

**Recent Trends in Teaching Writing at East West
University in Dhaka**

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University in Dhaka**

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This paper is dedicated to my parents for their support and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

This research attempts to find out the present approach to teaching writing being followed at East West University. Approach to teaching is considered as one of the most important criteria for successful teaching of writing to ESL/EFL students. This study analyzes various responses of the students regarding the theory of the product and process approach. It revealed quite conclusively that neither of the two approaches of writing was followed by the teachers of East West University. The university followed a combination of both or the eclectic approach to teach writing to its students.

Chapter-1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction:

This empirical study brings together some of the findings of a survey conducted to find out the recent trend in teaching writing at East West University, one of the renowned private universities of Bangladesh. It should be mentioned at the very beginning that there is no 'right' or 'best' way to teach writing skills. What will work as the best way of teaching writing will vary from place to place depending on the type of students, their proficiency level, the materials used, their attitude, their motivational orientation, and of course the way they are taught this productive skill. Teaching writing starts with the product approach, which is basically a classroom approach to teaching, wherein the teacher helps the students very little. The teacher gives the students a writing task providing them with a model, and the students carry out the task following the fixed model of writing. Students are not given any guidance on how to write. The more recent process approach offers to help the students in their writing. As the name suggests, the focus is on the 'writing process', and the teacher provides guidance throughout the process from generating ideas to wrapping up the ideas in conclusion. Though this is a widely researched area abroad, in Bangladesh, the research in this area is very rare. This present study aims at exploring the recent trend of teaching writing in a Bangladeshi university in light of the research done in this field.

1.2 Purpose of the study:

Approach to teaching writing is one of the most important factors among other factors that are involved in teaching writing skills. The study has been undertaken to find out the recent trend of writing of East West University.

1.3 Rationale of the study:

As already mentioned earlier, although a lot of research has been done in the trend of writing, in Bangladesh research in this area is rare. Research conducted in this area will help both teachers and students to know the recent trends of teaching writing in the universities of Bangladesh, in particular, students of East West University. A study of the recent trend of teaching writing will help, no matter how minimally, to an understanding of the role of approach to teaching writing in second / foreign language learning.

1.4 Limitation of the study:

The study was conducted among a small group (50) of students studying of East West University. Because of limitation of time, the study was limited to students only and teachers were not provided with any questionnaire, which could offer a more authentic picture regarding the recent trends of writing of the university in question. Another limitation is that based on the result of this small study the universe of which is only one university, the researcher cannot generalize the findings. In fact, the researcher feels that research of large scale needs to be conducted involving students of many other universities to get a more reliable finding. Lastly, this study could not be piloted which may have had an impact on some of the findings.

Chapter-2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several approaches to teaching writing. An approach to teaching writing addresses predominantly factors like what to teach and how to teach. At present two approaches to writing are widely accepted. These are: The Product Approach and The Process Approach. Recent research into this field confirms a marked difference between the traditional 'product' and more contemporary 'process' approach to teaching writing, which are in use to teach writing, one of the most important productive skills of language. In the literature review, an attempt will be made to discuss the theoretical development of the 'product' and the 'process' approach and their shortcomings in teaching writing.

2.1 Product approach to writing:

The main emphasis of this approach to writing is on the "finished product" meaning students produce only one final draft rather than producing several drafts before they finish writing. This is a traditional approach focusing on grammatical accuracy. As a result, writing becomes a means for practicing grammatical structure and using vocabulary. This is a teacher-controlled approach where students hardly get any opportunity to shape up their writing. No interaction or collaborative work takes place between students and they work individually (McDonough & Shaw, 2003:157).

Writing teachers following the Product Approach gives priority to what the product should "look like". Students' write-ups are supposed to meet certain standard of rhetorical style, grammar, and organization. Students' writing performance is evaluated in terms of content, organization, vocabulary use,

and mechanics of writing namely spelling, punctuation etc. (Brown, 2001: 335)

Venessa Steele suggested four stages of the product approach to writing: the first stage is the representation of a model text. In this stage, a model text is presented as a guideline for students. By following the model, Students imitate the model text before they start writing. By showing the model text to the students, the teacher draws their attention to the structure of the text. For instance, in case of studying a story, students emphasize on the structure of the text. And as a result, they don't get the opportunity to think creatively. The second stage is controlled practice of the highlighted features, usually in isolation, for example while studying how to write a formal letter, students may be asked to practice the language of how to make formal requests. The third stage is organization of ideas, which is a very significant factor in product approach. It does not matter how the ideas are generated; the focus is solely on the organization of writer's idea. In the fourth and last stage, the teacher asks the students to choose from comparable writing tasks. These four stages of the Product Approach reveal the fact that the teachers largely depend on different existing models of writing, rather than encouraging the students to come up with their own model. So, this approach to teaching writing is largely imitative in nature and hardly treats the learners as creative individuals.

2.2 The implications of the Product Approach:

Tricia Hedge (2000:321) suggested a number of principles for the teacher following the Product Approach. Three of the principles are:

- **Helping students to identify their writing needs:**

Teachers have to make the students realize their writing needs. Both

teachers and students together can survey the students' needs for writing in English to select writing from among relevant categories.

- **Building awareness of discourse organization:**

Teachers help the students identify the patterns of discourse in which smaller units of meaning combine to form larger stretches of discourse.

- **Enabling the students to appreciate the criteria for an effective text:**

Teachers build awareness in student writers that the organization of any writing must be appropriate to its purpose, and audience of readers. It will affect the range of cohesive devices, vocabulary, and complexity.

2.3 Critique of the Product approach to writing:

Eschholz (1980) heavily criticized the use of model texts in writing, which is one of the features of the product approach to writing as he commented that the study of models can result in the learner sacrificing content to style. He continued, "By studying forms and organizational patterns first students come to see form as a mold into which content is somehow poured...Students have no commitment to what they are writing, and care only for how they write it." (Escholz, 1980: 24) He also said that representation of model text might be threatening for creative writers. It spoils student's creativity. In this situation the whole class cannot produce anything by themselves. Nunan (1999) supported this view saying that the Product Approach emphasizes on controlled writing activity in which students mimic and transform the models supplied by the teacher. Since there is no chance to develop students' thinking ability, students do not engender their ideas before they start to write. Here, organizing the ideas is most important than generating them. Similarly,

Watson (1982) raised an additional concern by saying that as students manipulate the language in various ways, they produce the 'patently inauthentic' language.

2.4. A paradigm shift in approach to writing:

Recent studies in writing have shifted the focus from the artifact produced by writer to the process in which the writer is involved when writing (Applebee 1984). This paradigm shift has made us realize that writing is not a mere product putting down preconceived and well-formed meaning, but a process of creating, discovering, and extending meaning. With this realization, the concept of process writing emerged.

2.3 Process approach to writing

In the Process approach to writing, students not only pay attention to the written product, but also the process, i.e. how they write. The process approach to writing is not limited to only one draft which means students produce several drafts before they finally develop a piece of writing with the teacher's guidance. Tricia Hedge (2000) said "writing is the result of employing strategies to manage the composing process, which is one of gradually developing a text". According to Hedge (1988), writing is developed through some stages which can be categorized into three main phases: a. Prewriting, b. Drafting and Redrafting and c. Editing the pre-final version.

- **Pre-writing:** In Pre-writing stage, students brainstorm to get ideas before they put those on paper. They prepare provisional plans of ideas by

making notes of them.

- **Drafting and Redrafting:** At this stage, students review the ideas and revise them before making the first draft. In other words, they work out what to write and how to write.
- **Editing the pre-final version:** After the students are done with their first draft, they edit the pre-final version to ensure not only grammatical accuracy, but also clarity for the intended reader.

Writers carry out several things before finishing the final version which they refer to as "Finished product". Before writing the final draft, they need to re-shape their thoughts, reorder them, make a plan, reject it and start again, add more ideas as they go along, change words, rephrase bits, move sections around, review their writing parts, check through their final version, write on odd pieces of paper as thoughts occur to them and so on. (Mc Donough & Shaw, 2003: 163)

2.4 The implications of the Process Approach:

A process approach makes an attempt to provide necessary support for students writers depending on the kind of learners, for example their ages, background, and needs for writing in English. Tricia Hedge (2000:307) suggested a number of principles for the teacher following the Process Approach. Three of them are:

- **Helping students to generate ideas:**

It is quite difficult to start writing without a teacher's assistance. Teachers

have the responsibility of helping the students get their ideas together, for example students can be guided through a possible list of contents for a biography and they will select those they are prepared to talk about with a partner.

- **Providing practice in planning:**

Teacher needs to guide students in finding their own effective planning processes. It is essential to communicate the flexible nature of plans, which can be adjusted as writing progresses.

- **Encouraging students in revision strategies:**

In revision stages, the teacher should encourage his/her students to revise through conferencing and reformulation to make them realize that the teacher is not primarily responsible to improve the quality of work of their students. In conferencing, the teacher talks to the students individually about work in progress. In reformulation, he encourages the students to restructure or reframe their sentences and helps them acquire forms.

2.5 Critique of the Process Approach

In the teaching of writing, teacher prefers to use the process approach than Product approach because the Process approach is most popular in teaching writing for a series of advantages. Like Product approach, it has also a problem itself. In the books, "*The Practice of English Language Teaching*" Ron White and Valerie Arndt has mentioned two disadvantage of getting students to concentrate on the process of writing that are given below(White and Arndt, p.258):

- **Time consuming:**

In this approach, students take more time to generate their points and organize it in right order. Giving feedback to students also consumes time. For instance, students need more time to think about their topic and thesis statement. They have to edit their drafts in several times for which they need sufficient time. Eventually, the whole writing process takes much longer time than normally allowed.

- **The class size:**

In a large class, it is not possible for a teacher to implement the Process approach within class time. In a large class of 40 students, teacher may not be able to do conferencing with each of the students on their first draft because of the time constraint. So, it is evident that this approach is appropriate for small class.

The different aspects of the product and process approach discussed in this chapter will be used in constructing students' questionnaire for finding out the recent trend of writing at East West University.

Chapter-3: Research Methodology

3.1: Research Design:

This research is a small-scale, one time quantitative survey of the Product and Process approach in teaching writing. The students of the Department of English of East West University were participated for this survey.

3.2: Research Question:

A questionnaire consisting of 5 statements on the Product and 5 on the Process approach, respectively was prepared to find on the recent trend of writing of the students of the department of English of East West University.

3.3: Participants:

In this survey, we took 50 ESL learners of East West University where the learners are from different department. They are the students of a composition course.

3.4: Instruments:

A number of ways are there to design questionnaires. Using a rating scale is one Common way. The *Lickert Scale* (Lickert, 1932) is one very widely used rating scale used in empirical study. It provides 5 different options for each item on the questionnaire and asks individuals to respond to a series of statements by indicating whether they 'strongly agree' (SA), Agree (A), 'Are undecided' (U), 'Disagree' (D), 'Strongly Disagree' with each statement. 'Strongly disagree' may be assigned score 5, while 'strongly agree' may get score 1. But Seliger and Sohamy (1989: 173) have suggested that in an attitude questionnaire the sequence of attitudes should be the reverse of the sequence suggested by Likert (1932) i.e., the favorable attitudes should be reflected in high scores. Therefore, in this present study, attitudes or responses have been assigned

value in the following way: Strongly disagree= 1, Disagree=2, Not sure =3, Agree=4, and Strongly agree =5.

For this present study, a standard questionnaire was set, which was prepared for the students in order to collect their responses. This questionnaire was designed with ten close-ended statements. The entire questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first five questions were about Product approach. The rest of the questions were about process approach. The motive of this survey was to find out the approach to teaching of writing at East West University.

3.5: Data collection procedure

To perform the data the researcher met to the Head of the department of English, Mr. Harunur Rashid Khan, East West University. According to the class schedule, the chairperson sent the researcher to different classes. In the class, she distributed the questions among 50 students, whereas 46 of them responded as per the standard. They were asked to give their opinion based on the five point Likert scale. They got 7 minutes to complete it. She explained the purpose of doing this survey to them and told them that the answers of these questionnaires would be kept completely confidential. All the students were cooperative. After carrying out the open-ended questions, few of the students gave their comments about the improvement of their writing style.

3.6: Data analysis:

The data were analyzed statistically to estimate the mean score of each student to determine their position regarding the approach to teaching being followed in their writing course.

Chap 4: Research Findings

The data obtained from students' questionnaire was hand tabulated and analyzed in terms of means and standard deviation. The results are presented in this chapter.

Results as Found from the Survey of the 'Product' part of the Questionnaire:

In students' questionnaire, respondents had to tick an appropriate box from five options for each item. For analysis the responses were converted into mathematical figures as follows:

Strongly disagree = 1

Disagree = 2

Not sure = 3

Agree = 4

Strongly agree = 5

The results are presented in the table below:

(In each box the number on top indicates the number of scorers and the number at the bottom indicates the score after conversion into mathematical figures. The bottom ones are calculated for means)

No	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
1.	encouraged to meet certain standards of prescribed English rhetorical style.	00 00	00 00	06 18	23 92	17 85	3.90	0.52
2.	strongly advised or instructed to use accurate grammar in writing.	00 00	02 04	06 18	18 72	20 100	3.88	0.52
3.	evaluated against a list of criteria that include content, organization, vocabulary use, grammatical use etc.	00 00	03 06	06 18	18 72	19 95	3.82	0.51
4.	instructed to give utmost importance to the end product of	00 00	02 04	09 27	21 84	14 70	3.70	0.50

	writing.							
5.	advised to give more importance to organize rather than generate ideas.	00 00	00 00	10 30	26 10 4	10 50	3.68	0.50

* The purpose of calculating the standard deviation is to show how much the responses may vary.

Results as Found from the Survey of the 'Process' part of the Questionnaire

N o	Statements:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
6.	your teacher helps you to generate ideas before you start writing.	01 01	02 04	07 21	15 60	21 105	3.82	0.51
7.	you write several drafts before finishing a piece of writing.	01 01	03 06	09 27	22 88	11 55	3.54	0.47
8.	you give more importance to how you write rather than what you write.	01 01	05 10	09 27	21 84	10 50	3.44	0.46
9.	you go through your finished writing and rewrite if needed.	00 00	02 04	08 24	17 68	19 95	3.82	0.51
10	you get feedback from your teacher throughout the composing process.	00 00	01 02	10 30	18 72	17 85	3.78	0.50

* The purpose of calculating the standard deviation is to show how much the responses may vary.

Chapter-6: CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

From the research findings we can reach the conclusion that there was no single approach to writing being followed at East West University. Teachers did not stick to any given approach but drew on features pertaining to both the approaches, which is called an eclectic approach. For ESL classes, Raimes(1983) recommends the use of an eclectic approach that is responsive to learners needs as their skills develop, and asserts that there is no one answer to the question of how writing should be taught. Oluwadiya(1990) advocates a "marriage" of the techniques of the product-oriented approach: we should aim at using an enriched process approach that borrows freely strategies and techniques that belong to the product- oriented approach. In conclusion, it can be commented that successful teaching of writing does not solely rely on one single approach. It requires the teacher to have the ability to adapt different techniques of teaching to facilitate the learning process of his or her learners.

6.2 Recommendations:

To teach writing effectively, the researcher makes five suggestions. They are as follows:

- A. The students need to make their instructor realize their writing needs so that the teacher can decide on an approach accordingly, be it product or process or a combination of both (eclectic). This could be done through a needs analysis.

- B. The educational institutes can arrange in-service trainings and workshops for the language teachers and writing workshop for would-be teachers so that the teachers can keep themselves abreast of the recent trends of writing.
- C. The students should be encouraged to explore the topic with the teacher and must understand the instruction for writing before they start writing.
- D. The teaching-learning atmosphere of the class should be flexible so that the students do not feel discouraged to voice their opinion about the teaching-learning process.
- E. Instead of making the students finish their writing anyway, the teachers can at times allow them more time to work on their write-ups, but effective use of the time allowed must be ensured.

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Appendix

Students' Survey Questionnaire

I am pursuing a research as a partial requirement for my BA (Hons.) in English. I shall be obliged to you for your cooperation in carrying out this research.

This questionnaire is private and confidential. The information gathered from individual questionnaires, will be analyzed for research purposes only. I am simply interested in your opinions. Give your immediate opinion after reading each statement.

Please read each statement and circle the numbers that applies to you:

5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

When you prepare a composition you are:					
encouraged to meet certain standards of prescribed English rhetorical style.	5	4	3	2	1
strongly advised or instructed to use accurate grammar in writing.	5	4	3	2	1
evaluated against a list of criteria that include content, organization, vocabulary use, grammatical use etc.	5	4	3	2	1
instructed to give utmost importance to the end product of writing.	5	4	3	2	1
advised to give more importance to organize rather than generate ideas.	5	4	3	2	1

When you prepare a composition:					
your teacher helps you to generate ideas before you start writing.	5	4	3	2	1
you write several drafts before finishing a piece of writing.	5	4	3	2	1
you give more importance to how you write rather than what you write.	5	4	3	2	1
you go through your finished writing and rewrite if needed.	5	4	3	2	1
you get feedback from your teacher throughout the composing process.	5	4	3	2	1