

**A Qualitative Study on Bengali-medium HSC Students' English Paragraph-writing Skills:
Teachers' and Students' Perspectives**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

English is now ubiquitous in Bangladesh and a mandatory subject up to class XII or HSC level (Naik, 2018). Since the period of colonization in this Indian subcontinent, English has existed in Bangladesh, going through different phases to come to its present situation (Rahman et al., 2019). This part of the world had English as the 'official language' (Khatun, 1992) and the 'second language' (Rahman & Pandian, 2018a, 2018b) of the state from 1956 to 1971, the year when Bangladesh got independence from Pakistan through the Liberation War. Since the independence of Bangladesh, Bengali has always been the state language according to the Section 3 of The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh; and English has been established as a foreign language in the new country (Hamid & Baldauf, 2014). Shamsul Haque Education Commission (1997) indicates that the government of Bangladesh, in 1991, made English a mandatory subject for primary, secondary, and higher secondary level education. The current education policy- i.e. The National Education Policy (2010)- also partially revises and continues the policy of teaching English from Class-I to Class-XII. It means that students studying under Bangladeshi education system have to learn English for 12 years before turning to higher education (Naik, 2018). Sarwer & Haque (2019) confirms that in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination usually taken in the 10th class, students are required to write different writing items including paragraph, dialogue, and story, which carry 90 to 100 marks out of 200 distributed into two papers of English. Similarly, board questions of Junior School Certificate (JSC) and of Primary School Certificate (PSC) examinations, which are usually taken by students of Class-VIII and of Class-V respectively, indicate that students take preparation for paragraph writing in these levels as well. English grammar textbooks prepared for each class from five to twelve by The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), Bangladesh prove that grammars and necessary guidance are supposed to be given to the students for fostering paragraph writing skills.

1.2 Interest and Rationale

Writing is the most difficult of all other language skills for ESL students to learn (Muluneh, 2018; Rao, 2019). According to Annie Ferreira (2017) and Omid Wali (2020), paragraphs have structures that need to be maintained while writing them. However, Sarwer & Haque's (2019) study alludes that students in Bangladeshi schools and colleges are inclined to rote learning rather than learning

through using their own skills and creativity. It poses a problem since such tendency of HSC students, in spite of having a long English-learning experience, can have a negative impact on the students' paragraph writing skills.

This study aims to find out the Bengali-medium Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) students' condition of and their awareness about their paragraph writing skills. In order to do so, the answers to the following questions will be looked for.

1. What perspectives do teachers at higher secondary school have as to the students' paragraph-writing skills?

- a) What should an HSC student demonstrate through his/her paragraph?
- b) What is the evaluation of the students' performance, in general, by the teachers in this regard?
- c) What can be done for further improvement?

2. To what extent are the Higher Secondary students in Dhaka confident about and familiar with paragraph writing strategies?

- a) To what extent are the students aware of the types and the characteristics of a Paragraph?
- b) What do they consider about their grammatical, lexical, and organizational knowledge fundamental to paragraph writing?
- c) What do they hold regarding their frequency of and propensity for paragraph writing?
- d) What can be undertaken for further improvement?

In order to find the answers and present them in this paper, the data has been collected and assayed by following qualitative methods of research. Interviews and group discussions have been used as an instrument of the study. The research samples belong to different colleges in Dhaka. Almost all of them are students, and only two are teachers. After assessment, the data have been presented based on the responses of the participants.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Importance of teaching writing skills

Mukulu et al. (2006) opine that writing is regarded as the most essential language skill that students must develop for their personal success and academic development. Likewise, Sadiku opines, “Writing is a gem to pick. A person with good writing skills is always victorious at expressing oneself. The writing skill is the ‘hard copy’ of your intellectual level or the level of your expression. The writing process is taught in schools and colleges” (2015, p.31). Rao (2007) asserts that writing solidifies students’ learning, thinking and reflecting on the English language in their academic undertaking. Similarly, Rao (2019) says that competence in writing encourages and sets the platform for students to perform well in their academic journey. Furthermore, he adds that learners capable of writing well in the English language can get satisfactory results in their future academic or professional adventure, and later they can emerge as action researchers or professionals. He points out that the learners’ performance is measured through the examination system in which written tests and examinations receive the utmost importance; in fact, written tests are the sole medium of assessment in many countries. He reckons that those, as a consequence, who are better at writing will have convincingly better prospects to achieve higher grades in the examinations, and do well in other language skills also since all four skills are “interconnected” (Sadiku, 2015). According to him, the teachers of English have to help their learners to acquire all the skills in improving their writing skills since writing is the most important skill for the ELLs to get advancement in their academic career. He says, “The teachers have to encourage their ELLs to express their thoughts, ideas and opinions clearly and effectively in the classroom so that they will be able to put down them when they write any assignment” (p. 7). According to Kroll (2003), “Improving the writing abilities of students has both academic and social implications”. Rao (2019) also suggests that teachers motivate and guide the ELLs properly so that students can come out with creative ideas by implementing their knowledge and intellect in introducing clear, coherent, and logical ideas in their writing. “These skills develop the ELLs to shine in their professions in the future and they perform well in doing the written tasks,” adds Rao (2019. P. 7)

According to Klimova (2013), there are many benefits of learning writing that make it an essential part of education. She enlists a lot of advantages of writing: it helps to express one’s thoughts mixed with one’s personality and attitude. Moreover, a person is also benefited through being able to prolong communication, improve analytical thinking skills, apply cogent and persuasive arguments, provide himself/herself with a choice of reflecting upon his/her work and reassessing it, receive worthy feedback, and most importantly prepare for education and job.

Two more positive aspects of writing were recognized in the Graham and Hebert (2010, 2011) review. Firstly, Development of writing skills bore a positive effect on students’ reading competence. Multi-dimensional writing directions (e.g., process writing, skill-based writing

programs) mended the comprehension reading of students in grades 4–12. Moreover, confidently knowing the spelling of the words and the construction of sentences raised the reading fluency of students in grades 1–7. Secondly, increasing how much students English wrote bettered students' ability to peruse text. Graham and Hebert (2010, 2011) found that a corresponding increase in students' reading comprehension skills was noticed when students in lower classes wrote more.

The impact of writing on learning was also found by Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, & Wilkinson (2004) and Graham & Perin (2007a) that writing regarding content material enhanced students' learning.

Walsh (2010) says, "Writing is important because it's used extensively in higher education and in the workplace. If students don't know how to express themselves in writing, they won't be able to communicate well with professors, employers, peers, or just about anyone else." He also notices that many professional tasks, such as proposals, memos, reports, applications, preliminary interviews, e-mails, and more are done through writing and have become part of the daily life of learners.

Moreover, by means of writing, information can be made permanent and ideas readily available for revision and analysis; explicit expressions of writing inspire building connections among ideas, and its natural feature allows further exploration of theories and assumptions (Applebee, 1984).

Writing is so versatile a tool that can be used to chase various aims (Graham, 2006). In addition, writing is beneficial for one's psychology and physiology since it is a medium of expressing feelings and thoughts (Smyth, 1998). Graham et al (2013, p.3) says, "writing provides a powerful tool for influencing others. ... Writing is also an indispensable tool for learning. We use it to gather, preserve and transmit information widely."

2.2 Pedagogical issues related to writing

Asep et al (2014) state that both teachers and students face problems while teaching and learning writing skills. Sheeba (2018) and Asep et al (2014) say that students' problems are largely associated with "lack of vocabulary," "grammar problems," "lack of motivation," and "learning environment." Sheeba (2018) finds that lack of sufficient grammatical and lexical (vocabulary-related) knowledge hinders the pace of classroom teaching and learning, making the entire process ineffective. Moreover, she also says that students' awareness of their poor grammar and vocabulary discourages them from learning and practicing English writing tasks. In addition, she says that the surrounding or learning-teaching setting can determine the speed of acquisition and the degree of motivation of the students adds she.

Regarding the teachers' challenges, Sheeba (2018) and Asep et al (2014) have also a similar view; i.e., "motivation" (teachers struggling to motivate the students), and "types of students or different

learning styles of students” (teachers struggling to serve a diverse or heterogeneous class.” Apart from these issues, Sheeba (2018) reckons that scarce technological resources and impropriety of classroom management can also cause trouble for the teachers to teach students.

Sarwer & Haque’s (2019) study identifies another issue that students at Bangladeshi educational institutions are disinclined to learn through implementation of their skills and creativity; instead, they resort on rote learning.

In this connection, Asep et al (2014) propose some solutions to overcome such drawbacks. They are as follows- 1) teachers should distribute rewards and impose punishments as necessary, 2) technology should be used in the classroom to facilitate and engage students in the class, 3) organizing the class in a manageable way is also vital, 4) teachers can apply interactive method to keep students busy and avid during the class, allowing the students to participate in one way or another.

2.3(a) Types of learners- qualitative categories of learners

Ebert (2017) identifies some common characteristics of the struggling writers-i.e., they fail to concentrate on a writing task and frequently move from their places, or they are staring at their blank piece of paper gasping for how and what to write during a writing task.

Liz (2019) also recognizes seven “common issues” that struggling writers share. First, struggling writers lack critical reading skills. She says, “While reading and writing skills don’t go hand in hand 100% of the time, there is a large enough overlap that a weakness in one area typically predicts a weakness in the other.” Second, struggling writers grapple to comprehend the grammar concepts ranging from the roles of parts of speech to the construction of complex sentences without making a run-on sentence. Third, struggling writers experience a hard time editing their or others’ writing. Four, struggling writers have a hard time maintaining logical sequence of ideas in their writing. She says, “It is often not obvious to struggling writers that the order of ideas has a huge impact on the coherence of a text. They tend to view ideas and information as discrete, somewhat related pieces rather than as part of an overall logical flow.” Five, “These students tend to have a limited working vocabulary, a poor understanding of the nuance and connotation differences between words, or both,” says she. Six, struggling writers do not have any prewriting outline for an organized writing; even they often find it puzzling to start the writing. Last, struggling writers do not enjoy reading. However, she also acknowledges that there can be “exceptions to all of the above.”

Ebert (2017) has divided all these struggling writers in three categories, and also proposed suggestions on how to aid them. She says that writers can struggle simply because they are stuck for ideas. Stuck-for-ideas students are generally those who fidget in their seats or keep staring at

their own pages. Other writers suffer as their writings are “disorganized and lack structure.” She comments, “They often claim to be finished with a writing assignment before it is truly complete.” Finally, students can scuffle just because they do not feel connected to the assignment. In other words, they “feel disconnected from the writing assignment” and consequently they wrestle with writing.

Ebert (2017) suggests that students having idea deficits can be assisted by asking all students to share their own ideas before writing, since those students then can write based on the ideas they heard in the discussion. In addition, a collaborative writing practice (in groups or with the entire class) is likely to show the struggling students how to generate and then connect the ideas to complete the task. She also suggests that using sentence starters can offer such students with some platform to continue and complete the writing. Other solutions, according to her, are to let the students write for warm-up and to guide them through a pre-writing activity.

When it comes to students struggling for disorganization and lack of structure, Ebert (2017) suggests that this type of students can improve their writing style provided their assignments are presented by breaking them into chunks. In her words, “Breaking writing up into more manageable chunks (i.e.. breaking a paragraph into sentences) makes the task seem less daunting and more doable.” She also offers that teachers can lead modeling and guide writing to facilitate learning. In line with her thought, Lienemann et al (2006, p. 76) found, “Explicitly teaching young struggling writers, including those with special needs, strategies for planning and writing text, the knowledge needed to apply these strategies, and procedures for fostering self-regulation and motivation was an effective instructional approach....” Moreover, mini-writing lessons can make the teaching and writing easy to understand and effective. Furthermore, MacArthur (2009) concurs with Ebert that providing students with writing tools can be fruitful to mend the students’ writing skills. Ebert (2017) says, “Giving students a writing toolbox will give them a resource to get support with their writing,” while MacArthur (2009, p. 101) opines, “Although the research on assistive technology for writing is limited, sufficient research exists to establish that applications like word prediction and speech recognition can be beneficial at least for some students.”

As far as the students who feel disconnected from writing assignments are concerned, Ebert (2017) holds that teachers should leave the assignment on students’ choice. She states, “Give students choice with what they write about. Even a little choice goes a long way with student writing. When students feel invested in a topic, they will have more to say, thus more to write.” Apart from this, she claims that giving students, irrespective of their performance status, a sense of purpose for doing the assignment can make them ‘invest’ more in the assignment since it drives their motivation. Finally, She even confirms that “Conference with students individually and in small groups”- albeit a bit difficult and time consuming- can allow teachers to know the “weakness” and “strength” of the individual students and thus to make the necessary arrangement according to the students’ needs.

2.3(b) Types of errors

Suvin (2020) says that writing is a complex task because “written language is grammatically more complex than spoken language” (p. 68). He also concludes that writing includes a deft manoeuvre of subordinate clauses, complementary clauses, prepositional phrases, attributive adjectives of various types, and passive structures, which is not required for a meaningful and complete communication in the spoken language. Besides, according to him, written texts are more sophisticated than spoken texts in other aspects, too: shorter in the length of the text, and longer as well as complex in the size of words and phrases. He believes that written texts are densely weaved with lexical words rather than grammatical words, which are more widespread in the spoken form of the texts.

Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) stated five main problems a student might face while writing a paragraph. The first problem is that the student feels uncertain about the correct way of starting or ending a paragraph. Then the student is not equipped with enough grammar knowledge to write sentences correctly. Besides, the student fails to put together ideas coherently. Moreover, the student may also have a deficit of vocabulary. Finally, the student may simply have little knowledge about the topic he/she is asked to write.

Fahmida (2010) finds in her study with the students of some private universities in Bangladesh that students make a lot of errors in writing, the type of error ranging from syntax, to lexis, and to organizational/structural errors. Her study shows that students, in general, have poor knowledge of grammar to write correct sentences, insufficient vocabulary, and lacking idea about paragraph and essay writing structures. According to her study, teachers also agree with her research findings, marking the syntactic, grammatical and organizational problems as the most prevalent types of error.

Rao (2019) mastering good writing skills is the basic problem for the learners of English at all levels. Undoubtedly, writing skills are very important for the learners of all levels in the educational system, particularly, in learning a language like English as it has a complexity of spelling, pronunciation, sentence structure and contextual meaning.

Sarfo-Adu's (2015) study on polytechnic students' paragraph writing skills found that most students at Kumasi Polytechnic in Ghana knew the basic paragraph structures- i.e., a topic sentence followed by explanatory sentences. However, the students showed a wide range of grammatical shortcomings in their writing.

Alsmari (2019) noticed that freshmen EFL students generally lack the basic skills required to compose a standard paragraph, failing in matters of capitalization, punctuation, organization, spelling and grammaticality due to a lack of attention given to their writing. Siddiqui (2020) also

found that students at HSC level in Sukkur, Sindh, Pakistan could not write introductory and concluding sentences of a paragraph properly. Similarly, Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) research also indicates that school students were indecisive about how to begin or start a paragraph. The second biggest problem identified through the research is related to the vocabulary knowledge of the students. school students admitted that they were not confident about their English word stock. University students who were the participants of this study expressed their concern regarding word meaning and grammar, too.

2.4 learning and teaching in the context of Bangladesh- successes and failures

Since colonial period, the English language has always been associated with the history of Bangladesh, and even in the British period, it was used as a lingua franca for communication between the English and the local aristocracy, as noted by Islam & Hashim (2019). They also informed that English was present in all formal aspects of the society including ‘political discourses’, ‘administration’ and ‘education’. English was compressively used as the second language during the Pakistani regime, too (Rahman & Pandian, 2018a, 2018b), and according to the article 214 of the Pakistan constitution, 1956 English was accepted and remained as the official language for 20 years (Khatun, 1992).

After independence, the then Bangladesh government emphasized Bangla, nominalizing other practiced languages in the country including English (Rahman, 2010). Rahman et al (2019, p.03) commented, “Bangla was also given higher prestige in all domains of the society, primarily in education, which was not pragmatic at that time, since the outcome of the policy was a drop of English proficiency among the learner community.” Hamid (2010) identified that the lack of quality in the English language teaching (ELT) was persistent and caused by the inconsistent language policy and planning. Dearth of a clear and planned language policy has always been persistent in Bangladesh (Rahman & Pandian, 2018a, 2018b). A void, consequently, between policy and language exercise pertains in Bangladesh (Rahman et al, 2019).

The novel language taken in education policies openly pointed the significance of English in Bangladesh and language competence for laymen (Rahman et al, 2019). Numerous measures were taken in passing years to effectively establish English language teaching (ELT) in the country. For instance, communicative language teaching (CLT)-based curriculum reform took place in the mid-nineties, replacing the traditional grammar-translation method (GTM)-based language teaching, initially in secondary schools and later in all other levels (Rahman & Pandian, 2018a, 2018b). However, these initiatives do not show any promising and satisfactory outcomes (Ali & Walker, 2014; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). A plethora of problems such as the politically inspired decision in degrading the status and use of English in post-liberation-war Bangladesh (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014), haphazard language in education policies (Rahman & Pandian, 2018a), application of

communicative language teaching (CLT) curriculum, existing methods and instruction materials for teaching (Rahman, Pandian, & Kaur, 2018a), realization of assessment reform (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018a; Ali, Hamid, & Hardy, 2018), and language teachers' professional improvement (Karim & Mohamed, 2019) are the whopping drawbacks that bar ELT from satisfying national expectation in Bangladesh.

English access and resourcing policy, currently, requires grade 1 (6-years-old learners) to learn English (Rahman et al, 2019). However, the impact of learning English at an early age does not bring due results because English language teaching was ill-planned and the teaching and teachers' quality are substandard and poor across the country (Hamid & Erling, 2016). Besides, primary schools across the country are not equipped with adequate resources, and a constant want of quality English teachers dims the ray of aspirations (Haq, 2004). Discrepancy in disbursement of English teaching between urban and rural schools (Hamid and Baldauf, 2011), with an increasing number of English Medium Schools giving privileged students exclusive access to English (Hamid, 2016; Hamid, Sussex, & Khan, 2009), has created inequity in the English language proficiency of the learners nationwide (Rahman et al, 2019).

2.5 Paragraph writing strategies as part of the rationale of the study

Paragraph

Oxford Learner's Dictionary (n.d., Definition1) defines a paragraph as "a section of a piece of writing, usually consisting of several sentences dealing with a single subject. The first sentence of a paragraph starts on a new line." Alred (2012) indicates that a paragraph can also be constructed with only one complete sentence. But, Edwin (2006) indirectly rejects the idea of one-sentence paragraphs, and says that three sentences should be the minimum length of a paragraph. Omid Wali (2020) says, "Paragraph by definition is a group of closely related sentences that develop one single idea. From the mentioned definition, it is quite clear that only one topic is being discussed in a paragraph. The discussion of more than one topic is not acceptable under one paragraph" (p. 44). Ferreira (2017) has mentioned several types of paragraph- viz 'introductory,' 'context/summary,' 'argument,' 'evidence,' 'counter argument,' 'comparison/contrast,' 'transition,' and 'conclusion.' She also has identified that a paragraph should have a 'topic sentence', 'evidence' (in analytical papers), development, cohesion, and 'transition' (in essays). However, Wali (2020) adds a few more types of paragraphs and they are 'narrative', descriptive' and 'expository' paragraphs. Regarding basic parts of a paragraph, he complied with Boardman & Frydenberg (2008) by dividing it into 'topic sentence', 'body', and 'concluding sentence'.

Regarding academic writing, Wali (2020) emphasizes paragraphs as the basic unit. Ismail (2011) opines that writing should demonstrate a language learner's linguistic competence of grammatical

concept, vocabulary knowledge, and idiom application. However, “Writing in a correct and good form is a big challenge for non- native students, especially to EFL learners” (Nasser, 2019, p. 178). Rao (2019) suggests that being able to write sentences properly is one of the prerequisites of paragraph writing by stating, “Once the teachers find that the ELLs get good command over constructing sentences on their own, they can immediately proceed to the paragraph level” (p. 201). Javed et al. (2013) agree with Pylkkanen and McElree (2006) and Henry (2000) regarding the use of correct grammar, grammatical coordination, and required vocabulary to be an essential part of improving writing skills irrespective of the type of the writing task.

Vocabulary, Grammar, and Syntax

Vocabulary refers to “All the words that a person knows or uses” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, n.d., Definition 1) and grammar refers to “The rules in a language for changing the forms of words and joining them into sentences” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, n.d., Definition 1). Syntax is the “Grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d., Definition 1).

Annie Ferreira (2017) mentions that students should structure a paragraph by including ‘topic sentence’, ‘evidence’, ‘development’, ‘cohesion’, ‘transitions’. Rasheed et al. (2013) proposed ‘The Step Model’ for constructing a paragraph. The Step Model consists of a ‘topic sentence’ followed by several explaining sentences. Lewis (2006) listed six principles for writing a good paragraph. These principles are given below as summarized by Sarfo-Adu (2015, p. 146).

- i. The beginning of each sentence upon what precedes shall be explicit and unmistakable
- ii. When several consecutive sentences iterate or illustrate the same idea, they should, so far as possible, be formed alike. This may be called the rule of parallel construction.
- iii. The opening sentence, unless so constructed as to be obviously preparatory is expected to indicate with prominence the subject of the paragraph.
- iv. A paragraph should be consecutive or free from dislocation.
- v. A paragraph should possess unity; which implies a definite purpose and forbids digression and irrelevance.
- vi. As in the sentence, so in the paragraph a due proportion should be obtained between principal and subordinate statements.

Since grammar, syntax (grammatical structure), vocabulary, and organization are universal problems of paragraph writing in all EFL/ESL countries, this research will endeavor to conduct a similar study focusing on the mentioned problems to find out the paragraph writing capacity of the Bangla medium students of HSC level in Bangladesh.

To summarize, the importance of English writing encompasses our social, academic, and professional life. Scholars mention that having a good command over English writing a student can attain academic success. Writing skills foster creativity within the learners and teach how to connect the ideas coherently. Official works precondition necessary communicative expertise, analytical aptitude, and rigorous arguments that are developed consistently with writing skills. Most importantly, any written text is a record of data that can be retrieved any time in the far future if kept adequately. The concerned consequently will be able to review and reconstruct upon these documents. Both teachers and students face pedagogical drawbacks in teaching and learning writing. Students for their poor grammatical capacity, lexical knowledge, and motivation do not feel like engaging or fail to engage in the class and pay attention to lessons. Teachers have problems, too. Scarcity of technological resources and issues with classroom management are troublesome for teachers to conduct classes. These obstacles can be overcome by lesson plans befitting students' needs and through the installation of technological accessories. Two types of writers are there: struggling and competent. Struggling writers share similar features. They are stuck for ideas, have weak concentration, lack critical reading skills as well as grammar knowledge, and have insufficient vocabulary for their level. Moreover, their writing is in shortage of logical organization of ideas, are incapable of editing their works, are disinclined to reading, feel disconnected to the tasks, and make no outline of the writing. Their struggles might be downsized through group tasks. The errors partly originate from students' hesitation about beginning and ending of a paragraph. Among writing related topics, students mainly err in the grammar of sentence structures, the arrangement of ideas, and the diction (appropriate use of words). Learners can produce a lacking written text simply due to unfamiliar subjects. 'Paragraph', the most fundamental subject in writing, is a complete written text, or part of it, usually being concerned with a particular trajectory of a subject. It can be formed with more than a sentence divided into at least three sections- introduction, body/discussion, and conclusion. Grammar (rules of word formation, combination, and sequence), vocabulary (meanings of words), and syntax (grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence) are crucial parts for making an error-free paragraph.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction:

According to Igwenagu (2016), methodology refers to a series of techniques applied throughout the research- i.e., a guidance to research by describing and assaying methods, shortcomings and resources, and predispositions and consequences. Accordingly, the methodology portion of this paper opens with the research questions of the study, followed by successive discussions on research design, setting, sampling, and instrument. Then it includes how the data for the research

has been collected and analysed, and what ethical issues have been considered throughout the process.

3.2 Research Questions:

This study aims to find out the answers to these following questions.

1 What perspectives do teachers at higher secondary school have as to the students' paragraph-writing skills?

- a) What should an HSC student demonstrate through his/her paragraph?
- b) What is the evaluation of the students' performance, in general, by the teachers in this regard?
- c) What can be done for further improvement?

2. To what extent are the HSC students in Dhaka confident about and familiar with paragraph writing strategies?

- a) To what extent are the students aware of the types and the characteristics of a paragraph?
- b) What do they consider about their grammatical, lexical, and organizational knowledge fundamental to paragraph writing?
- c) What do they hold regarding their frequency of and propensity for paragraph writing?
- d) What can be undertaken for further improvement?

3.3 Research Design:

Creswell (2008) recounts that a research design comprises the research plan- and procedure-oriented decisions ranging from initial assumptions to selected methods for the collection and analysis of data.

Since this research and its questions are concerned with the academic experience of teachers and students, a research method that befits such research needs should be implemented. Qualitative research seems to meet the requirements as Tiley (2017) opines that participants or research samples are more comfortable to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings through qualitative research methods. She also says, "... qualitative research focuses on words rather than numbers, depth rather than breadth. Its methods are exploratory; they seek to unearth the opinions, thoughts and feelings of respondents (para. 2)."

Jackson et al. (2007) agree echoing that in qualitative research “the focus turns to understanding human beings’ richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences. ... the qualitative researcher relies on the participants to offer in-depth responses to questions about how they have constructed or understood their experience (p. 22-23).”

Hence, the qualitative research method was undertaken for this research to extract the best outcome out of it.

3.4 Research Instrument:

As mentioned, I chose qualitative methods for my research. Among the variety of research instruments used for qualitative research, I selected interviews and focused-group discussions.

I interviewed two teachers and arranged focused group discussions with two sets of HSC students, with all the participants belonging to different colleges in Dhaka, in order to garner qualitative data. I reached out to the potential candidates to make a request for their valued participation. After participants being aware of the ethical issues that I had presented and promised, they gave consents in favor of the research. Then I conducted the interviews and group discussions in a semi-structured way so that an extensive amount of information could be elicited for analysis.

3.5 Setting:

The setting of my research varied as per the convenience of the interviewees. The interview with one of the teachers was held inside a simply furnished school-office-room with a couple of chairs facing one another across the only table in-between. The school is situated on Mridhabari-Shanir Akhra road, Jatrabari, Dhaka. The other interview could not have been conducted face-to-face because the volunteer was outside Dhaka, in her hometown. As a result, a virtual interview had to be organized under that circumstance.

As for the focused-group discussions with the students, the venue remained the same on both occasions. A middle-sized room of English-Master coaching centre at Donia, Dhaka was adorned with three low benches arranged in U-shape in order to accommodate a group of 8 HSC students. The room was sound-proof and congenial to discussions.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure:

The data was collected maintaining two qualitative research methods- i.e., interviews and focused-group discussions- over a period of three weeks. Since my research is to understand the present status of paragraph-writing skills of the HSC students in Bangladesh, and to find out whether the status matches the expectations; I, through interviews, intended to bring out from the teachers what skills are expected from this level of students, and how paragraphs should be practiced and are actually being practiced by the students. In the focused-group discussions with the students, a similar set of questions were asked to glean necessary information.

A Face-to-face Interview with an English Professor

One of the two teachers whom I nominated for my research was interviewed in his/her physical presence. At the beginning of the interview, I reiterated my aims, purposes, and reasons for that endeavor. I also described the ethical issues that I would be considering during the whole process. I asked questions mainly about his/her experience with students in relevance with paragraph writing skills- what was expected, and what the performance was like. I made no interruption while he/she was answering. Only when he/she was finished, did I ask another question, which was either spawned by the answer or partially different from the previous question. Before ending, I asked for his/her further comments should he/she want to add to that interview. The language of our conversation was Bangla, our mother tongue, just for better spontaneity and comfort throughout the session. The entire episode lasted around 40 minutes, and was recorded with my smartphone.

A Virtual Interview with an English Lecturer

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many people left Dhaka for their hometown, and so did my next interviewee. Because of our being a long distance apart, I had to conduct the session via my smartphone. I started off with some questions impertinent to the research, just due to setting up the ambience and making him/her relaxed. Then onward, I followed the similar steps to that of the face-to-face interview throughout the session. This nearly-an-hour-long conversation was in Bangla, and recorded entirely.

Focused-group Discussions

Two focused-group discussions were arranged on two different days to collect data from a total of 16 Bangla-medium HSC students. Both the discussions are identical in procedure. In the sessions, after explaining the background of that meeting and reminding them of my vow regarding ethical aspects, I asked a question to all of the participants, who had their fair turns to share their thoughts,

experiences, and view-points. All the questions asked were semi-structured in nature, and in relation to paragraph writing skills. If anyone had to add more information, he/she would have to raise their hands in order that the speaker was not interrupted. I also let the speakers finish their answers and then asked questions; I, though, intervened a few times to prevent the respondents from derailing from the topic. Bangla was the medium of communication, and the recording was on during those sessions that continued for around 80 minutes each.

3.7 Sampling:

The research was done amid the tight lockdown due to the COVID-19 breakout in Dhaka. In addition to that, I had to conduct the data collection activities in the month of Eid-ul-Fitr, one of two major religious festivals of the Muslims, when typically everyone celebrates the occasion in their hometown with relatives as the vacation stretches for some time. So, it was utterly impossible to follow any systematic method for sampling. I, consequently, was compelled to rely on the ‘convenience sampling’ method- i.e., “... the required sample size has been obtained of those who happen to be available and accessible at the time” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 218).

Turning to the participants and their particulars, there were a total of 18 respondents, among whom only two were English teachers, while the rest were students. One teacher was male, and the other female, and likewise, an equal number of male (8) and female (8) students were invited for the purpose. The ages of the teachers are between 25 and 35, and of the students between 18 and 20. All the respondents are part of a variety of institutions. Two lists of the participants – of students and teachers separately- are given below.

No.	Pseudo-name	Gender	Age
1	Sajid	Male	33
2	Farjana	Female	29

Table 1: Enumeration of the Teacher Participants

No.	Pseudo-name	Gender	Year	Age
1	Afif	Male	2 nd	18-20 years
2	Karim	Male	1 st	
3	Jubair	Male	1 st	
4	Latif	Male	2 nd	
5	Himel	Male	2 nd	
6	Bashar	Male	2 nd	
7	Rabbi	Male	1 st	
8	Tamim	Male	1 st	
9	Shirin	Female	2 nd	
10	Dina	Female	2 nd	
11	Fatema	Female	1 st	
12	Nilima	Female	1 st	
13	Zerin	Female	2 nd	
14	Mim	Female	2 nd	

15	Oishi	Female	2 nd	
16	Proma	Female	2 nd	

Table 2: Enumeration of the Student Participants

3.8 Data Analysis:

“There is no one single or correct way to analyse and present qualitative data; how one does it should abide by fitness for purpose.” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 643)

Complying with the statement by Cohen et al.(2018), I analysed the information following the thematic analysis method, which I thought to be the best-fit for the purpose. With a view to assaying data, at first, I made a purposive transcription of the interviews and focused-group discussions. I arranged the answers of the respondents according to the questions asked, and then I categorized them under certain key points so that the answers for each question could be generalized in that particular context. I took notice of the exceptions, and mentioned them too. I reached my conclusions entirely through the implicit and explicit responses of the participants.

3.9 Ethical Consideration:

The spontaneous participation of the respondents was achieved after taking certain ethical matters under consideration. First, I shared the reasons for and the objectives of the interviews and discussions with the teachers and the students in detail. Second, I clarified their roles and informed them about their freedom of choice, for example about answering questions and/or opting out of the session at any point of the time. Then I assured them about the confidentiality of their identity saying that even their names would not be revealed to any party under any condition, and that the recorded conversations would have restricted access exclusively to certain, relevant people. I invited those who gave consent, and had them sign in a form that confirmed their agreement. During the sessions, no one was manipulated or forced in any way to act differently from the way that they would originally do. Furthermore, the schedule for the sessions was set after consulting with all participants considering their convenience.

Chapter 4: Findings

The findings of this research are presented in compliance with the research questions. At first, what is expected from the students regarding their paragraph writing skills is discussed. Then the research findings about the degree of paragraph knowledge of the students are presented, followed by the presentation of the students' propensity and frequency of practicing paragraph writing. After that, the condition of the students' present paragraph writing skills is also delineated in the light of the opinions of the respondents. Finally, the suggested measures, according to the teachers and students, for the further improvements are enumerated. All the findings are justified with the most relevant quotations (or sometimes paraphrases of the quotations) taken from the conversations undertaken for this research purpose.

4.1 Expectation from the students:

Both teachers and students agreed that students should demonstrate an HSC level of paragraph writing skills. Teachers expect that students show their competency in writing a paragraph with its befitting structures (i.e., topic sentence, body, and concluding sentence), standard and correct grammatical structures, and a wide range of word stock that is regarded as the vocabulary of the HSC level.

Teacher 2 (see Table 1)- Farjana said, "As teachers, we want to see whether students are able to write the topic sentence properly, develop the body with ideas, use linkers to connect sentences, and draw conclusions appropriately." As Boardman & Frydenberg (2008) mentioned about the same thing regarding a paragraph structure, her statement indicates that students should know the basic structure of a paragraph. She also informed, "We also evaluate whether students can write grammatically correct sentences, what the level of their vocabulary is, and whether they can fulfil the minimum word-limit." Teacher 1 (see table 1)- Sajid agreed saying, "Students must have a minimum range of vocabulary (of the HSC textbook standard), the grammar of vocabulary (i.e., using the various forms of a word), and a variety of sentence structures that they think they need in their writing." This statement is supported by Rao (2019) and Suvin (2020), who said that a piece of writing must contain different phrases and structures as well as sophisticated vocabulary. Regarding sentence structures, Teacher 2 agreed with Rao (2019) and Suvin (2020) by adding, "Students have to write varieties of sentence structures- for example, simple, complex, compound sentences; active-passive voice; and usage of particle phrases and gerunds." As far as the accuracy is concerned, Teacher 1 admitted, "We want students not to make any silly mistakes/errors related to subject-verb agreement and tense." Through this statement, Teacher 1 indirectly presents this wish that students at higher secondary level should not show in their paragraphs the characteristics

of struggling writers (Liz, 2017), as writing can represent one's "level of intellect" (Sadiku, 2015, p.31)

Besides, all of the students recognize that they need to show much more than they used to in their secondary school level. All students agreed with one student- Oishi as she noted, "Teachers want us to write more advanced words, and use more various long error-free sentences; otherwise, they are not giving us good marks." Another student said, "Our vocabulary is not fitting for this level. We have to write about diverse topics, of which we possess a very insignificant number of words." It indicates that students do correctly understand what they are supposed to demonstrate through their writing, as we see the teachers and the scholars mention the same points.

Teachers spoke about the extent to which the mistakes in this level are tolerable. Teacher 2 said, "I personally overlook very basic mistakes such as missing -s/-es after a verb following a third-person-singular subject in present tense, and spelling mistakes if they are due to the slip of the pen. However, if I find that students are making errors in these basic aspects, I usually note them and try to give feedback." Teacher 1 in this regard said, "students should be able to write accurate sentences without any spelling mistakes." So, it can be said that mistakes regarding basic English features are condonable, but errors (mistakes that students are not knowledgeable about) are not acceptable, and should be addressed by the teachers. However, Fahmida (2010) in her study with a crowd of university freshmen found that students had basic grammatical shortcomings in their writing.

4.2 Knowledge of Paragraph: Types & Structures

There are some aspects of a good paragraph that should be kept in mind while writing one- for example, what type of paragraph it is, and how a paragraph is constructed. Except for one teacher, the other teacher and the students pointed out that students have implicit knowledge of a paragraph's structure. However, only one teacher noted that students can infer the type of a paragraph implicitly and write accordingly.

Regarding the skeleton of a paragraph, Teacher 1 said, "I have assessed many examination papers and noted that students are likely to begin a paragraph with an introduction of some sort, for instance by writing a definition or a general statement." When questioned about the things they try to follow while writing a paragraph, many students replied that they at first thought about what points could be presented in that writing, and then they wrote an introduction and presented a subsequent arrangement of the ideas. It is best elicited in Himel's statement, "If there are questions that I must answer in the paragraph, I at first go through them. Then I start my writing with one or two sentences that allude to the aim of my writing, followed by the answers to the questions in the same order as they are given in the question paper." Tamim, Mim, Bashar, and some others

basically gave the same reply. Afif added to the answer by confessing, “I write a topic sentence and present the ideas. If I remember, I will also try to write a conclusion in a sentence.” Shirin and Dina said that they wrote an introductory sentence, then developed the idea, and finally gave a finishing statement. All their answers imply that they tend to write a paragraph in only one para. Nevertheless, one student- Fatema- explicitly said, “We cannot write a paragraph neither too long because we have to write a paragraph in only one para, nor too short because we also have to meet the minimum word limit, and consider what length is appropriate for the marks assigned.” Hence, an assumption can be that students at this level know the basic structure of a paragraph.

A different view has been received from Teacher 2, who bluntly said, “I do not think that students have any knowledge regarding the types and structure of a paragraph. ... I have found many students at my college writing more than one para in a paragraph.” This statement being singular in contents can be regarded as an exception in this regard.

Turning to the different kinds of paragraphs, Ferreira (2017) and Wali (2020) mentioned variety of types such as descriptive and argumentative. In this regard, Teacher 1 said optimistically, “Though students may fail to categorise what type of paragraph it is, they somehow understand what information this paragraph must contain.” This statement is partially akin to that of Teacher 2 in the previous paragraph. In the focused-group discussions, only two students- Fatema and Nilima- mentioned “problematic paragraphs”, while others did not even make any allusion to any category of paragraphs. These two said, “...if it is a problematic paragraph, we enumerate the causes in the first half, and offer some potential solutions to the problem in the later half.” So, it can be concluded that most of the students are not conscious about the categories of a paragraph; they, however, are able to include ideas as per the requirement of the paragraph.

It is obvious that the findings regarding a paragraph’s structure are analogous to that of Saro-Adu (2015). However, they show a slightly better result while compared with that of Fahmida (2010) and of Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014).

4.3 Propensity and frequency of paragraph writing

Students were asked about their tendency and feeling of paragraph writing. Almost all of them made a consensus reply that they comparatively liked paragraphs more. This is best represented in Jubair’s statement, which goes as such, “I like paragraph writing relatively more, because I do not have to read a lot. To get important ideas is enough.” Zerin liked Paragraph writing for a different reason. She said, “I enjoy paragraph writing because we can bring significant matters in the paragraph, yet we do not have to write a lot.” A first-year HSC student- Rabbi gave a mixed opinion as he said, “I do not like paragraphs much, since they take up a lot of time for me to study. To me, they are the most problematic part in the first paper. Again, I enjoy them sometimes as

well because you do not have to memorize always- just see the key points and that's it." Rabbi's statement complies with that of sheeba (2018) about one of the reasons for students' reluctance to learning.

Teachers 1 and 2 also commented on the willingness of students' paragraph writing. Teacher 1 noticed, "Initially students show tremendous eagerness, but their interest wanes with the passage of time. Only 10-12 students out of a class of 60 can remain steadfast." On the other hand, Teacher 2 thought in line with Sarwer & Haque (2019), "Students are not at all inclined to practice paragraph writing as they are more willing to memorize. Their excessive dependence on learning by rote is undermining their writing skills including paragraph writing." Therefore, students can be said to have interest in paragraph writing, but that interest does not come across their demeanor and method of practice.

Majority of the students opined that they only studied paragraphs when they had any homework or test on paragraphs. Dina described her situation that represented that of most of the batch saying, "I make notes of paragraphs from different guide books, and only revise them if there is any homework or test coming. Actually, we usually have tests and homework very frequently." Nilima and Fatema said a little differently that they studied paragraphs at least once a week. It, though, is to be noted that none of the students practiced paragraphs by writing. They wrote either in the examination halls, or for the note-making purposes. This tendency was signified by Teacher 2, who said, "...the students who practice do not practice in the way they should."

So, it can be said that students with some exceptional cases practiced paragraph writing irregularly. The way they practice is also not effective to develop their skills.

4.4 Present Status of the Students

In this research, Students and teachers both shared a consensus about the discrepancy between the expectation of the teachers and the performance of the students. Shirin said, "At this level, we are facing problems that we have been facing since our high school life. We should have been able to be far more confident, comfortable, and competent in English by now." Teacher 1 and 2 also thought that most of the students lack the skills that an HSC should demonstrate in his/her writing.

A variety of errors and mistakes were mentioned by the students and teachers. Some problems are universal in all their answers, whereas some were unique to a particular respondent. Here, I will enlist all of the problems that came up during the sessions.

- *Verb-related problems:*

Perhaps, the most common problems recorded through this research were those with verbs. Teacher 2 mentioned a number of verb-oriented errors that she found in students' paragraph writing. She gave examples saying, "I often notice that verbs do not have -e/-es ending even if they follow a third-person singular noun in the present indefinite tense." Most students admitted that they had problems with right forms of verbs. Karim's statement gave a complete scenario, "I find it difficult to decide when to use which form of the verbs. For example, I am confused about when to use a gerund, and when to use a participle." Proma said the very thing in a different way, "I have so much confusion about whether to add -ing/-ed at the end of the verb."

Both teachers had identified a common problem- that is with subject-verb agreement. In the words of Teacher 1, "Students seem to fail to realise that a subject can determine the form of a verb." Teacher 2 mentioned one more issue complaining, "... sometimes there is no verb in an intended sentence."

Fahmida (2010), Alsmari (2019), and Sarf-Adu (2015) among others mentioned that they found similar grammar problems in their study.

- *Tense-related Problems:*

Both teachers and students said that students noticed problems with tenses. Teacher 1 illustrated a situation by giving an example, "...while writing a paragraph on 'The Sweet Memories of your Life', a student may start with verbs in the past form. But, after several sentences, the student may be describing in the present tense." Teacher 2 also considered it 'past-present mixture' problem. Though maximum students said that they mixed up past and present events, one student- Shirin had another problem. She said, "I have problems deciding whether to write a situation in a continuous or perfect mood." Another student- Mim said, "In long sentences, I often get puzzled and write verbs in the wrong tense."

Asep et al's (2014), and Sheeba's (2018) findings indicated the similar problems among their participants.

- *Sentence Structure:*

Two students- Latif and Zerin introduced this problem in separate sessions. They informed me that they had a hard-time placing words one after another correctly. Teacher 2 found an issue regarding sentence structures as well. Basically, it is not an error; in this level, it, nonetheless, is problematic,

in her opinion. She pointed out, “Students at this level produce substandard sentences or incorrect sentences. ... very few of the students can show many types of structures in their writing.”

Ebert (2017), Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014), and Rao (2019) in their works argued that writing error-free sentence structures can be a tough and exacting task for the L2 learners.

- *Paragraph Structure:*

Regarding problems in paragraph structures, only teachers made direct comments. Teachers did find some issues in this respect. Teacher 1 confirmed that the missing of a concluding sentence in a paragraph was the most common case among students. He identified the same matter as Ebert (2017) did, and he related, “We, colleagues, have discussions about one particular feature widespread in the paragraphs of the students, and that is that students do not complete their writing. There is no sentence indicating the end of the writing. As a result, students get poor marks.” This phenomenon is relatable with the statement of Afif mentioned earlier. He said, “... If I remember, I also try to write a conclusion in a sentence,” implying that he forgets to give conclusions. However, it is noteworthy that students have knowledge about the concluding sentence in the paragraph and this signifies that students know the basic sentence structure of a paragraph. Sarfo-Adu’s (2015) also found a similar result in his studies.

On the other hand, Teacher 2 remarked about two more issues. According to Teacher 2, “... I have found many students at my college writing more than one para in a paragraph.” It means that some students write a paragraph with sub-paragraphs. She also said, “I am even surprised to have found paragraphs without any title.” It refers to the fact that students often miss out titles as well.

So, we find a conflicting view considering the students knowledge of paragraph structures.

- *Voice-related Mistake:*

One teacher and student regarded voice-related issues, too. Teacher 1 notified that many students did not fathom the difference between the doer and the agent. Dina confirmed, “I have problems comprehending when the sentence should be in the passive form.” Suvin (2020) acknowledges that passive structures are one of the most difficult part of writing for the second-language learners of English.

- *Message-style Writing:*

Teacher 1 noted that students out of too much of a habit of texting tend to write complete words in short forms. He illustrated, “Students in their exam papers write as they do on Messenger or other social communication platforms. For instance, they write ‘because’ as ‘bcz’.” This has been an original finding in this study. Little reference has been made to such kind of problem in the literature I have studied.

- *Attitude Influencing Writing:*

Teacher 1 held students’ attitude as part of their writing problem stating, “Students know that they are making mistakes, and do not care about it. They think grammatical mistakes are not a big deal. They will get marks anyway.” This opinion adds another dimension to the statement of Sheeba (2018), who opines that student’s awareness of their poor grammar knowledge discourages students from learning. It indicates that students sometimes behave indifferently to their grammatical accuracy. Teacher 2 also brought another issue connected with students’ tendency and attitude. Her statements concurred with Sarwer & Haque’s (2019) statement, as she highlighted, “Students are not at all inclined to practicing paragraph writing as they are more willing to memorize. Their excessive dependence on learning by rote is undermining their writing skills including paragraph writing.”

- *Preposition and Article:*

At least 12 out of 16 students named appropriate prepositions as their area of struggle. Bashar explained by saying, “I am not confident about using prepositions, especially appropriate prepositions. Appropriate prepositions are too many and too tough to remember.” Only two students- Proma and Tamim acknowledged their issues with articles. Proma said, “... I also have problems with articles.”

- *Vocabulary-related Problems:*

All students confessed that they needed to know more vocabulary as their current level they thought was inappropriate. 15 students also admitted that they got confused about spellings of the

words. Fatema is the only exception here. She said, “I am sure about the spellings I write. I do not even hesitate while writing or saying the spelling. But, I do think that I need to learn more words. Vocabulary is a thing that the more you learn, the more you realise how little you know.” Another problem came out as Mim said, “I do not know the correct use of adjectives and adverbs, and often end up using them interchangeably.”

Asep et al (2014), Sheeba (2018), Liz (2019), Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014), and many others identified vocabulary as a problem for learners

- *Lack of Ideas:*

More than 60% of the student participants thought that they could not generate ample ideas. Take Shirin as an example. She said, “I feel that enough points do not come to my mind when I write. Even the thoughts that come cannot be represented properly owing to the lack of vocabulary and the fear of grammatical mistakes. This actually happens because I often write by translating my thoughts from Bengali to English.” Ebert (2017) noted the very issue that struggling students gasp for ideas.

Unsurprisingly, there were exceptions. Fatema and Nilima said that they made very few mistakes and errors in terms of grammatical aspects- i.e., spelling, preposition, article, sentence structure, and verb-oriented grammar.

4.5 Suggestions for Improvement

Numerous potential measures that could alleviate the situation were recognized by the respondents. All teachers and some students believed that inspiring students by giving incentives or showing the worth of paragraph-writing skills could be an effective way of improving the paragraph writing skills of the students. Teacher 1 echoed, “... Let them write- no matter correctly or incorrectly. ... if they see any recognition of their work- e.g., on notice boards and/or magazines, they will feel motivated and learn more seriously.” Sheeba (2018), Asep et al (2014), and Ebert (2017) also suggested similarly that students’ motivation can help them improve their writing skills.

Teachers and students accentuated the importance of practice. The teacher 2 noted, “All students should practice as much as possible, because the more they practice, the better their writing will be. If they do not practice, their writing skills will continue to deteriorate.” Ebert (2017) recommends struggling students to practice in groups to generate and sequence their ideas.

Teacher 2 and some students stressed that the tendency of memorization be uprooted. To do so, “The repetition of the questions should be prevented, and question setters should be tricky,” said Teacher 2. In this regard, Teacher 1 opined, “When we look back to the previous years’ questions, we understand why students opt for memorization.” Sarwer & Haque (2019) made the same suggestion.

Teacher 1 and several students also pointed to the skills of teachers. Teacher 1 said, “... our teachers need more training on different teaching methods.” Bashir echoed, “I think our teachers need to be trained so that the teaching reaches all students equally.” Karim & Mohamed (2019) recognizes this issue, too.

Teacher 2 suggested a few more initiatives. One of them is proper classroom management (also Asep et al, 2014). She said that they had to learn how to manage such a large class more efficiently. For paragraph practice, “... dividing the class into small groups and assigning them with paragraph writing tasks can help students develop ideas.” This statement complies with the ‘interactive method’ of Asep et al (2014). Ebert (2017) prescribes such action, too. Teacher 2 further suggested, “We have to allot more classes for paragraphs, and must give feedback so that students can beware of the mistakes next time.”

Teacher 1 gave his part of suggestions as well. He signified effective materials saying, “We have to provide students with a very good model of each type of paragraph. By following the models, students can improve.” He complied with Lienemann et al. (2006) about indirect corrections, and with Liz (2019) about improving reading habits and skills of the students with a view to overcoming the problems. He also agrees with Ebert (2017) that students should be provided with models to emulate.

Some students mentioned the medium of instruction in the class. Karim reflected, “Our English classes are held in Bengali, and that is not conducive to any language skill development.” A good number of students suggested that their range of vocabulary should be improved to make them more confident about expressing themselves. Sadiku (2015) holds similar views that language skills are interconnected.

The feasibility of these measures was not discussed; it, hence, would require another study to discover. However, the suggestions mentioned above came from the participants, and should not be thought of as the only or categorical solutions to the problems.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis paper aims to find out different aspects of Bengali-medium HSC students' paragraph-writing skills. To conduct the research, only qualitative data was collected through interviews with teachers and focused-group discussions with students. The findings indicate that students of HSC level should demonstrate the ability of writing different types of sentences, a range of standard HSC vocabulary, and the expertise in writing topic sentences, bodies, and concluding sentences with correct grammar, and coherence and cohesion. The findings also allude that most students with some exceptions know the basic structure of a paragraph, and that students cannot identify the type of paragraph explicitly and write as per demand. However, both teachers and students agree that their performance is not up to the HSC level. The topics that students often make mistakes on are: verb, tense, sentence structure, paragraph structure, voice, abbreviated forms of words, preposition, article, vocabulary, and idea. A number of potential solutions were offered by the students and teachers. The suggestions are as follows: stopping memorization and repetition of questions, inspiring students, managing the classes and teaching in groups, doing more practice, giving feedbacks, training teachers, making corrections indirectly, increasing reading habits, providing effective materials, making English as the medium of instruction in English classes, and enhancing the volume of students' vocabulary. Most of the findings listed above have been identified by Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014), who said that students could grapple with the grammatical aspects, and the shortage of ideas and vocabulary. The findings here also agree with the findings of Fahmida (2010)'s study, which show that students can have grammatical, lexical, and skeletal deficits in the writing. In addition, the results of this study are clearly in line with those of Rao (2019), Sarfo-Adu (2015), Alsmari (2019), sheeba (2018), and Asep et al (2014) among many others. However, several original findings have been found such as message-style writing on examination paper, and mix views on the paragraph structure.

Based on the findings of this research, I am compelled to argue that Students' paragraph-writing skills are inconsistent with their education level because of students' tendency of memorization, the lack of motivation and practice, and the teaching methods.

As for the limitations of this research, the main drawback was the size of sampling. It is understandable that a group of 16 students cannot represent the population which is far greater than thousand times in size. It can be said for teachers, because only the experience of two teachers cannot account for the thoughts and judgements of a far greater group (of which the sample size is less than 0.5%). Again, the method used for sampling is not reliable enough to assert any generative conclusion. The research could have been better conducted unless there had been an outbreak of COVID-19, and a stern, extensive closure of academic institutions. Finally, the analysis of students' writings, especially paragraph writings, can solidify the end result with concrete evidence.

This research can originate many questions that can lead to other theses. For example, the statements of the teachers showed that there could be an inequality in terms of disbursement of education since the situations seemed very different from one institution to the other. One student-Shirin identified that saying, "... I wonder how well my cousin who studies at Holy Cross College speaks and writes in English. I am not even a close match for her. I am even more amazed to have heard that the students there have a similar set of skills to hers." This statement is enough to stem curiosity to look into the situation.

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