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Research Paper

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING EFL WRITING SKILL AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL IN BANGLADESH

Samiul Islam*

Abstract

This paper aimed at finding out the overall scenario of teaching EFL writing at the secondary level in Bangladesh along with the challenges faced by the teachers while teaching. A mixed method approach was chosen to conduct the study. Twenty EFL teachers teaching English as a foreign language at the secondary level in Dhaka and Mymensingh divisions of Bangladesh were chosen as the participants of the study who were provided with a questionnaire and also participated in the interview session. It was revealed that most of the teachers face challenges regarding class size while teaching EFL writing because they cannot handle such a large class intensively. Again, it was found that for the short duration of each class, teachers cannot provide proper feedback to every learner. It was unfolded that the biggest challenge that the teachers face is the mixed ability of their students. Besides, a great number of teachers do not have any kind of training to teach EFL writing at the secondary level of education. It was recommended that through providing proper training facilities to the teachers and allocating sufficient class time and authentic writing materials, these challenges can be overcome.

Keywords: Challenge, EFL Writing, Teaching, Secondary Level

1. Introduction

People from all over the world use English language as a 'lingua franca' for the purpose of different kinds of communication and Bangladesh is not an exception (Dewi, 2015). Basically, four English language skills are taught at the different level of education in Bangladesh and writing is a dominating one among them. Teaching EFL writing at the secondary level in Bangladesh is really a challenging job for the teachers because it is the largest level of education where students come from different background. Writing is such a skill that need to be learnt through formal education (Giridharan & Robson, 2011). Writing is the most difficult skill to master (Nunan, 1989). Writing is the long-lasting process to communicate people in a unique way that has been defined by Nunan (2003) as both physical and mental way of communication though this process may need more efforts for both the writer and reader. It is the common scenario that most of the students does not get enough idea to generate their writing concept properly and they often do grammatical and other mistake due to the lack of enough guidelines (Mokhtar et al., 2017). Most of the teachers face several types of difficulties while teaching English in English as a Foreign Language context and they faced most of the challenges during teaching EFL writing (Alaamri, 2013). Basically, the whole procedure of

*Corresponding Email: samiul48@gmail.com
Assistant Teacher (English), Halimunnessa Chowdhurani Memorial Girls' High School, Bhaluka, Mymensingh, Bangladesh

teaching writing depends on the teachers who need to select the appropriate pathway to teach writing to their students through analyzing their background and needs (Harmer, 2019). Teaching EFL writing seems much challenging to most of the EFL teachers because it needs both the learners' competency from the perspective of structural and communicative phenomena (Bilal et al., 2013). Teaching EFL writing demands very systematic and task-based techniques that may sometimes be challenging for the instructors (Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008). Dealing with students' writing errors is another challenge for the teachers while teaching EFL writing as it mainly connected with the analyzing capacity of the teachers as well as they have to distinguish the level of error so that they can give proper feedback according to the level of errors (Hedgehock, 2009). It is also a difficult job for the teachers to choose the perfect avenue to teach EFL writing at the different level of education (Leki, Cumming & Silva, 2008).

The objectives of the study were (i) to examine the overall scenario of teaching EFL writing at the secondary level in Bangladesh, (ii) to find out the challenges faced by the EFL teachers while teaching EFL writing at the secondary level in Bangladesh, and (iii) to have teachers recommendation to overcome the challenges faced by them while teaching EFL writing

2. Literature Review

Different studies examined the challenges of teaching EFL writing in different stages of education. The present study focuses on the secondary level education in Bangladesh. According to Heaton & Mickelson (2002), teaching EFL writing is a tough work as it is connected to the grammatical, syntactical, semantic, morphological and intellectual capacities of the learners. Especially, at the secondary level, students start to learn the basic issues of the English language and that is why it is very challenging for the teachers to make them efficient in writing skill. According to Nyang'au (2014), it is a difficult job for the English language instructors to teach writing skill to the school students as they are not well known with the different rules and regulations of English writing and that is why they often feel afraid of doing mistakes. Myles (2002) mentioned that when teachers guide the students for EFL writing, they usually start thinking about the writing topic in their first language first, then they transfer their idea into English that interrupts their free writing. According to Fareed et al. (2016), when teachers guide the learners for academic writing, a great number of the learners cannot cope with this because of their poor background knowledge of the issues related to writing as well as for their less writing habit. Singh et al. (2017) explored that most of the EFL teachers face numerous problems regarding teaching them grammatical phenomena as well as how to generate idea for academic writing. Abas & Bakir (2013) mentioned that many teachers face difficulties regarding teaching EFL writing at the school level because they use the traditional method while teaching writing to their students. According to Bilal, Tariq, Din, Latif, & Anjum (2013), techniques to teach EFL writing in the classroom should be student friendly but controlled. Cahyono & Mutiaraningrum (2016) suggested the integration of internet-based EFL teaching that can reduce the teachers' challenges through making the teaching more interesting to the teachers and definitely this will increase the confidence of students as autonomous learners.

In the view of Ibnian (2017), teachers give their students different types of writing task that need different attention as well as the teachers do not get enough time to provide proper feedback to each single issue related to their writing task. It is quite difficult for the teachers to consult each student based on the feedback because of the time constraint. Nasreen (2014) mentioned that there are a large number of students in every classroom at the secondary level of education and most importantly, their EFL writing ability differs from each other. So, it is a big challenge for the teachers to deal such a mix ability class while teaching writing. Rahman and Sarker (2019) mentioned that in the context of Bangladesh, most of the students are afraid of doing mistakes in EFL writing that makes them demotivated in practicing writing in the classroom as well. According to Sultana & Ahsan (2013), classroom environment can also create difficulties for the teachers to guide the students for EFL teaching if there is noise and other distractions. Sikder (2013) stated that it is a difficult job for the teachers to assign same kinds of writing activities for the whole class as their ability is different from each other. According to Harmer (2019), teachers should be very careful while dealing with error

correction of the writing scripts of their students because this procedure of correction should be motivating to the learners. Gündoğmuş (2018) examined that a large number of EFL teachers do not have proper training about teaching writing and that is why they face more challenges while teaching EFL writing.

3. Methodology

The current study chose a mixed-method approach to collect and analyze data. It included both the qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The researcher selected ten secondary level schools for sampling from Dhaka and Mymensingh divisions. He chose total of twenty teachers teaching English as a foreign language for collecting data. So, two teachers from each school were selected randomly. Each of the teacher was given a set of questionnaires to have his/her opinion regarding some significant issues in the arena of the respective research as well as each of them were interviewed based on some open-ended questions.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Results of the Questionnaire Survey

Table 1. Teacher Questionnaire

SL	Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
01	Class duration is sufficient for teaching EFL writing	06 (30%)	03 (15%)	11 (55%)
02	Class size has impact on my teaching EFL writing	16 (80%)	04 (20%)	00
03	I can give proper feedback to the students in EFL writing classes	02 (10%)	06 (30%)	12 (60%)
04	I have proper training to teach EFL writing	13 (65%)	03 (15%)	04 (20%)
05	Different levels of students are a challenge for me to teach EFL writing	18 (90%)	02 (10%)	00

It is revealed from the response to the first question that majority number of the teachers, 55% (frequency: 11) believed that class time for teaching EFL writing is not sufficient for them. A notable number of the teachers, 30% (frequency: 6) disagreed in this regard that indicates that either they do not give their students much activities for writing or their class size is small. Here 15% (frequency: 3) teachers remained neutral in response to the same question. It refers that maybe they do not have clear idea in the respective issue or they do not teach teaching writing practically in the classroom. In case of the response to the second question, most of the teachers, 80% (frequency: 16) opined that class size has great impact on their teaching EFL writing. A small number of the teachers, 20% (frequency: 4) were neutral while responding to this statement that refers their inadequate knowledge in this regard. While responding to the question number three, more than half of the participants, 60% (frequency: 12) mentioned that they cannot give proper feedback to their students during the class time. In this same statement a remarkable number of the teachers, 30% (frequency: 6) remained neutral that means they are not very clear about how to give proper feedback while teaching EFL writing. Here 10% (frequency: 2) participants disagreed in response to the same statement. It means that they can give enough feedback to their students' written tasks in the classroom.

Regarding the response to the question number four, majority number of the teachers, 65% (frequency: 13) opined that they have proper training to teach EFL writing at the secondary level. A mentionable number of the participants, 20% (frequency: 4) disagreed in this regard that proves that they did not get standard training about teaching EFL writing at the secondary level in Bangladesh. Again, 15% (frequency: 3) participants were neutral regarding the response to the same statement. It means that they even do not have idea about the training module or strategy regarding teaching EFL writing. Finally, it is unfolded from the response to the question number five that almost all the participants of the study, 90% (frequency: 8) agreed that different levels of students are a challenge for them to teach EFL writing at the secondary level in Bangladesh. Here also 10% (frequency: 2) teachers remained neutral in response to the same question. It refers that maybe they do not have clear idea in the respective issue or they do not teach teaching writing practically in the classroom.

4.2. Results from Interviews

During the interview session, the participants expressed their views on some significant phenomena related to their teaching. Most of the teachers marked the mixed ability of the students as a big challenge for them to teach EFL writing at the secondary level. They mentioned that in each class, some dynamic students like to do some challenging activities related to improving their EFL writing skills but at the same time, some poor-ability students are even afraid of doing very simple writing activities in the classroom. One teacher said,

> *"When I assign some regular writing practice to my students, there are some students also who like to present some excuse to avoid the practice in the classroom, and the main reason behind it is their very poor knowledge of basic writing."*

While the teachers were talking about the class size, most of them mentioned that they have to deal with forty to sixty students on average in every class. They think that it is very difficult for them to handle a big class within a limited time for practicing EFL writing. They expressed that it is quite impossible for them to provide proper feedback to every student's written scripts within a short time duration. One of the teachers mentioned,

> *"I usually go through some of the scripts and finally I have to give some common feedback to my students based on those few scripts only I think this is not the proper way of feedback but I cannot handle each one individually in such a large class."*

In the course of the interview sessions, a notable number of the teachers said that they do not have any kind of formal training to teach EFL writing at the secondary level. One of the teachers said,

> *"It has already been one and half years since I joined this school but I did not get any kind of formal or informal training on teaching EFL writing and that is why I just try to follow my way of teaching but if I had proper training my teaching would be more effective."*

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations have been suggested by the researcher to overcome the challenges related to teaching EFL writing at the secondary level of education in Bangladesh.

a. School authorities should appoint sufficient class time for teaching EFL writing.
b. Teachers should teach keeping in mind that there are mixed-ability learners in the classroom and due to this they can sort out the students into different groups while giving them instructions and writing tasks.
c. Teachers should select materials and writing tasks in such a way that will increase students' interest in writing practice.
d. Teachers should be very careful about providing proper feedback to their students' written work and in some cases, they can arrange peer correction strategies among the students.
e. Authorities should arrange effective training for the teachers teaching EFL writing at the secondary level regularly.

6. Conclusion

Teaching English as a foreign language is a very difficult job for the teachers and especially teaching writing is the most challenging one. So, it is a significant matter to investigate the real challenges faced by EFL teachers while teaching EFL writing and finding out the proper solutions to the challenges. It can be summed up that if the teachers get proper training support, materials support and institutional administrative cooperation, then the scenario will be changed.

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