank, matching tables, picture description short answer within one sentence or one word, etc. Students got a chance once or twice in a week for free writing activities such as small paragraphs on known topics mentioned in the syllabus. Different teachers conducted free writing activities in different ways. During the interview, teachers told that they give homework to students to write a paragraph on some related topics.

Another teacher SBIT2 said, *"I write a paragraph on the board and students copy that from the board. Sometimes I write half of a paragraph and students complete it. Then I give it as homework so that they can study and become prepared for the exam."* Teachers used several activities to develop English writing skills among the students based on three methods called free, guided and controlled methods. Students get very less opportunity or proper way for free writing. This study revealed that teachers mostly use traditional teaching methods such as copying from blackboard or book, handwriting, teaching some grammatical rules, memorizing some common paragraphs and not checking all the copies or giving proper feedback. Moreover, these create huge achievement gap among students due to not identifying the level and learning of students, their needs, and finding out or correcting the mistakes. Developing writing skills in elementary grades requires different strategies of teaching, more practice, and hard work from both end teachers and students. Brown (2007) recommends that teachers should provide as

much authentic writing tasks as possible and this stands as one of the nine main principles of teaching writing skills.

Teachers followed easy to hard strategy and gradually let students develop their writing skills. Teachers followed the textbook according to the syllabus and chapter-by-chapter. At first, teachers introduced the vocabulary, then read aloud the story of the chapter alone and then with the students two or three times. After reading teachers asked some questions and asked students to write answers to some questions on the blackboard. When students failed to answer teachers helped them to write the answer or told other students to help. Teachers gave writing tasks and students wrote individually. Teachers roam in the room frequently to make sure that everyone was writing, checked their copies and gave feedback to them.

During interview teachers told that they mainly concentrate on developing students' reading skill and level, then the emphasis on handwriting (letter and word formation, writing convention, etc.), give controlled writing tasks more and homework to students to practice more. This study explored that teachers' role in the class was inspiring, feedback provider and mentor. Teachers used positive reinforcement to inspire students in writing, provided feedback on writing after checking both class task and homework. On the contrary, other researchers found that teachers gave feedback to the students after various types of assessment but providing feedback was not regular practice (Rahman, 2018; Rahman, Babu & Ashrafuzzaman, 2011).

One teacher SDIT4 said that "*sometimes I sit with the challenging students in break time and give extra attention to them so that they can cover up the lacking.*" Lesson plan making by teachers for each class is mandatory. During the interview, teachers mentioned that

they make lesson plan according to the textbook but in class observation, it was found that teachers did not have any lesson plan. Similarly, other researchers also found that teachers were not using lesson plans for their English classes (Kabir, 2015). Hasan (2004) found that very few teachers know how to lesson plan should be made and most of the teachers thought it is just the list of topics or subtopics that they will teach in the classes.

This study found that teachers mostly used charts, pictures, calendars, cards, etc. as teaching aids in the class. Rahman et al. (2011) found that teachers used mainly pictures and posters as teaching aids but the quality of the materials was not satisfactory. During the interview, teachers told that they took help from the 'Teacher Guide' to make teaching materials. In 'Teacher Guide,' everything was described such as what to teach, how to teach, which materials are needed for teaching that particular topic, how to make the needed materials. There were also 'Content Book' from where teachers can get an idea to make materials according to the curriculum.

One teacher SAIT1 said that we have to collect or make and sometimes even buy teaching aids for different classes. Sometimes, School authority gives some teaching aids to us. In most of the primary schools, teacher shortage is a common scenario. So teachers used to take extra class besides their regular classes. Three teachers said that they do not get any budget to make classroom materials; they had to buy everything from their own money. Another teacher SCIT3 told that "I have extra class pressure and other works. Therefore, although I want to use teaching materials regularly, I cannot. I just make flashcards by using an old calendar and colour pen."

A motivating atmosphere for language teaching can be created by displaying posters,

charts, maps, advertisements, timetables and signs together with works produced by the students themselves in the classroom. In fact, teaching aids that can be used in language class are enormous and their use would be suitable and appropriate to the students' needs (Hasan, 2004). However, very few teachers intend to use these in the class. This study found that teachers do not show interest to make materials for several reasons, for example, no budget for materials, extra work pressure or responsibility and extra class for teacher shortage etc. Likewise, Salahuddin, Khan and Rahman (2013) found that teachers do not get any support to use teaching material from the school, government and non-government donor agencies. They need to take eight classes on average and as a result, they do not get interested to use extra teaching aids. Teachers could not take preparation for conducting classes using technology as they have a huge burden of classes and do not have any gaps between the classes (Ehsan, Ashrafuzzaman & Das, 2013).

This study found that teachers could not provide worksheets to all students as in Government primary school photocopy system was not available. Therefore, teachers did not make any worksheets for students rather they wrote the questions on the blackboard. Students copied the questions into their classwork copy and solved it. During the interview, teachers mentioned that they needed a photocopy machine urgently to make worksheets for such a large number of students. Similarly, Ehsan et al. (2013) found that when teachers tried to use flashcard in the English classroom it became insufficient for large class size.

B. Classroom Assessment in English

This study observed that teachers mainly used different types of questions from a textbook or similar to the textbook to assess students

writing skill. On the contrary, Rahman (2018) found that teacher did not assess students' classwork to measure their learning. Teachers preferred oral assessment more because of its validity. They argued, in oral assessment nobody can copy, whereas in written assessment there is scope to copy from others (Rahman et al., 2011).

In the primary level, students need to seat three times for written exams in an academic year. Ten types of questions were mentioned for these summative exams in the syllabus with the distributed marks of each question. These questions types are MCQ/ fill in the blank, true-false/matching, answering questions, rhyme/poem, word meaning, making sentences/table, rewriting using capital letters-punctuation marks, rearrange sentences, rewriting the correct form of a verb (5 individual sentences) and writing the textbook related paragraph.

During interview teachers told that their focus is on handwriting, properly writing letters in the sentences. Teachers mainly followed the textbook to assess students. Sometimes they also made similar questions but mostly used writing tasks according to the chapters of the book. Teachers used some common questions like fill in the blank with clue and without clue, matching tables, correct answer, question-answer, true-false, multiple choice, sentence making, sentence correction, answering questions from a given paragraph, word meaning, describing pictures, some short and common paragraph for instance, my mother, my family, my school etc.

One teacher SEIT5 said that actually in one class, *"I could not give more than one type of questions to assess the students as we have limited class time"*. Although teachers practised some questions to assess students writing skill, they did not teach how to answer or become skilled in answering those questions. Teachers write a paragraph on the board and students

copy it to memorize or write similar topics to enhance students' creative writing. However, this is not the right way to develop students' writing skills. In the same way, Rahman et al. (2011) found that teachers involved students writing the answers of the questions from the textbook, true or false statements and fill in the blanks as writing practice. Teachers never involved students in any creative writing.

B. Challenges in teaching English writing skill

Writing skills are the toughest linguistic skills because of the involvement of so many skills (literacy, cognitive, organization, vocabulary, etc.) into it and requires extra attention than other skills. Teachers faced various challenges in teaching writing skills at the primary level such as large classroom size, lack of resources, time shortage, achievement gap of the students, language barrier, and less support from parents or family support, etc.

Teachers brought out some crucial facts such as achievement gap one of the most challenging things to teach writing. Students' academic levels are so diverse for several reasons such as students' family is not supportive or caring at all sometimes, even many of their houses do not have a minimum environment to study, students do not study at home. All the teachers mentioned that maximum parents are not aware of their children's study and the home environment of the students are not friendly for study. So gradually, the achievement gap increases and students' academic level of English writing skills become so different which make teachers' job tougher. Several students fall behind their grade level. One teacher SCIT3 shared her experience, "It is common that many students repeat the same class multiple times but can't recognize English letters. Weak students are very challenging for us as we cannot give them extra

attention all the time due to the lack of time."

Maximum students of Government schools are from illiterate and poor family. Therefore, students' lack of basic knowledge in English and lack of English speaking environment creates a barrier in English classes (Ehsan et al., 2013). Babu, Ashrafuzzaman, Begum and Hossain (2014) found that family could not provide the required books and resources adequately so the students had to suffer.

Many students do not submit class task or home task so tracking them regularly and giving individual feedback or paying extra attention etc. are very difficult for teachers when class size is big. Four teachers mentioned that they had to check many copies in the class within a very short time. Therefore, it is not possible for them to check everyone's copy, and weak students take this advantage. They do not submit class tasks and homework regularly. One teacher SAIT1 added that "some students are irregular in class and they come to school after 2/3 days. Therefore, they cannot catch the lesson and achievement gap increases".

Similarly, other researchers found that most of the class size is large where teachers have to teach about 80 students in a section. It is tough for one teacher to maintain a large class size for 40/45 minutes (Ehsan et al., 2013; Kabir, 2015).

Lack of adequate English teachers in the schools is also concerning matter for which teachers of other subjects have to take the English classes but they do not have in-depth knowledge and training in English (Milon, 2016). This study reveals that teachers English knowledge and skill was not good enough to perform teaching-learning appropriately.

One teacher SBIT2 told that "*Her English skills are not very rich and students also don't understand English. Therefore, she doesn't give instructions in English in the*

class". The finding is similar to other researchers that teachers use Bangla as a medium of instruction and helping students to understand English (Kabir, 2015; Babu et al., 2014; Salahuddin et al., 2013). On the contrary, Ehsan et al. (2013) found that teachers were conducting English classes in English. Based on the findings and discussion of the study it can be said that teachers' classroom practice to develop students' English writing skill is not appropriate. Students of government primary school have not still reached at the expected level in their English writing skill (Hasan et al., 2016) due to lack of creative writing practice in English classrooms, teachers less attention towards students writing skill, focusing on memorizing paragraphs rather than teaching students how to write appropriately, insufficient use of teaching materials and absence of formative assessment in the classroom. Teachers showed multiple common barriers like extra workload, unavailability of teaching aids, large class size etc. this study also explored some crucial challenges like students family environment and support, lack of consciousness of writing skills works as a barrier to develop students writing skills at primary level.

Teachers need to execute different interactivities activities for making an English writing class more interactive instead of the rule-based and traditional approach. Effective teaching techniques like group work, pair work, crosschecking of each other copy, etc. effective must be used to develop students writing skill to a maximum level and manage a large classroom. Although it is tough to check every student's copies and give them individual feedback based on their needs for a large classroom, teachers can do a regular assessment and provide feedback in a weekly basis to minimize this issue. The government need to take steps in providing necessary creative teaching aids (Flashcards for

letters, words; visuals, manipulative etc.) to the teachers and encourage teachers to use those materials regularly. The school authority and other stakeholders should come forward to create an awareness among the parents of primary students to create an English learning-friendly environment at home. Finally, teachers need to understand that the English writing skill should be given importance in teaching English at primary level so that the students can reduce the number of errors in their writing and can become a creative writer in the future.

■ CONCLUSION

As English is a foreign language for the people of Bangladesh, students of our country find it a complex task in their education. Writing is a very important component of language and needs to be developed by applying different effective teaching-learning strategies, structured formative assessment and providing regular feedback properly to every student. It is a matter of great sorrow that the effective teaching-learning practice for developing students writing skill is still far away, especially in Government Primary schools of Bangladesh. Teachers' inappropriate classroom practice and some challenges impact students writing skill development. Government and non-government organizations should take proper initiative to improve the quality of teaching English in primary schools of Bangladesh. Special attention should be given towards students writing skill of English because it opens the door of further learning which will help our country to survive in the long run. The finding of this study suggests that by improving teacher's teaching-learning approach, necessary changes can be brought at the primary level. Furthermore, to reduce the challenges of teachers and policymakers, this study can be a point of reference.

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