# Teachers' Classroom Practices and Their Impact on Student's English Writing Skills: A Qualitative Study of Three Schools in a Small Town in Bangladesh

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Bachelors of Arts in English

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# Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.

2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.

3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.

4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

**Student's Full Name & Signature:**

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# Approval

The thesis titled "Teachers' Classroom Practices and Their Impact on Student's English Writing Skills: A Qualitative Study of Three Schools in a Small Town in Bangladesh" submitted by
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of Spring, 2019 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of B.A. in English on 24th of April, 2019.

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## Ethics Statement

This paper is my real research work and during the research I have tried to maintain the privacy issue of the participants. I did not expose the real name of the places and participants as they did not permit me to publish their names. I have used pseudonym to keep the privacy of the participants. During this study, no one was forced to participate. Permission was taken from all the participants.

# Abstract

Writing is one of the skills to judge a person's language competence. English is now the global language and also it is a medium to get success in various fields; such as in job market, higher education, communication, research and trade. At the high stake examination in Bangladesh, students are judged by their exam scripts and as a result students' writing skills are very important for their future study and career. This study, qualitative in nature, explored English teachers' preference for teaching methodology and its impact on students' writing achievement in three schools. Data for this research collected through interviews, classroom observation, examining students' exam scripts and a surprise writing test. Participants are from three selected schools from a small town in Bangladesh. Results show that teachers' preference for teaching methods impacted students' writing attainment. Apart from teaching methods there are other factors, for example exam questions also impacted students' writing skills. When writing topics in the exam are easily predictable, students prefer to memorize than writing from their own imagination. Finally this study suggested some recommendation that may help developing students' writing skills in rural and sub- urban areas in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** writing styles, impact of old way of teaching on writing styles, schools in small towns.

# Dedication

*This paper is dedicated to my beloved father who has always supported me in every ups and downs and my mother who taught me to read and write and always been the best teacher. Their endless sacrifices, love and support has always been a source of inspiration to me.*

# Acknowledgment

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

The education system in Bangladesh is divided into three main stages: primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Primary education is designed for five years. Secondary education is designed for seven years which is subdivided into three stages; junior secondary (Class VI-VIII), secondary (Class IX-X) and higher secondary (Class XI-XII). According to the Article 17 of the Bangladesh Constitution, all children have the right to get full free education up to secondary level (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliament affairs, 2010).

The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) are responsible for conducting the two public examinations: Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE) and Junior School Certificate (JSC). The secondary level of education is controlled by the eight General Education boards: Barisal, Chittagong, Comilla, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Jessore, Rajshahi, and Sylhet. These educational boards are responsible for conducting the two public examinations: Secondary School Certificate (SSC, 10th grade) and Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC, 12th grade).

There are also private English Medium schools which follow the General Certificate of Education (GCE) syllabus where students are prepared for taking their Ordinary Level (O Levels) and Advanced Level (A Level) examinations. Madrasah education system focuses on religious education. Tertiary education is higher level of education which consists of public universities, medical colleges and they are regulated by the University Grant Commission. Colleges which provide tertiary education are under the National University. Private universities are also providing higher studies.

English is taught in Bangladesh from primary level to tertiary level. Students learn it as a mandatory subject. For university admission, for job sector, for government jobs besides other subjects, marks are also allocated for English. The books of higher education are written in English. A student learns English for about 12-16 years but still majority of the students cannot fluently speak or write in English.

Writing is one of the four skills of language learning. It reflects the capability to express the feelings of an individual and it is a medium of communication too. Writing is considered as a productive skill and useful tool for learning process. It is the most used skill in evaluating students' performance in almost all levels of education in Bangladesh (Afrin, 2016).

English has become the global language and good writing skill in English is now considered as a pillar to get success in every field, like education, research, job, higher education and so on. In Bangla medium schools writing gets more priority as in board exams students are evaluated based on their written examination. At school level students study English as a subject from class one to class ten. For ten years they are taught English but still their English writing is often found not satisfactory.

There are several studies on the writing problems in English faced by the tertiary level students in Bangladesh, but there are few studies on the English writing problems faced by the students of secondary level Bangla medium schools of small towns in Bangladesh. For example, Afrin (2016) talked about the writing problems of non-English major undergraduate students in Bangladesh. Mustaque (2014), talked about the writing problems among the tertiary level students in Chittagong Region of Bangladesh. Hasan and Akhand (2010) had conducted their research on balancing product and process in writing class at tertiary level. However none of them can be said as in depth study. Furthermore there is hardly any study that investigated the matter qualitatively. This study aims to fill this gap.

The main purpose of my study is to explore how teaching method is affecting the English writing achievements of the students of secondary level Bangla medium schools located in small towns.

Small towns are not so developed like big cities but they are not so undeveloped like rural areas. These small towns are mainly sub-rural areas. Every year thousands of students from these small towns which are known as 'Mafosshol Shohor' complete their secondary and higher secondary education and sit for admission tests for universities, engineering colleges and for medical colleges. These admission tests are mainly written test.

They face problems in writing and speaking in English. Whenever they need to write anything in English including a formal letter or application in English most of them ask for samples. When they come for higher education they have to compete with the students from different background. They have to compete with students from English medium background or from other reputed schools and they can feel that they are lagged behind as they are weak in English.

# Chapter 2

## Context

The participants of this study are from small towns and in this chapter, I have tried to give a brief description of the area where the selected schools are located. Small towns are not so developed like Dhaka city or other cities but not so undeveloped like rural areas. Bangladesh has more towns than cities. Bijoy-Nogor is a small district located in the northern part of Bangladesh. The district is divided into 11 upazilas.

In the upazilas, most of the people are farmers. The main crops are paddy, jute, wheat, maize, sugar cane, potatoes, pulses, oil seeds, onions, and garlic. This area is also famous for mango. This district has the highest number of rice mills than any other district. In the main town, people of various occupations such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, shopkeepers, businessmen, rickshaw puller, day labor live harmoniously. In the whole district, there are 20 colleges, 9 madrasas and 74 secondary schools. All of them are Bangla Medium Schools. The concept of English medium school is not so popular in this district. English medium schools are expensive. In this district majority of the population directly or indirectly depends on agriculture, so the poor people cannot afford English medium schools and that is why hardly any English medium school is found here.

In the main town, the economic condition of the people is average and the business of clothes, furniture, gold, silver etc. is very popular here. Most of the people are middle class and lower middle class. The number of higher class or higher middle class is very low. Students from all social classes read in same schools which are located in the main town. In one classroom, children of teachers, lawyers, doctors, labors, clerks study together. In the Upazillas and Thanas, the quality of education is poorer than the main town. Students from the schools of

Upazillas and Thanas are not so up to date. Majority of them are afraid of English and they rely on memorization to get marks. People of these places mainly depend on agriculture and small business; like tea stall, stationary shops, confectionary etc.

Apart from attending schools, students depend on coaching centers and home tutors. Parents, who can afford, keep 2-3 tutors for all the subjects. Senior students who are studying in Honors or Bachelors level in National University, usually work as home tutors. The home tutors are not proficient in English and they use guide books and solution books to teach the students. The students do not get chance to get access to English language. They study English as an 'isolated subject' just to get marks in examination.

Another big issue in the Bengali medium schools of small towns is that teachers, in most cases, are not qualified enough. Majority of the teachers complete their Graduation and Post-Graduation from National University. National University was established by an act of parliament as an affiliating university of the country to provide graduate and post-graduate level education to the students. Affiliated collages and professional institutions located in all over the country is used for this purpose. The head-quarter is located in Gazipur and most of the colleges under National University has some common problems; for example, poor attendance of the students, lacking of good teachers, lacking of classroom facilities etc. Their textbooks are written in Bangla except the text books of English Department. That is why their writing and speaking skill in English is often not so good. Even the students of English department sometimes struggle to speak and write in English. They memorize the answers from guide books to pass exams.

Most of these the schools have lacking of English teachers, so, often they have to appoint other teachers as proxy to take classes who do not have completed their graduation in English. The

researcher met a teacher who did his graduation and post-graduation in Philosophy but still he takes English classes of class nine and ten.

In spite of these issues, every year a huge number of students get admission in public universities and medical colleges. Many of the students also study in well- known private universities in Dhaka. Majority of the students face problem in English speaking and writing as they do not get much facilities in their schools.

The next chapter, I will review some of the literature related to this study. For this, I extensively searched various database including Jstore and Google Scholar, and various journals and thesis repository of various universities.

# Chapter 3

# Literature Review

In this chapter, I will review some of the literature related to this study. I explored literature related approaches to teach ESL writing, reasons to follow the traditional method or Grammar-Translation method in the selected schools, importance of learning writing, and teacher's role in teaching writing. One of the aim of this chapter is to establish the rationale of my study and to show how my study will contribute in the existing literature.

## 3.1 Approaches to teaching ESL Writing

There are some approaches to teach second language writing. The most important difference between teaching L1 and L2 writing is mastery of the language of expression (Scott, 1996). Raimes (1983) discusses six different approaches to teaching ESL writing. The Controlled to-Free Approach is an approach which focuses on grammar, syntax, and mechanics. In Free writing Approach, teachers give priority on quantity of writing rather than the quality with minimal error correction. Pattern- Paragraph Approach is applied to teach the students organizing paragraphs, putting scrambled sentences into order, identifying topic sentences. In The Grammar- Syntax Organization Approach focuses on the grammatical and syntactical errors. The Communicative Approach is an approach where students are engaged in real life tasks, such as formal and informal letters. In Process Approach, rather than focusing on the final production, the teachers focuses on the process of writing, e.g. draft, feedback, self-correction etc. (Scott, 1996).

Nordin (2017) talks about three approaches of teaching writing; students using the product approach are normally told to write an essay imitating a given pattern. Generally the focus of such writing is on the written product rather than on how the learner should approach the process of writing. The process approaches focus on how a text is written instead of the final

outcome. The teacher in a process-approach classroom becomes the facilitator. Like the product approach, the genre approach views writing as predominantly linguistic. It places a greater emphasis on the social context in which writing is produced.

## 3.2 Principles of Teaching Writing

The teacher can give guidelines for helping the students to write effectively. A teacher needs to take care of many issues while teaching writing. He/she needs to select materials, check drafts, avoid culturally sensitive issues etc. Teachers need to change their teaching style according to the needs of the student. In this present era, writing is considered as one of the major skills for communication, getting jobs and other opportunities. Writing is now not only considered as a skill to get good marks or good jobs but it is also a scale to measure a person's ability to express, communicate and to present an idea. So, teaching writing has now a great significance. Writing is no longer relegated to second place and it is given its own status in the ELT course (White, 2017).

Writing is a composting process and the teachers should maintain a flow between the processes to reach to the final product so that the students can watch their progress step by step. If there are some apparent contrasts between student's native traditions, then the teacher should try to explain this to the students. Letters, advertisements, resume etc. can be shown as samples. Brainstorming can be a way to generate open minded ideas. The drafting and revising stages are the core of process writing. Each genre of writing has its formal properties. A teacher needs to explain them to the students. (Brown and Lee, 2015, p. 442).

Teachers need to follow some steps according to the time limit for course, needs of the students and with the available materials. In the process of writing, students are guided by specific steps to continue their participation (Zhang, 2019). For example, Seviour (2015) describes the teaching steps of a six-week writing class: process the writing materials independently; draft

writing plan; submit the final drafts of writing plans (teacher's assessment on the final plan 15%); write and edit the first draft of the paper (formative assessment and defense, 15%); submit the second draft according to the feedback; teachers evaluate the final paper (70%).

Teaching writing not only requires to show samples to the students and ask them to write several drafts; but it also demands some further steps taken by a teacher. A teacher needs to understand the nature of texts, cognitive processes, learner, participants, and learning contexts (Kaplan, 2003).

## 3.3 Teachers' role in teaching writing

A teacher has to play several roles while teaching language skills. A teacher is an instructor and he/she has to guide or instruct the students. Learning to write is generally conceived of as highly dependent on formal teaching. Popular wisdom and linguistic textbooks usually contrast the natural acquisition of spoken language with the learning of written language (reading and writing), which requires specific instruction (Tolchinsky, L., & Jisa, H. 2018).

Breen and Candlin (as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 1986) described teacher roles in the following terms: The teacher has two main roles: the first role is to facilitate the communication between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group (p. 77).

Some of the roles are explained below; but most of them are not found in small towns of Bangladesh. According to Harmer (2007), a teacher needs to play three roles while teaching writing. Sometimes the teacher needs to be a motivator, a good teacher always motivates his/her students. The teacher must encourage the students to practice. Even if the students make mistakes again and again but the teacher should motivate them to write by their own.

Sometimes a teacher needs to act as a resource. The teacher must tell the students where they can find information. Teachers can help to develop the ideas. The teacher can help the students to find data and guide the students how to use those data and information in their writing.

Giving feedback is one of the major task that a teacher has to perform. A teacher has to maintain the role of a feedback provider. Giving feedback on writing items needs special care or feedback. The teachers should find out where the student makes mistake or in which section he/she needs to improve.

## 3.4 Importance of Learning Writing

Learning writing is not only so important to get good marks in examination but it is such a skill that is needed for a long term benefit. Writing reflects ideas of a person and it also shows the capability to express the thoughts and creativity of a person. Thinking is so closely linked to writing, at least in mature adults, that the two are practically twins. Individuals who write well are seen as substantive thinkers (Kellogg, 2008).

Learning writing is also important for communication and writing is also important for transmitting information. According to Graham & Harris (2013), writing is an indispensable tool for learning and communication. We use writing as a medium to gather, preserve, and transmit information. Writing about what we are learning helps understand and remember it better.

Reading and writing has some connections. Students can understand better the reading materials if they write about it. As with writing about concepts presented in science or other content classes, writing about material read provides students with a tool for visibly and permanently recording, analyzing, connecting, personalizing, and manipulating key ideas from text. This has a strong impact on making text read more memorable and understandable (Graham & Herbert, 2010, 2011).

## 3.5 Practicing Traditional Method or Grammar- Translation Method in Small Towns

Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is an old method used in language teaching. It is also known as the Classical or Traditional Method. Though it is a very old method; still now it used in many countries. At present, Bangladesh follows communicative approach to teach English. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for teaching English was first introduced in the secondary and higher secondary levels of Bangladesh in the 1990s by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board keeping the notion of developing communicative competence in the global context (Binoy, Sultana, & Basu, 2007). In Bangladesh, English is taught as a compulsory subject (English Part I & II) included in the syllabi of Secondary School Certificate and Higher Secondary School Certificate examinations (Secondary Curriculum, 2016; Higher Secondary Curriculum, 2016). The Bangladesh National Curriculum, 2012, emphasized communicative use of English and put much emphasis on using English in real-life situations. A classroom can be more interesting and fruitful if the teachers use their own techniques to teach the students. To develop communicative competence, a learner must develop reading, writing, speaking and listening ability. In Bangladeshi context, practicing listening skill is very challenging as most of the schools do not have listening labs. Almost in every schools, reading gets priority. But many of the student struggles if they are asked give a sudden speech on a particular topic or write something creative or their own thoughts.

Though Communicative Language Teaching is now compulsory in Bangladesh, still in many schools in undeveloped areas Grammar- Translation Method is the most preferred method to teach English. In Grammar-Translation Method, classes are taken in mother tongue and vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words. Reading of difficult classical texts is begin early. Long, elaborated explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given. Grammar

provides the rules for putting words together, and instructions often focuses on the form and inflections of words. Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis. Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue. Little or no attention is given to pronunciation (Brown 2000). Frager (1984), mentions Hafner's (1977) suggestion that an unsympathetic teacher who only marks the error on the paper of a student who has written *indignant* instead of *malignant* has missed a golden opportunity to introduce that student to the delights of malapropism. With tact a sympathetic teacher might make that student feel good about trying to use a new word and at the same time help the student laugh at his or her mistake. This goes with Bangladeshi style of teaching. For example, if a student is told to make sentences with any particular given word, he has to strictly follow the rules of sentence construction and if he tries to write something by his own and makes a mistake; usually the teacher mark it as a "mistake" and do not appreciate him for his effort and made him realize that taking an attempt is not a negative thing.

Though Bangladesh now follows Communicative Language Teaching Method, but still because of some issues in small towns Grammar-Translation Method is still followed. In a communicative classroom, participation and interaction between the teachers and the students is a must but usually in Bangladesh, especially in Bangla Medium schools students are shy and they remain silent and only take class notes. Communicative language teaching requires active participants in classrooms but Bangladeshi students are traditionally shy and passive (Biswas et al, 2013).

Exam has a significant role in the education system of Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the students have to sit for board exams so the schools follow product oriented syllabus. In classroom activities, there is hardly any scope for improving the quality of writing. In product oriented syllabus, the learning outcome has more importance; in process oriented syllabus learning

process and learners gets priority (Nunan, 1988, p. 27-40). Majority of the Bangla medium schools follows product oriented syllabus. In board exams like, JSC (Junior School Certificate Examination), SSC (Secondary School Certificate Examination), HSC (Higher Secondary School Certificate Examination), there is a fixed syllabus. Teachers rush to finish the syllabus.

Another big issue is that there are too many students in one class. As a result, the teachers cannot give much time to every student. Classroom activities cannot be conducted properly. An ideal CLT classroom should consist of 25-30 students. More than 30 will create problems to conduct a CLT classroom successfully. In Bangladesh, in one classroom 80-100 students are found and there is shortage of classrooms and teachers. Teachers cannot make pairs and groups as these make the classroom noisy and also hampers the neighboring classes (Tarannum 2010, p. 145).

The next chapter will discuss the methodology of this research. In the Methodology I have talked about research methodology, data collection, data analysis, participants of the study and how the ethicality of this research is addressed.

# Chapter 4

# Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the readers with an insight about the methodologies adopted to conduct this research. This chapter discusses the procedure of collecting data, participants of the study, purpose of the study, problems that I faced while collecting the data. I have come up with some research questions to indicate the problems and used the research questions as a guide to conduct the research. Following are the research questions that guide this research:

1. What are the English teachers' approaches to teach writings in the secondary level Bangla medium schools in small towns?
2. How do teaching methods of these teachers affect their students' writing development?

This research mainly focuses on English language teaching in Bangla medium secondary schools. So, I approached to the secondary school teachers and students. I had to understand their point of view, expectations and barriers. During the interview, I felt that they were little uncomfortable. Some of them were hesitated to talk openly about their schools. So, I had to warm them up. I asked them about themselves and informed them about my research. I designed interview question with the aim of exploring the present scenario of teaching and learning and the barriers. They shared their experience and comments.

## 4.1 Research method

The researcher has followed a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to

general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher has focused on primary resources and has tried to make connections between every piece of information from the interviews and classroom observation. The researcher has adapted Thematic Analysis for completing data analysis. Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information. There are list of themes in thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998).

Terry, Hayfield, Clarke and Braun (2017), said that TA (Thematic analysis) as a 'named and claimed' method has gained hugely in popularity and has entered the qualitative cannon as a recognizable and reputed method of analysis. I have tried to come up with some themes based on the interviews and classroom observation for data analysis.

Nowadays almost all aspects of everyday life can be qualitative research topics and for a thematic classification, an orientation towards central types of qualitative research is helpful (Krüger, 2010). We can study social science, educational fields, international- relation etc. in qualitative method.

## 4.2 Data Collection

Data were collected through interviews with teachers, students, observing classrooms, checking homework scripts and at last I took a surprise class test. I prepared a set of questions for the teachers and the students. I asked some follow up questions for getting clarification of their answers. I preferred open ended questions and survey components are avoided as the research is qualitative in nature. There were some straight-forward questions too. I have listened to their real life stories to find out subjective data. As this study is a primary research, I focused on the participant's answers and their stories. I have used these information as data to give shape to final data analysis. Qualitative research demands more interpretation of the

researcher. In a qualitative approach, the researcher needs to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of participants (Creswell, 2014, p. 19).

Taking one interview was not enough to collect data. So I had to visit the place several times and I had to repeat some questions again as I had a gut feeling that the participants were either little nervous or they were in rush to go home. They requested me not to use their real names as the authority might create a problem if they publish something negative about the authority. So, I used pseudonym for the participants so that their identities are not revealed. I could take the cell phone number of one teacher and I called him whenever I need help.

The interview was not strictly structured and it was flexible. There were sets of questions both for students and teachers. During the tiffin period I took the interview of the students at the absence of the teachers so that they can feel comfortable and not feel hesitate to talk. The students were also asked to share their problems freely and they also made comments. I talked to the teachers in the common office room for the teachers.

I personally checked some old homework scripts of the students so that I can find out the problems that the students face in writing. I asked them to show their paragraphs and composition writing. I decided to take a surprise class test so that I can check the students' capability to write in an instant or sudden test. I observed three classrooms. I observed classrooms of class six, class seven and class nine. I tried to notice how the teacher is conducting the class, what type of techniques or methods he/she is applying and the activity and response of the students. At the end of the class I took extra 15 minutes and asked them to write a short story or paragraph.

## 4.3 Selection of the Participants

The students who took part in the interview, were 11 to 16 years old. In the schools I took group interviews of 12 students from class six to class ten. I have already mentioned that in the

selected schools, students from different social classes study together. They have different attitude. The teachers who took part in this study has been teaching for several years. Their age range is from 25-35. All the participants requested me not to expose their real names. So, I used fake names but the information about them are real.

The following table shows information related to the teachers who participated:

| No. | Name | Age | Gender | Years of experience | Academic background |
|-----|------|-----|--------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Kabir | 35 | Male | 11 | B.A and M.A in Sociology |
| 2 | Shohel | 28 | Male | 4 | M.A in English |
| 3 | Ratul | 31 | Male | 7 | M.A in English |
| 4 | Tuli | 25 | female | 1 | M.A in English |

The following table shows information related to the students who participated:

| No. | Name | Age | Gender | Class |
|-----|------|-----|--------|-------|
| 1 | Rafi | 16 | Male | 10 |
| 2 | Sohan | 16 | Male | 10 |
| 3 | Hasin | 16 | Male | 10 |
| 4 | Soha | 15 | Female | 9 |
| 5 | Rafa | 14 | Female | 9 |
| 6 | Maisha | 13 | Female | 7 |
| 7 | Rownak | 11 | Female | 6 |
| 8 | Nishi | 14 | Female | 8 |

| 9 | Rajib | 13 | Male | 8 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 10 | Tutul | 12 | Male | 6 |
| 11 | Sadia | 15 | Female | 9 |
| 12 | Saba | 13 | Female | 7 |

## 4.4 Instruments

I asked 19 questions to the teachers and 10 questions to the students. I designed open ended questions where they can share their opinions. I also kept few close ended questions to get more information. Besides I had to ask follow up questions for further clarification. I tried to explore the phenomena in details. I intended to record the interview but they were not comfortable with that. I also observed three classes and wanted to video record but the teachers did not allow as it could distract the students. So, I had to take hand notes and sometimes I had to note down the key points.

## 4.5 Data Collection Procedure

Interview and observation were the main way for data collection. I already maintained that for getting more details I had to check homework scripts and I also took a surprise test. For data collection I followed John W. Creswell's two book *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* and *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* as guidelines. Creswell (2012), talks about five process steps in collecting data. The process of collecting qualitative data follows steps similar to those in quantitative data collection. The researcher selects participants and sites, gains permission to conduct the study, decides on the types of data to collect, develops means for recording information, and administers the data collection, while anticipating field issues and ethical concerns (Creswell 2012, p. 233). I selected participants

and took required permissions. I intended to record the interview and classroom activities but the participants were not comfortable with that and they did not agree. I also felt that they can talk more freely if I take hand notes. I also maintained the ethical issues and did not publish their original names.

Creswell talks about natural setting of the study, qualitative observation and interview. In qualitative interviews, the researcher conducts face-to-face interview with the participants, telephone interviews, or takes group interviews. These interviews involve unstructured and open ended questions and intend to elicit views and opinions from the participants. In qualitative observation, the researcher takes field notes and tries to explore the views of the participants by observing their regular activities (Creswell, 2014, p. 190). Qualitative documents such as personal letters, records, e-mails etc. can be source of data. I also checked class works homework of the students.

## 4.6 Data Analysis Procedure

To analysis data, I followed Creswell's book *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* From this book, I adopted Creswell's six steps in the process of analyzing and interpreting qualitative data (2012, 261-262) mentioned in chapter eight. To follow these six steps, at first I organized all the data that I collected, then I started explore and code it. Then I gathered the codes to find the broader themes.

Qualitative research is interpretive research, and the researcher will need to make sense of the findings (Creswell, 2012, p. 257). While analyzing the collected data, whenever I felt that there is a confusion, I had to talk to the participants for more details or clarifications. I could not met them personally again and again so, I contacted some of them through phone call. I wrote down important key points in my diary during the interviews and classroom observation. Whenever I got a new or important fact, then I had to check the previous information and had to make

connection between every piece of information. I tried to show my interpretation after studying the stories, experience, suggestions and complains of the participants.

## 4.7 Obstacles

I had to complete the research within a short period of time. That is why I collected data from only three schools and could not take interview of too many people. So, the research has some limitations as on the basis of this limited amount of information we cannot get the whole picture of an area or a whole country. During the data collection I had to face some difficulties, such as the students and teachers were not so co-operative. Some of the students were afraid to share the negative sides of their schools and teachers. Some students were asking whether I am going to publish their names or not. While taking the interviews of the teachers, some of them were not taking the interview seriously. I had a feeling that they were not giving the full information. While taking the surprise class test, most of the students were in rush to leave the class room. I had to convince them to write.

## 4.8 Ethical Considerations

The name of the participants and the name of the educational institutions are not published as they were not comfortable with that and before taking the interviews and class room observation the researcher took permission from the participants. During the classroom activities, the researcher did not interrupt their regular activities.

# Chapter 5

# Finding

This chapter starts with narrative of three participating teachers. I have tried to portrait their teaching, classroom activities, day to day practices, and how they attempt to teach writing in the classroom.

## Shohel's Class:

Shohel has been teaching in a Bangla medium school for four year. His experience of teaching is not so long. When I asked him about communicative language teaching, he replied that he knows about it and he also wants to apply it in his class. However, he faces lots of barriers to implement in his class. He also informed me that because of the exam pressure students prefer to memorize than writing from their own creativity.

Regarding the barrier he stated that although they have a computer lab but the number of the computers are not sufficient for the increasing numbers of students. Moreover, they do not have strong internet connection. Another problem is if he tries to make his classroom more interactive and encourages his students to talk, the guardians and other senior teachers complain that he is lazy and waste his time in 'gossiping' with the students. During his first days in the school, he tried to make the classroom interactive and give group task. But other senior teachers criticized him and the guardians care about the grades of their children. So now he takes his class in 'traditional method'. Now he delivers lecture and prepare the students for terminal and final exams.

I observed his class Nine English class. At first he checked the homework that he gave in the previous class. He did not give any overall feedback or any individual feedback. He just checked whether the answers were right or wrong. He put red crosses on wrong answers rather than writing comments. More than forty students were present on that day but he checked only

five to seven scripts. He started the class with a new lesson. He was reading out lines from the text and asked the students to read aloud with him. He started with the chapter titled 'Nepal, the land of Everest'. The teacher was in rush and he did not allow anyone to participate. Then he discussed what types of questions or items may appear in the exam. Then he asked them to open the text book to practice some open ended questions from the model question section of the book. Shohel was conducting the class in Bangla. He did not allow the students to talk. He was asking them to memorize the answers for the next class.

Throughout his class I could not see any activities where he asked students to think critically or asking them write something from their imagination. Rather he is giving homework where students need to memorize. It appears that he does not encourage his students to develop their writing skills or critical thinking skills.

## Kabir's Class:

Kabir has been teaching for eleven years. I was quite surprised when he said that he had B.A. and M.A. degree on Sociology but working as an English teacher. He also teaches students at his home. He said that there is shortage of teachers in his school. He has been teaching for a long time that is why he has a good knowledge about the syllabus. When I asked him about group activity, creative writing, inspiring students, he replied,

> "I know how to teach. Group activity is a wastage of time. If I do so the students will only gossip. Moreover, the seating arrangement is not perfect for performing group task. So, solving taste paper is the best way for practicing."

He informed me that he is a strict teacher. When he was young, he was very friendly to his students but after teaching for so many years he realized that students only care for marks. Even the guardians like strict teachers who can control the students.

I also observed one of his classes where he was teaching English to Class VII students. He was teaching paragraph writing. Forty seven students were present at his class. Although he was speaking in Bangla he used English sometimes. His English was not so good and he was making grammatical mistakes when he tried to speak in English. He was teaching "My Homeland". He asked the students to open the book and read the paragraph. He also said that they students can write about their town, village etc. if they can learn this paragraph. He asked her students about their ideas on writing a paragraph on a place. He asked what kind of information can added in the paragraph "My Country". He asked them to follow the book. He also suggested some other books from where they can memorize the paragraph.

Kabir's class is again a typical class where there is hardly any imaginative or creative writing activities are practiced or encouraged. Teachers suggested to memorize or suggested what topics are important for the examination. Developing students' English skills and particularly writing skills are less important as the ultimate goal is to achieve good marks in the examination.

## Tuli's Class:

Tuli a secondary English teacher allowed me to observe her English class. The duration of her class was forty minutes. She told me that that she will teach the essay "Natural Calamities of Bangladesh". She was reading aloud from the book and said that there are many more books from where they can memorize and right. She did not teach how to write a topic sentence or how to write supporting sentences. She was focusing on the length of the essay. She said that they should write at least four pages to get good marks. Then she checked the homework. She also did not check all the scripts and she did not even find the mistakes she just put a tick mark. Towards the end of the class she had few more minutes, so she asked them to read the essay "Natural Calamities of Bangladesh" and write half of the essay without looking at the book. At

the end of the class she left and said that the rest of the essay would be finished in the next class. Her class again a typical class where creativity and developing students' writing skills are emphasized less and memorization seems encouraged more.

# Chapter 6

## Some Common Problems observed in the class

Subsequent analysis of the interview and observations data and checking some of the students writing scripts revealed some problems associated with students' writing development. In this section I will highlight some of these.

Organizing introduction, body paragraph and conclusion seems one of the major problems of the students. Most of the students do not have a clear idea about how to organize the ideas in their writing. They just write and fill pages to get good marks. Some of them even do not use paras to organize ideas. Their idea of developing introduction, body paragraph, and conclusion is not clear to them. Some of the reasons can be attributed to teacher's inability to discuss in the class. In most cases students write from their memorization and for that they are not required to think about this organizational skills.

Ideally it is prescribed that one idea should be presented in one paragraph but it is observed that they hardly make any paragraphs and majority of them do not maintain any sequence. Most of the students write too many concepts in one paragraph. For example, I checked a student's homework script. He wrote an essay on 'A Journey by Boat'. He did not make paras. He was supposed to write about his experience but he wrote pages after pages about his friends and family. The ideas were not organized in any sequence. In one para he wrote that 'It was a beautiful day'. Then suddenly in the same para he wrote, 'My friend Jamal is a good singer. He can sing well. He is very talented. I like to listen to his songs. He sang a song. The song was amazing. I cannot forget it.' The student suddenly starts to write about his friend rather than describing the beauty of the day of their journey. When I asked him why he suddenly wrote about his friend then he replied, "My teacher told me that we have to write minimum

400 words for an essay but we can get good marks if we write more. Nobody bothers about organizing ideas or writing in paras".

I checked another old homework. The tittle was "A Journey by Boat." I checked six scripts and saw similar kinds of mistakes or problems in their writing. For example, almost all of them used the starting sentence, 'A journey by boat is a great experience' or "A journey by boat always gives us pleasure". I found that their writing is very artificial. Either they memorize line by line from books or copy from their friend's script.

I also noticed that they use too much compound sentences. For example, one student wrote, 'We had a lot of fun and it was the most memorable day of my life and I will never forget this day'.

In order to see students' sample writings I asked to write students of class seven, a paragraph on 'My first school memories'. I selected an easy topic so that all of them could write and did not feel that I gave a tough topic to prove that they are bad students. I asked them to write in their own words.

After 15 minutes I collected the scripts. I brought the scripts at home so that I can get enough time to check. Though I asked them to write their real life experience but still I saw that they wrote artificial things. Majority of the students write that 'the first day of their school was very good. They were excited. The teachers were nice, classmates were friendly. They made many friends'.

I found mistakes in their application of present perfect tense and past perfect tense. They were confused to use these two tense. Another problem that I found that at one sentence they used present tense and in the next line they use past tense. There were also some minor mistakes in articles, conjunctions and organizing ideas. The body paragraphs and conclusions are not so organized. For the students of class nine, I asked them to write a story. As they were senior

students in high school level that is why I decided to check their creative writing skills. I gave them few lines from a story and asked them to complete it and gave a suitable tittle for it. When I checked the scripts I found that most of the students wrote same tittle, may be they just copied from their friends. In their scripts I also found the same things; confusion and mistakes in using tense and articles. I also found that they did not make paras and it was not well organized.

Most of the teachers agreed that the students are bad at creative writing as they make mistakes in sentence formation and most of the student has poor vocabulary. The students are not willing to read vocabulary as they have to memorize it. The students can develop ideas by their own but because of poor vocabulary, they cannot express it correctly in the second language.

Few students said they try to learn new words but most of the students said they do not think that learning vocabulary is important. Somehow they manage to write with easy words. A student told me, "Why should I work hard on vocabulary? Is there any extra benefit of it? At the end of the day, we somehow get marks, right?"

Repeating same topics in the syllabus is another problem. For example, writing paragraph on 'Natural Calamities of Bangladesh' is taught from class 6-10. A student told me, "For essay, paragraph, application or letter writing; there are some common topics which are taught from class 6-10. So, we do not need to work very hard. We learn it once and use it for a long time. So, I do not think that I need to learn new words or waste time for reading or writing English".

Teachers informed that students make spelling mistakes if the word in too long. For example, most of the students make spelling mistake in words like 'Mymensingh', 'Psychology'. Almost all the students agreed that they can generate new ideas but whenever they start to write they cannot think it in English and they try to translate from Bangla to English in their mind which is time consuming and they become confused. A student told me,

"I can write thousands of pages in Bangla but the same thing I cannot write in English. I try to translate from Bangla to English while writing in the exam scripts. Then I become so confused that I just try to fill pages. I repeat a same sentence in two different styles."

This chapter reveals some of the problems students face in their writing and I also tried to highlight and analyze the nature of the mistakes students make. In the next chapter I will try to explore some of the reasons of why students make that sort of mistakes and what are the barriers that stand against developing students' writing skills and developing their critical thinking.

# Chapter 7

## Traditional Method of Teaching and the Impacts of Exam

The interview and the class observation reveals that teachers prefer to teach in a traditional way and even though the curriculum emphasizes on communicative activities, teachers hardly uses these in their classroom. All of the teachers I interviewed admitted that their schools do not have enough facilities. They also think that exams have a huge impact on our education system and students are judged by grades. Most of the time the teachers have to take classes in traditional way as they do not have enough multimedia facilities, separate seats for the students, modern materials for teaching and enough time for classes.

All of the teachers said that they give lectures. They translate texts from English to Bangla so that students can get the meaning of the text. Since they do not have enough technological facilities, they have to deliver lectures. Kabir informed me that the government is now trying to provide multimedia facilities in every schools but it is not sufficient for huge number of students.

Several of the participating teachers informed me that although they have one or two multimedia projectors, they use it when visitors come. If they use is regularly then some of the guardians complain that they are wasting time in showing videos. Another problem is that there is lacking of proper maintenance of these multimedia projectors. So, they cannot use it regularly. Ratul in this regard stated that

> Government arranges training program for us. We have the knowledge of new methods of teaching. We try to apply these methods. But when it comes to practice, we have many issues that is why we mainly rely on giving lectures and old way of teaching.

The students also gave the same information. The teachers delivers lectures and translates the texts. Shohel stated that

> According to the rules, we have to follow the textbooks of NCTB but the students go to coaching centers and home tutors and they suggest guide/note books and test papers. They memorize answers and memorize essay, paragraph, letter writing. They use these note books as reading materials.

Tuli commented that

> The students follow guide books. Some of them even do not bring the main text book in the class. The guardians also expects us to follow note books for teaching. So, sometimes we have to follow these. In Bangladesh, guardians believe that if a teacher gives lectures then he is a good teacher and if a teacher wants to make a class interactive, they complains the teacher is wasting time. So, though we are supposed to follow CLT but we have to stick into old methods most of the time.

While taking the interview of the teachers, one of them said that, "the teachers are supposed to deliver lectures, right? Giving lectures help to remember things. There are many obstacles that we have to face. Then what else we can do except giving lectures?"

Almost all the teachers said that without knowing the grammatical rules one cannot write well. The students have good content but they are too much concerned about grammar and even that they often make mistakes in sentence formation. When I was observing the classrooms I noticed that while giving lectures the teachers are reading out the grammatical structures. They were giving very common examples rather than giving examples out of the text book. One teacher was saying that he would provide a handout in the next class on 'Transformation of Sentences', there would be the grammatical structures. The teacher was saying that if they can memorize those rules it would be helpful for them. When I asked him why he is providing

hand-made notes of structure instead to providing authentic samples and using multimedia to show videos, he replied. "We have multimedia facility in one class. Moreover, most of the time we do not get strong internet connection and majority of the students demands for notes. I know it is an old way of teaching but if there is shortage of multimedia facilities, number of classrooms, new seating arrangements, then what else we can do?"

From the interviews, it is also visible that most of the students are not willing to learn new words and they dislike the teachers who pressurize them to practice more. Moreover they do not ask questions in the class. All the teachers said their students do not want to write rather they find it easier to memorize what is important for the examination. Also writing from memorization than writing from one's own imagination are easier to get better marks in the examination. Especially students who are about to take participation in board exams like, SSC and JSC exams, they only want to get A+ grade and memorization plays a big role to secure highest GPA.

In the following chapter I will provide further discussion based on the data and where relevant I will also include my own analysis.

# Chapter 8

## Discussion

This chapters presents a critical discussion of the previous chapters which talk about the collected data from interviews and observation. I have tried to highlight the main areas of concern. This chapter also contains some recommendation.

While students in many cases can be blamed for not trying enough to develop their writing skills, to some extent teachers are also responsible. For example, most of the participating teachers use red pen to put cross mark in the script they check and hardly any comments or suggestions that will help students to improve their writings. When I observed the classrooms I found that in the homework scripts, the teachers put red crosses if there is a grammatical mistake, punctuation or spelling mistakes. Sometimes they directly write the correct answer with the red pen. The teachers do not give proper feedback. They do not write comments or suggestions. To improve writing, a student needs proper guidelines and feedback by the teachers. Ellis (2008)in his typology of written corrective feedback stated different types of feedback and my analysis show that teachers do not use any of them, thus it is a real concern how these teachers can help their students to develop their writing skills. A better approach would have been if the teacher could point out some of the mistakes and asks students to find other mistakes in their writings and write them again.

However there are other related factors that made it difficult to help students actively. As an example, Ratul, an experienced English teacher informed me that there are too many students in one class. So, it is quite impossible for one teacher to give feedback individually. In one class, there are minimum forty students. For a teacher it is very challenging to handle too many students and give them equal attention. For each class they get 40 minutes and in this short period of time with too many students, sometimes they cannot even finish the exam syllabus.

That is why the students keep home tutors to finish the syllabus. The students also give priority on the tutors. Most of the tutors are students of colleges under National University. Most of the tutors are not even from English Department. They are not professional and their English is not very sophisticated. Thus there is a lack of support for students in those areas both from school and at their home.

This study also revealed that although the school mentions the names of the books selected by the NCTB in their syllabus, but s students buy guidebooks with answer sheets. One of the participants of this study, Kabir said that the guardians want that their children to revise the syllabus for the terminal or board exams. He suggests that the guardians should change their attitude. He believes that it is not only a teacher's responsibility to educate a child; guardians have equal responsibilities towards the children. Most of the parents of that area are not so aware of the importance of their children's skill development. Rather they see the exam result as the only important things and they want that teachers should teach what is only important for the examination. Parents who can read and write sometimes help their children checking and matching with the guidebooks if their children memorized something.

There is a lack of enthusiasm about teaching in the participating teachers. They only take the classes as it is their duty. When I asked the teachers whether they take preparations before the class majority of the teachers replied that as they are teaching for a long time and the syllabus is fixed and they are familiar to the syllabus so they do not need any extra preparation for the class. They try to complete the chapters for the assigned classes. However this is a very small scale research and conducted within a very short amount of time. Thus it is not appropriate to generalize the result based on this small sample. What it appears that without having real passion and enthusiasms for teaching it is difficult to become a great teacher. Stronge (2018) also stated that in order to become an effective teacher a person needs to have real enthusiasm for teaching and needs to love his profession.

Sometimes the teachers encourage the students to write by their own. But unfortunately few teachers believe in this practice of creative writing or writing by own. I checked the feedbacks that the teachers provided to their students. The teachers rebuke the students who made grammatical mistakes. They do not appreciate the ideas or content. In one class, I saw that the when the teacher was reading a text, he was also telling the grammatical structures of the sentences. Learning grammar is important but the teachers demotivate the students even if their ideas are good enough but there are few grammatical mistakes. If a teacher demotivates a student for minor mistakes, the students will lose their interest to write by their own. The teacher should encourage them to practice more and more so that they can overcome the problems by their own. Also creating opportunities and encouraging students to develop their creative writings are important to develop students' writing skills. The analysis of the data revealed that teachers hardly create that kinds of spaces or opportunities.

Another important point, apparent through the analysis, is that unfriendly environment for learning is responsible for the poor writing performance of the students. The teacher-student relationship is not so flexible. The teacher does not allow students to share their opinion. They do not appreciate them. From the interview of the students I got to know that the teachers are biased and they only appreciate the good student who get first, second or third place in the class. That is why the other students remain silent and they do not participate as the teachers often avoid them. Students remain silent in the class and they pretend that they have understood everything from the lecture. Majority of the students informed that the teachers suggest them to only rely on books and if they try to write something by their own, they teachers says that it is not standard. Few students said that some teachers are not regular to class. The students informed me that the teachers take interest only in the good students and they appreciate them more to improve themselves. They do not get much attention to others. While I was observing the class, I also noticed that the teachers were encouraging the students who were first to fifth

in rank. The teachers were eagerly checking their scripts. After checking their scripts, if they had enough time then they checked few other scripts.

# Chapter 9

# Conclusion

This study attempts to show that there are some factors which are directly or indirectly responsible for poor writing of the students. Most of the time the teachers have to teach in traditional way and they cannot apply Communicative Language Teaching in classrooms. Old teaching practices have negative impacts on the writing skills of the students. We cannot only blame the teachers. It is a complicated issue like a spider web and many factors are responsible. The attitude of the guardians and the old teachers, huge number of students, proper training of the teachers, impact of exams, lacking of teaching materials, unwillingness of the students to improve their writing due to unfriendly environment of the classroom, lacking of multimedia facilities, dependency on guidebooks and coaching centers are some of the factors that can be attributed to students poor achievement. This problem cannot be solved in overnight but some steps, such as proper usage of the authentic materials (e.g. newspapers, articles, emails, books), training of the teachers on improving writing skills, making the guardians aware on the fact that using technology in classroom is not a wastage of time etc. can be some possible solutions. The school authority can make policies; like, the students must borrow one book every month from the school library and write summary on the book and submit it English class. Two teachers can take one class as there are too many students in one class, in this way the students will get proper attention and proper feedback from their teachers.

To conclude, the researcher comments that a major part of the students in Bangladesh are belong to small towns and majority of them studies in Bangla medium schools. During the study, the researcher has observed many problems in the selected three secondary Bangla medium schools. Although a small study cannot show the overall picture of the whole country, but it can give a snapshot.

With the small number of participants caution needs to be taken to make any recommendations. The aim was to investigate the phenomena in depth so that other teachers, researchers or policy makers can see the real practice. Yet I would like to make following recommendations.

- There should be more training programs for the teachers. Special training should be given to the teachers to teach writing where teachers will get a clear knowledge about giving detailed feedback, choosing appropriate teaching and learning materials, using technology etc.

- There should be varieties in using materials. Apart from the main text book, the teachers can use English short story books. They can make a rule that every student must read the suggested book so that they can get idea from different sources.

- Creative writing should be rewarded than memorized answers. Awareness needs to be created among teachers and examiners and also guidelines needs to develop regarding the writing assessment.

- The exam topic should choose in such a way where students are bound to write from their own imagination. When a students take preparation for IELTS examination, they know that they cannot answer from memorization. This should be the norm for high stake examination in Bangladesh where students will think that the writing topic will not be common rather they have to develop their own writing skills if they want to get good marks in writing.

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## Appendix A

## Interview Questions (for the teachers):

1. Could you please share something about your teaching experience?

2. How do you take preparations before taking a class?

3.  If you suddenly ask your students to write on a new topic, can they write?

4. What are the major types of mistakes your students usually make?

5. Do they make mistakes in mechanisms of writing (e.g. spelling, punctuation, and grammar)?

6. Can they write proper sentences with correct grammar?

7. Can they develop ideas by their own?

8. According to you, what are the major reasons for making mistakes in writing?

9. Do you think that your students enjoy writing?

10. Do you think that practicing grammar more and more will improve their writing skills?

11. How do you teach your students?

12. Do you try to bring variation in your teaching style?

13. According to you nowadays what are the main factors that influence the writing styles of the students?

14. According to you what are the criteria of a good writing?

15. Can your students develop good introduction, body paragraph and conclusion?

16. Do you think that the syllabus is helpful to develop writing skills?

17. How do you give feedback to your students?

18. How do you set questions for the exams?

19. What are your suggestions for improving writing skills?

## Appendix B

## Interview Questions (for the students):

1. Do you enjoy writing?

2. Do you think that you need to improve your writing?

3. How do your teachers teach writing?

4. Are you happy with your teacher's teaching style?

5. Do they encourage or motivate you to write?

6. Do you think that you need to learn vocabulary?

7. Can you develop ideas while writing on a new topic?

8. Why writing is important to you?

9. Do they appreciate your creativity?

10. Do you ask questions in classroom?