

Approaches and Challenges of Teaching ESL Essay Writing Online: A Study on an English Medium School



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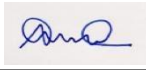
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.



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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

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Abstract

The global pandemic of 2020, has made most schools in Bangladesh switch to the online platform. Prior to the pandemic, schools mostly operated offline through face-to-face interaction between students and teachers, as such the transition from offline to online teaching made use of Zoom, Google Meet, or other similar software. The main objective of this research explores the teaching methods of English essay writing online, reasons for teachers' preference of an approach, as well as problems they face while teaching essay writing using a particular approach online in an English Medium school in Dhaka. Suggestions to improve the teaching experience will also be accounted for. The research used two essay writing approaches- Product Approach and Process Approach, to identify the type of approach used to teach English essay writing online. The researcher used semi-structured interviews as qualitative data collection method and survey forms as quantitative data collection method. Eight teachers from a Dhaka based English Medium School were selected. The interviews were collected through phone conversations and their answers were analyzed thematically in line with the queries posed in the research questions of the research paper. Findings suggest that some aspects of product and process approach are used by teachers based on various classroom situations, and more than the teachers' literacy on computers, some features of the portal cause limitations in giving feedback, motivating students or teaching essay/paragraph. Lastly, some teachers agreed that students' regular work needs checking apart from assignments. Moreover, these findings provide insights into the pedagogical approaches, reasons for teachers' predilection to an approach and challenges teachers face as they adapt to using technology while teaching essay/paragraph writing in ESL online classrooms in a Dhaka based English medium school.

Chapter One: Introduction

Writing is considered one of the productive skills along with speaking. McDonough et al., (2013) emphasized that writing for most learners with English as their first language or second language occurs at an extensive level only as part of a formal education. In Bangladesh, the three main institution systems which include: Bangla Medium Schools, English Medium Schools, and Madrasa teach English as a compulsory subject (Education Policy Bangladesh, 2010). The Product Approach and Process Approach to teaching writing have mostly been used in ESL/EFL classes since the last few decades (Hasan & Akhand, 2010). Steele (n.d.) elaborated the Product Approach where students are guided in writing by examining specific features of model texts and completing the write-up individually in one-go after which the teacher provides feedback on students' use of grammar, vocabulary and language structure. As for the Process Approach, she distinguished it as an approach where students brainstorm together, jot down their ideas, write a draft, receive their classmates' feedback, redraft and submit the final version for teacher's feedback. However, in Bangladeshi context, Sadia (2019) found that in Bangla medium schools, the Grammar Translation Method is used where grammar rules and essay memorization are encouraged and students translate Bangla passages to English. In addition, few researches focus on the teaching of essay writing in English Medium schools. When it is done so, English Medium is explored in relation to Bangla Medium schools, leaving less scope to fully investigate the teaching dynamics of the former system. One such research was done by Ferdousi (2017) where she explored 3 Bangla Medium Schools and one English Medium School's contrast in teaching essay writing and ESL classroom situations. Furthermore, due to the current pandemic, physical classrooms have been replaced by online platforms ever since the closing of educational institutions from March 17, 2020, in Bangladesh (UNB, 2020). The sudden shift from offline to online gave way to several problems in the teaching and learning process due to less access to the internet and television (Hasan,

2020). Therefore, the approaches used and challenges faced while teaching English essay writing online need to be studied in context to English Medium Schools.

Due to the current pandemic worldwide, most government schools in Bangladesh shifted from in-person classes to online classes using television, web portals, radio and mobile phones (Hasan, 2020) and few others have opted for Zoom or Google Meet (Sultana, 2020). The concept of studying online is new for school goers of Bangladesh, unlike the West, where a study by Wijeyewardene et al., (2013) gives some idea on the teaching of ESL essay writing online in a University. However, there has been little focus in the context of English Medium Schools in Bangladesh. Moreover, McDonough et al., (2013) mentions that based on the fact that only “input” will not suffice for an ESL learner, the “acquisition” point of view looks at how students will be given a chance to interact in a genuine manner online, where being understood by each other is vital to the process. McDonough et al., (2013) also adds that research in English as a second language in the online environment is mostly related to instantaneous written communication, which was analyzed as a substitute to in-person communication. Therefore, it is essential to explore how the Covid-19 pandemic and the availability of advanced teaching platforms like Zoom, Google Meet and institutional domains have introduced new dynamics and challenges to the teaching of English essay writing online.

Stephen D. Krashen, defines “acquisition” as the spontaneous uptake of linguistic rules obtained through everyday communication. While “learning” is defined as informed uptake of linguistic rules and needs to be studied. He also defines certain conditions in terms of “input” which are needed for “acquisition” to occur. “Input” must be understandable, a little above the student’s linguistic skills, engaging, not following any order in teaching grammar, in precise amounts and should not trigger anxiety in the learner (Krashen, 1981, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 1999, p. 18).

Objective:

The objective of this study is to investigate the writing approach used in teaching English essay writing online and challenges teachers face while teaching essay/paragraph writing online in an English Medium School. The study will look into the writing approaches particularly in terms of the Product and Process Approach to essay writing in both qualitative and quantitative methods, as teachers will be interviewed and surveyed. In addition, the results of the study will help to address the possible solutions in teaching essay writing online.

The following research questions arise in a context where online teaching is the practice and physical classrooms are not attainable at the moment:

1. Which approach is followed by teachers to teach English essay writing online and what makes them use this approach?
2. To what extent do the teachers' knowledge of technology get in the way of teaching essay writing in English online?
3. What challenges do teachers face in interacting with students online and how effective are the online essay writing tasks in fulfilling teachers' objectives of teaching essay writing?

Past research and relevant literature described in the introduction will be further examined in the literature review section. The methodology section will address the two approaches to writing- Product and Process Approach in relation to essay writing. The data collected includes teachers' interviews with regard to the approaches used in teaching essay writing online. In addition, survey questionnaires used as a method of quantitative data collection will help to support the findings of qualitative analysis. Due to the researcher's affiliation with an English Medium School in Dhaka, for ease of study and data collection the research will be based only on that school.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In countries like Bangladesh, where English is taught and learnt as a second language, writing plays an important role in the language learning process. This study aims to explore the writing approach used to teach essay/paragraph writing online in an English Medium School in light of Product Approach and Process Approach. In addition the reasons for using a specific writing approach will be evaluated from the teachers' perspective and solutions to tackle problems while teaching in an online environment will be provided.

2.1 Approaches/methods to teaching second language essay writing offline and online

The successful approaches to writing in EFL/ESL classrooms, as advised by ELT experts, include: product, process and genre (Wenden, 1987, as cited in Hasan & Akhand, 2010). According to Steele (n.d.) the proper approach in any classroom will vary due to each students' cognitive abilities, the kind of text used, the education system in a school and various other factors.

According to Hasan and Akhand (2010), most schools under S.S.C and H.S.C boards introduced the Communicative approach where teacher-student interaction is vital to learning English. But lack of teachers' training makes them revert to using the old Grammar Translation Method, where grammar rules are memorized and students translate sentences between their mother tongue and the target language.

A mixed-method study by Chakraborty (2012) to explore the current status of free writing and teaching methods in five Bangla Medium schools in Dhaka, found contrasting pictures between class observations and students' and teachers' interviews. Classroom observations revealed that teachers do not use the Process Approach to essay/paragraph writing, but some said they did, and they only provide feedback with regards to grammar. Teaching and learning is exam-

dependent as essay topics in exams tend to be from within their books, which encourage memorization hindering students' creative thinking.

Comparative analysis between four Bangla medium schools and one English Medium school on the teaching methods and students' essay writing skills was carried out by Ferdousi (2017) through class observations, evaluation of students' essay writing skills using surprise test, and teachers' and students' interviews. Results showed that classrooms were teacher-oriented in Bangla medium schools, only front row students participated in class discussions, students communicated in their native language mostly, students had less interaction in English as they had one English class each day, teachers followed NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) books to assign essay topics. In the English medium school, classrooms were student-oriented, all students actively participated in class discussions and they spoke fluently in English, except Bangla all other subjects were taught in English, and teachers had freedom to assign topics.

A qualitative study was carried out by Sadia (2019) through interviews, class observations, evaluation of students' exam scripts and surprise tests; on 3 Bangla Medium Schools in a small town in Bangladesh on teachers' methods of teaching essay writing and its impacts on students' writing skills. Teachers taught using the Grammar Translation Method, where they gave lectures, translate passages and taught grammar out of context, encouraged memorization of grammar structure and essays. Students' creativity is limited as the length of the essay and grammar is focused on more than cohesion of ideas and content.

Jun and Lee (2012) carried out a study on the perception and challenges of an online writing unit designed to teach compare and contrast essays being trialed in EFL writing classes using Process Approach for international students at a US university. Students followed the steps of

the process writing approach of brainstorming, drafting, revising and receiving feedback from classmates with the help of several instructions posted on the website.

Another study by Wijeyewardene et al., (2013) outlines the strategies used by a program called The Pathways Enabling Course offered by the University of New England (UNE) to teach academic writing online to students using their Moodle, along with other multimedia tools. Foundation 101 and Foundation 102 are the courses taught online, which focus on genre approach to writing. The courses introduce students to various forms of texts and highlight specific features of each genre of text.

2.2 Difficulties faced while teaching second language essay writing offline and online

Chakraborty (2012) in her research through class observation found that students complete their writing in one go without making drafts or revising. Time constraints, lots of students, lack of students' motivation in class, students' lack of knowledge about grammar, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation, and predictable question patterns in exams provided impediments to teaching the process approach. Sadia (2019) in her study, found through teachers' interviews in 3 Bangla medium schools that some teachers know the Communicative approach but due to large class, time constraints, exam dependent curriculum, parents and older teachers focus on grades than an interactive class, students' mindset to memorize than think creatively to get better grades easily, are reasons why teachers use the Grammar Translation Method. The lack of multimedia facilities and proper seating arrangements make group work impossible. Large class and time constraints also prevent teachers from providing feedback to all students.

Jun and Lee (2012) in their research pointed out the teachers' difficulty in providing feedback in online platforms and emphasized the limitation of student-teacher interaction in online classes due to lack of face-to-face interaction. Moreover, Wijeyewardene et al., (2013) also pointed out that determining the degree of student engagement with instructional materials,

inability to illustrate how to perform certain tasks, the stressful and rigorous task of writing, redrafting and marking, and being bombarded by student emails asking for immediate feedback are some problems teachers face in the online foundation courses provided by University of New England. Carolan and Kyppo (2015) denote problems teachers face while teaching process writing in an online writing course in a Finnish University, like dealing with language learners with varied expertise, keeping in mind about student involvement with the course, their enthusiasm and willingness to learn and lastly the need to enhance students' writing skills.

2.3 Online multimedia tools

An online writing unit to teach compare and contrast essays in EFL classes of a US university, used message boards for feedback and online discussion, and instructions on tasks were posted on the Moodle website (Jun & Lee, 2012). Wijeyewardene et al., (2013), outlines the multimedia tools used in an online foundation course by the University of New England which included: database tool, pdf files, YouTube videos, Turnitin and Grademark. The flash technology helps students identify the main features of an essay so that students find it easy to write on their own. Another tool is the “database” tool, where students upload their work and have it marked by a “rich text editor (RTE)” which has in-built features like strikethrough, and highlighting, it can also be customized by the teachers/ “markers” (p. A-28). The “marker” may also instruct students to submit a corrected version of their paragraph if necessary, to make students aware of the drafting and editing process in writing. Students' final essays are marked online via Grademark, which has more features than the “RTE” (p. A-28). According to Carolan and Kyppo (2015), the University of Jyväskylä Language Center provides an online writing course which uses a learning management system, known as Optima, which encourages self-dependent learning and allows sharing of different course materials like files, webpages, videos and recorded media. In addition, learners can also engage in discussions, write journal

entries, complete assignments in a cooperative online system, share remarks, give and receive constructive criticism about their write-ups. Each learner has a personal folder that outlines the rudimentary procedures of the Process Approach. It also contains links to different web pages with writing tips and guides.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to schools being closed worldwide and there has been a rise in online teaching through various technological platforms (Li & Lalani, 2020). Similarly, during the initial months of Covid-19 pandemic, most schools in Bangladesh started online classes through Zoom or Google Meet on a small scale after educational institutions closed to contain the virus spread (Sultana, 2020).

2.4 Accessibility to proper technologies to teach offline and online

A study by Mahmud (2017) on the needs analysis to improve secondary students' writing skills found that there was no access to multimedia facilities in Bangla Medium Schools. Similarly, Sadia (2019) found that access to multimedia facilities like computers and projectors are limited in outer parts of Dhaka and even those multimedia facilities are not maintained well. Hasan (2020) relates that less access to the internet in rural areas and instability of internet connection, makes the approach of distance learning during the pandemic exclusive to those living in Dhaka with a strong socio-economic background. And according to a UNICEF survey, only 50% of students have television.

2.5 Teacher-student interaction in ESL classrooms offline and online

Teachers interviewed in the study by Sadia (2019) in certain schools in Bangladesh, shared that they tend to be stern and do not encourage students' participation as they have perceived that parents prefer strict teachers who can keep students in control. Hence, the classroom

environment is hostile and the interaction is transactional, i.e. one way, as only the teacher speaks.

Teachers participating in the research by Jun and Lee (2012), felt a gap in interaction with students in online classes as it did not provide enough instances of interaction unlike in-person classes. In Bangladeshi context, when online classes began due to the pandemic, the government's initiative to start classes via television posed a lack of two-way interaction (Hasan, 2020). However, Wijeyewardene et al., (2013) mentioned that students can be kept busy with writing tasks, peer discussions and teacher's feedback, which might be straining for the teachers but it will keep students from feeling desolate and disconnected from their peers and teachers in online classes.

2.6 Suggestions to improve teaching of ESL writing offline and online

To develop students' writing skills in offline classes of Bangladeshi educational institutions, Chakraborty (2012) suggests students should be made to practice varieties of writing tasks of different genres like short stories, essays, letters, book reviews, etc. She adds that teacher and peer discussion will allow teachers to focus on students' needs and be supportive when necessary but also allow development of students' creative thinking and writing. Lastly, teachers should give students the freedom to discuss and choose the content, objectives, and readers of their writing. Sadia (2019) points out the need to use authentic materials to teach English which are contextualized to Bangladeshi culture and literature, properly training teachers in various writing approaches and use of technologies, and changing the writing topics in board exams so students do not rely on memorization for good grades. Ferdousi (2017) recommends that schools can encourage students to read English books outside of their academic ones. Teachers can provide group work which will also reduce the load of providing feedback to lots of students as they can assess students' work in groups. Lastly, encouraging

students to enhance their creativity by giving timely feedback and appreciating their effort with positive remarks.

Ways to improve students' writing through online courses include providing explicit objectives and instructions of tasks to students, providing video tutorials of the use of technologies to teachers and students, and training teachers using technology (Jun & Lee, 2012). Wijeyewardene et al., (2013) emphasized that to properly provide students with a walkthrough of the tasks in a course, tutorial videos available on YouTube or teacher made videos using Camtasia Studio can be made accessible along with small lessons. The researchers suggested dividing students into groups and forming a simple group of ready to use comments in the learning management system increases productivity of providing feedback. Lastly, Adobe Connect can be used to make students edit a piece of academic writing synchronously so they learn to work as a group.

Therefore, the literature used depicts different approaches, particularly the product and process approach to writing in context to various Bangla medium schools in Bangladesh and some universities in the West. However, there has been little research on the approaches used to teach ESL essay writing online in English medium schools of Bangladesh. Therefore, with the help of existing research on online courses, this study will conduct a mixed-method study to explore the approach in teaching essay/ paragraph writing in an English Medium School in Dhaka, using the product and process approach. The research will also look into reasons for preference of the approach and provide solutions to help alleviate problems in an online environment.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This research will use Product and Process Approaches to study the teachers' methods of teaching essay writing in an English Medium School online. Additionally, the research will also look into the reasons for using an approach, teachers' computer skills, online student-teacher interaction and essay writing assignments fulfilling learner outcomes. While the Product Approach to writing provides students with a model text which they are instructed to follow to develop their own piece of writing. The Process Approach to writing is a step by step process that develops students' knowledge about the use of language and produces their own writing, through brainstorming, group work and redrafting their writing (Hasan & Akhand, 2010).

This research will use qualitative and quantitative methods. Eight Creative Writing teachers from a Dhaka based English Medium School teaching essay/paragraph writing from Class-II to Class-V were selected. Three teachers from Class-II, two from Class-III, two from Class-IV and one from Class-V were chosen conveniently. Out of the participating teachers, one teacher teaches both Class-II and III and so she has been included once in the group of Class-II teachers, while another teacher teaching both Class-IV and V, has been included once in the group of Class-IV teachers. The qualitative method was used to collect data by interviewing teachers regarding the approach they use to teach essay writing online as opposed to offline classes, difficulties they face while teaching essay writing online, challenges in interacting with students and their opinion on the standard of the essay writing assignments given online and any suggestions for improving the online teaching experience. Interviews with three teachers were recorded as the rest of the teachers did not give consent. The interviews were collected via phone conversations, and the researcher noted their answers on the spot and transcribed the recorded ones. Five semi-structured interview questions have been designed to provide scope

for further discussion during the interview. The data for the quantitative method was collected by forming twelve multiple choice questions which acted as survey questionnaire and helped to answer questions like, the teachers' ways of teaching essay writing, their opinion on what makes a good essay, struggles with adapting to the online environment, ways of interacting with students and ways of providing feedback. Likert scale was used for three questions with the options 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree', the rest have options that have been designed in context to the specific questions. The qualitative and quantitative data were both collected in informal settings, the former data via phone conversations and for the latter data, the researcher distributed the survey forms through various messaging platforms such as Messenger, Viber and WhatsApp according to each teachers' convenience and availability, this was done because of the lockdown in place due to the pandemic during the time of the data collection. The responses from interviews have been analyzed thematically while the data from the quantitative survey have been presented in the form of pie-charts.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the writing approach used in an online classroom, the teachers' reasons for the preference and their difficulties while teaching online and whether online essay writing assignments are enough to improve students' essay writing skills.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

This chapter deals with the analysis of the data collected through interviews and survey forms. The data collected has been analyzed to answer the research questions which focus on the type of approach teachers use to teach essay/paragraph writing to ESL elementary level students online in an English Medium School, their reasons for teaching using that approach, teachers' technological skills and challenges they face while teaching essay/paragraph writing online, features of the institutional software that affect the teacher-student interaction and the standard of essay/paragraph writing assignments fulfilling teachers' objectives.

4.1 Qualitative Analysis:

Eight participating creative writing teachers have each been assigned a specific letter and number, from P1-P8. Two creative writing teachers teach Class-II, one teacher teaches both Class-II and III, two creative writing teachers teach Class-III, one teacher teaches both Class-IV and V, and lastly one teaches Class-IV only and another Class-V only. In the context of the specific English Medium School, from the teacher's interviews it was evident that students in Class-II are taught to write 15-20 sentences on a given topic, this then moves to the paragraph level in Class-III and finally to the essay level in Class-IV and V.

1. How do you teach English essay/paragraph writing online and has it changed from the way you taught during in-person classes? What are the reasons for teaching essay/paragraph writing the way you do?

All eight participants, whether they teach paragraphs or essays, teach about the 3 segments- introduction, body and conclusion, however, their methods of teaching about these segments vary. P1 and P6 both provide keywords after giving the topic. However, P1 also gives clues for students to begin writing. While P6 provides some questions related to the 3 segments of a

topic to help Class-II students form sentences in the correct order and P8 follows the same method to help students write paragraphs on a topic. P3 gives out the format after she discusses her real life experience relevant to the essay topic, and then she discusses the content of the 3 segments. P4 provides a general description of narrative and descriptive essay and simultaneously discusses the structure and later moves to the topic, sometimes she also asks students to provide their own ideas and she adds her ideas to theirs. Lastly, P5 and P2 provide their own sample texts which is a feature of product approach to writing and explain the 3 segments. P5 then provides students' ideas on how to write an essay on their own. However, before P2 moves to her own sample paragraph, she provides the necessary points and explains them. Lastly, P7 provides a topic sentence from which students are taught to form main ideas and supporting sentences to help them write 18-20 sentences on a topic, and like P5 and P2, she provides sample sentences of her own for the 3 segments as well, which the students can tweak to fit to the topic. The mode of instruction is English and no textbooks are used to teach essay/paragraph during both in-person and online classes. Topics are assigned by teachers.

A number of changes that teachers highlighted due to their transition from in-person to online classes include the following: P4, P6 and P8 brought up the inability to make students brainstorm and write in online classes, and P4 keeps her explanations brief due to less time, about 30 minutes. P7 also mentioned the inability to check students' work in-person and provide feedback when necessary. During in-person classes, P6 and P2 mentioned that they made students do some sentence making with the keywords they provided before moving to paragraph writing. P2, P4 and P8 used to complete one topic in two classes where they would provide students with ideas, generate students' own ideas in one class and complete the essay/paragraph writing in the next class. According to P7, teachers need to keep giving lectures in online class to keep students focused.

An important aspect of the process writing approach is writing a draft (Steele, n. d.). And P1, P2, P7 and P8 agreed that they teach students to write a draft before they start with a paragraph topic, in both online and offline classes, although P2 and P7 sometimes do it. While P7 recommended it for getting good marks and P2 suggested it for a more organized final draft. P8 mostly teaches students to write a draft in online classes more as students cannot write the paragraph instantly unlike offline classes due to time constraints, while for offline classes she made students write drafts if the topic was difficult. The other teachers P3, P4, P5 and P6 did not make students write a draft both in online and offline classes. Their reason for not doing so in online classes was that there are time constraints as P6 mentioned that asking for ideas from learners might overwhelm the teacher with student responses making them unable to complete their lessons.

Group work while writing an essay/paragraph topic was done by all teachers, during in-person classes, an aspect of process writing. However, most teachers made students work in groups or pairs after syllabus completion to assess their understanding, once or twice a term. P1, P2, P5 and P6 made students do group work on unseen topics related to the syllabus, where they divided each segment of an essay/paragraph among groups of four/five students. P3, P4, P5, P7 and P8 also made students discuss in groups on the students' chosen book to prepare for the "Book Reading Competition" organized in collaboration with British Council and write book reviews individually. In addition, P6, P7 and P8 compiled students' short stories, poems, and other creative pieces and hung up on the classroom wall in chart papers. P1 and P8 held group presentations whenever they made students do group work. But in online classes none of these can be done as P6 mentioned that in the portal students have no way of knowing who is attending the class with them and teachers cannot monitor students' activities in class.

In terms of giving feedback, P1, P2, P3 and P5 focus primarily on grammar, spelling and punctuation but they also mentioned that if content has problems that is also pointed out. P2 further added that mistakes in grammatical elements lead to inaccurate sentence structures and will affect content. P3 mentioned that leniency is shown while giving feedback when students can somewhat relate to the essay topic. P5 stated that students make the most errors in grammar hence that gets more focus. While P4, P6, P7 and P8 all focus on both grammar, spelling and content, P4 puts more emphasis on content as her main focus is to assess how much students understand the topic. She also reiterated P2's reasons for focusing on grammar. While P6 mentioned that content or topic dictates grammar for e.g. 'A Visit to a Zoo'. P7, on the other hand, is lenient in pointing out grammatical errors based on the amount of mistakes students make. In addition, P7 also focuses on formatting, proper ordering of introduction, body and conclusion.

The various reasons why each of the teachers teach online the way they do include, P1 thinks it is more effective and P5 wants students to plan an essay by themselves, similarly P7 chooses topics related to students' lives so that they cannot copy from each other or the internet, hence a more subjective topic like 'My House' will help them think independently. P2 and P8 think it is crucial for children of Class-III to know the basic structure of paragraphs, because otherwise they will mess up the order of the 3 portions of a paragraph. P3 teaches in her way because students have little scope to add their ideas due to limitation of teacher-student interaction and moreover she has to take into consideration the different cognitive capabilities of all students of Class-IV in her session, whereas she had separate classes with each section during in-person classes. P4's reason for repeating the explanation of the same concepts was because she believes that students have receptive brains and they absorb concepts faster this way. Lastly, P6 and P8 mention that they use one-line questions to guide Class-II and III

students respectively, to write their own sentences as they are still too young to form complete sentences with correct grammar and content.

2. How efficient are you in browsing the internet or using Microsoft Office, Google classroom, Google meet or other similar software and when did you learn them?

P1, P2, P4 and P6 know the basics of MS Word as they can make assignments which require a specific format to be followed and that includes inserting page numbers, changing page layout and page size, inserting footer and lastly converting the word to pdf file to upload it on the school portal. P1 and P4 also added that they can make PowerPoint slides which they learnt in university although P4 mentioned that due to the lack of need to use the other MS Office software to teach online at primary level her skills have gotten a bit rusty. P2 also has knowledge on internet browsing and she gained the computer skills in her school and university. P6 added that she learnt the basics of computer functions through a subject called Computer in her HSC and while teaching paragraph writing online she has gotten accustomed to browsing the internet for finding meanings and synonyms of certain words.

P3, P5, P7 and P8 all claim to have a really good grasp of using MS Office and browsing the internet. All four teachers credited their efficiency to the assignments, and presentations they completed in their respective universities. Additionally, P3 mentioned that she got accustomed to using online resources in her previous workplace which was also a school, where all the activities were computer based from lesson plans to notes, emails, making worksheets, inserting marks in report cards. P7 also mentioned the training from the school to operate the school portal. Lastly, P8 revealed that her use of MS Office, Google classroom, online resources, and video lectures improved in an external program called Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in her LLB Honors degree.

3. What are the features of the online platform/software that your institution uses and how does it affect your teaching of English essay/ paragraph writing?

All teachers highlighted that the portal has video and audio options for teachers only, students use the comment box. P1, P2, P3 and P6 emphasized the fact that limitation of face-to-face interactions made students unwilling to ask questions or answer teacher's questions. P6 added that the delay in receiving students' responses reduces class time. P2 and P3 agreed that teachers are unable to monitor if students are attentive in the class, which becomes evident when some students ask about taking notes when P2 takes class, and when they make mistakes in their paragraph assignments which could have been avoided, as those are discussed in class.

According to P5 some students learn better when shown practically rather than being told how essays are written, which she could do during offline classes but now some students fail to understand when asked to plan their essays. P4 added that creative writing is a part of English Language, and English Language teachers teach grammar. Hence, when exam scripts are submitted the English Language and Creative Writing portions are set in the same question paper and so both teachers need to enter each other's portals and check their respective sections, which is a hassle at times. P1, P3 and P4 all agreed that the number of students in online class has increased around 200:1, compared to 30:1 in offline classes, where students were divided section wise with different sections for boys and girls but now they are divided class wise, and P3 added that due to this teachers have to be mindful on the level of input they provide to students in a way that all students understand.

In addition, P4 and P8 also mentioned the facility of having a personalized and secure account with access to syllabus, class schedule, recorded classes, students' assignments, and notes all in one place leading to less mistakes in P4's opinion and no hassle of looking for link to conduct video lectures in P8's opinion. P5 and P7 also pointed out a good side, that not being able to

see or hear students, leads to an uninterrupted teaching experience, unlike in-person classes when some students would chat during class discussion. P7 also adds that teachers are also saved from some students' malicious verbal comments and, P2 mentioned that it is easier to upload assignments and study notes. Lastly, P8 added that a good feature of the comments section is that teachers can answer students' queries even after the class has finished.

4. How does the question & answer box work as an alternative to communicating face-to-face with students during in-person classes? How does the online platform affect the way of giving feedback to student assignments?

P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P6 preferred face-to-face interaction, as communicating with students through question and answer box posed challenges. P1 and P3 mentioned students feel reluctant to comment their questions and only ask a few questions, and this leaves teachers in the dark about the non-participating learners' progress. P1, P2 and P4 mention that most do not even ask. While P5 pointed out that a 10-15 second delay in loading the class causes a lack of sync in communication, in that case students ask for re-explanation in the question and answer box. P6 feels that if she asks students many questions she might be overwhelmed by their responses and this will consume the class time, so she keeps her questions to one-liners. Conversely, in P8's opinion the limitation of face-to-face interaction increases class participation as some students respond since they find the experience less unnerving which did not happen as much during in-person classes. P5 reveals that teachers have the autonomy to pick the relevant questions and answer them, and P7 mentions that she communicates with students just like in-person classes, sensible students comment their questions and she responds promptly.

P1 and P3 agreed that the feedback option for students' assignments do not provide the option of marking over the images of assignments. All teachers agreed that pen and paper checking was a lot easier because they could make corrections directly on the students' copies during the

in-person classes now teachers need to type the feedback which as P4 mentioned will need some time to get used to. P1, P3, P4, P5 and P8 rewrite lines and mention the line numbers. Sometimes, P3, P5 and P6 would provide a general feedback if there are whole paragraphs full of errors, e.g. P5 writes ‘There’s overall a lot of grammatical errors’, and P6 mentions that she tries to correct as much as she can without changing the students’ ideas much, and other times she mentions sp. or gr. and writes the correct spelling or grammar respectively. While P4 and P6 reduce the number of errors they pinpoint, and according to P6 it is due to the word limitation of the comment box. Conversely, P5 suggests it is due to the shortage of time to complete checking. P2, P7 and P8 provide a different picture as P2 and P7 simply lists the correct spellings, grammar or sentence structures, without mentioning line numbers, as there is no specific guideline on providing feedback to students’ errors. While P8 mentions that she uses the underline feature available in assignments only sent as pdf and then types the explanations in the comment box.

5. What type of writing assignments are given to students in the online portal and does it equalize the amount of written work students did during in-person classes to learn essay writing?

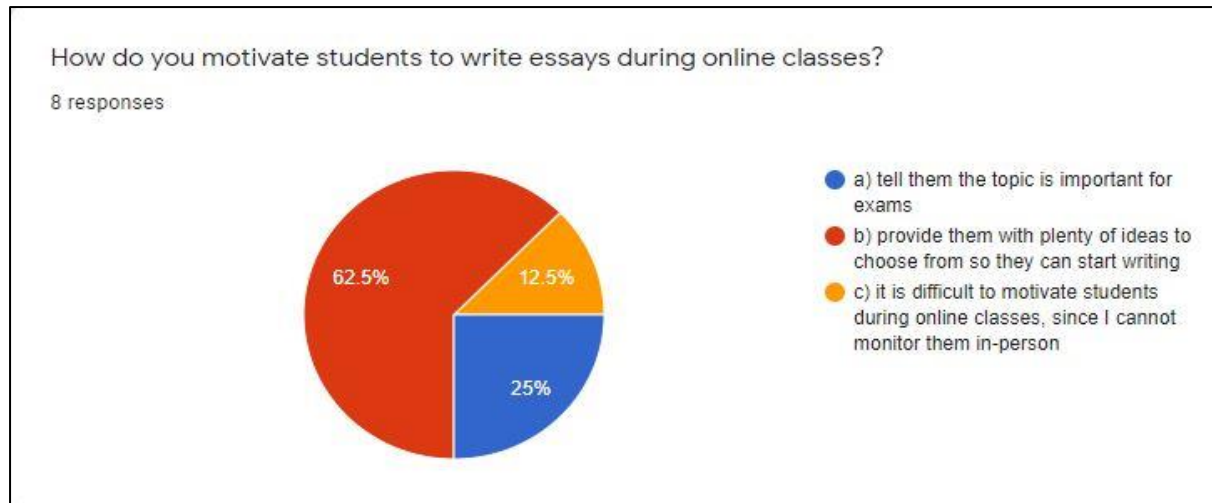
All teachers agreed that assignment topics are usually given on similar topics discussed during online classes and there has been no change from in-person classes. P1, P2, P6, P7 & P8 mentioned that types of assignments for Class-II and III students include paragraph writing, letter writing and diary writing, while P3, P4, P5 mentioned Class-IV and V students receive narrative or descriptive essays, letter writing, application or sometimes story writing, where one line is provided and students need to complete the rest of the story.

On an average in all classes teachers discuss five-six paragraph/ essay topics each term and usually are instructed to provide one or two essay/paragraph assignments. Teachers are also

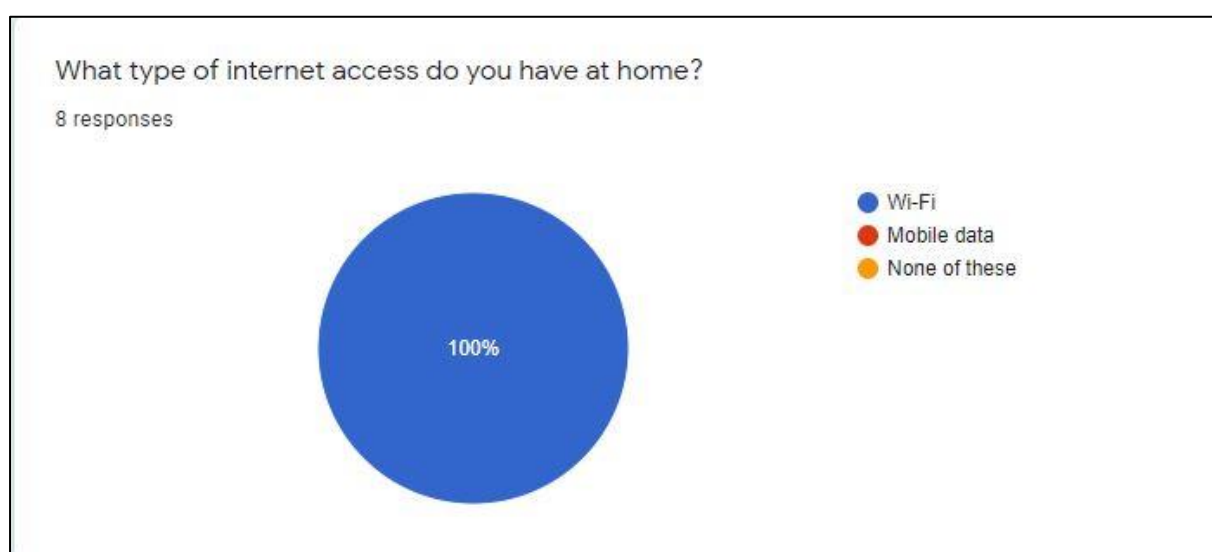
instructed to make the topics easier in online assignments. P1 and P2 both think students are not improving their writing skills with less number of assignments and P1 thinks assignment topics do not match the age of the students as some topics are repetitive throughout a few classes, for example, 'A birthday party' is given in Class-II and III. P2 mentions that some students need to be physically present in the class and practice paragraph writing more as different students have different cognitive abilities. So it does not equalize the amount of written work as many times students do not write notes during online classes, a similar concern was raised by P6. P5, P6 and P8 mentioned that in offline classes they made students write in every class, and P5 would sometimes make students take out their English Language books and make students do picture writing but it is not possible in online classes as students know teachers cannot monitor them. Similarly, in offline classes P6 asked students to brainstorm on a topic and provided keywords with which students made sentences and this helped them write a paragraph on a topic. Moreover, students cannot be compelled to give assignments as it is difficult to monitor so many students. While P3, P4 and P7 all agreed that students are getting enough practice in terms of the individual assignments given, as the word limit for Class- IV and V students and sentence number for class-II students are the same as in-person essay/paragraph topics.

4.2 Quantitative analysis

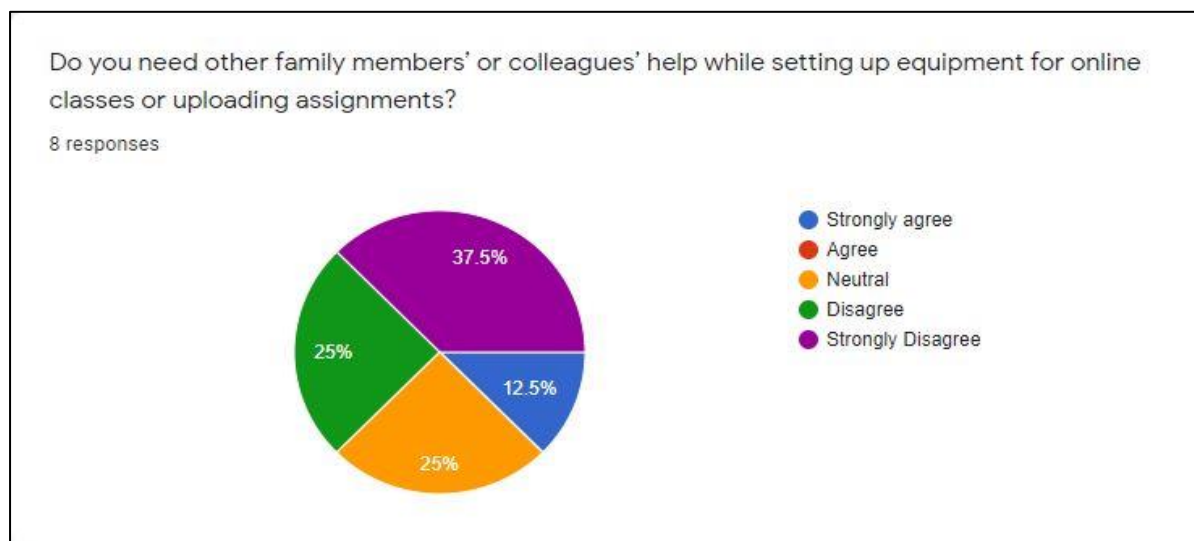
Twelve multiple choice questions were prepared for a quantitative analysis to support the participating teachers' responses in the open-ended interview sessions. Due to word constraint out of twelve questions, seven have been discussed and the corresponding pie-charts have been added.



Students studying in an online environment often feel lonely and separated as it does not have instant face-to-face interaction like offline classes and hence can lead to unwillingness to participate in classes (Wijeyewardene et al., 2013). So when teachers were asked how they motivate students to write in online ESL classrooms, 62.5% chose that they give students enough ideas to choose from so they can begin essay/paragraph writing. Around 25% of participating teachers responded that they tell students that an essay topic is important for exams. Lastly, only 12.5% of teachers expressed that it is difficult to motivate students in online classes, as teachers cannot monitor them in-person.



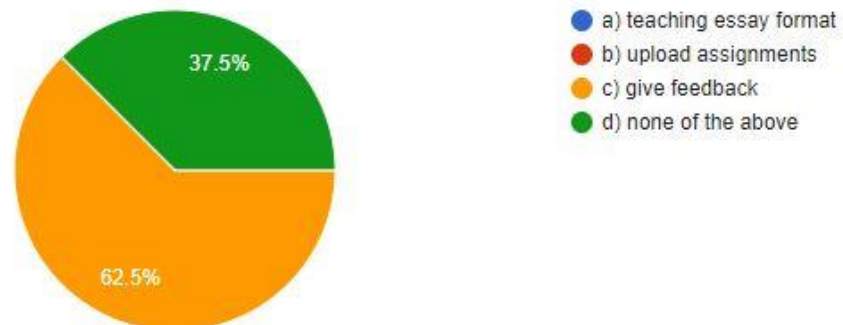
The way technology can be incorporated into teachers' everyday use depends on a number of factors, and one of them is the availability of certain technologies (McDonough et al., 2013). Hence, all participating teachers have access to the internet through Wi-Fi. This reflects the report by Hasan (2020) that less access to the internet in rural areas and instability of internet connection, makes online teaching and learning exclusive to those in Dhaka with a strong socio-economic background.



Teachers' "personal confidence" in utilizing technology is also an important factor in deciding how to incorporate it into everyday use (McDonough et al., 2013, p. 80). As evident from the results, different teachers feel differently about using technology to take classes. About 37.5% teachers strongly disagreed with needing their family members' or colleagues' help to set up equipment for online classes or uploading assignments, while 25% disagreed with the matter of needing help, this shows the majority of the teachers can cope on their own. Another 25% who chose to be 'neutral' allows for the assumption that they side both ways based on situations. The rest 12.5% require some help for their online classes and setting assignments.

What task do you find the most challenging among the ones listed below in an online environment?

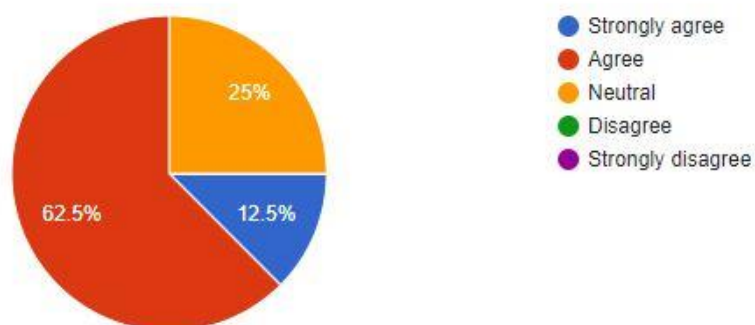
8 responses



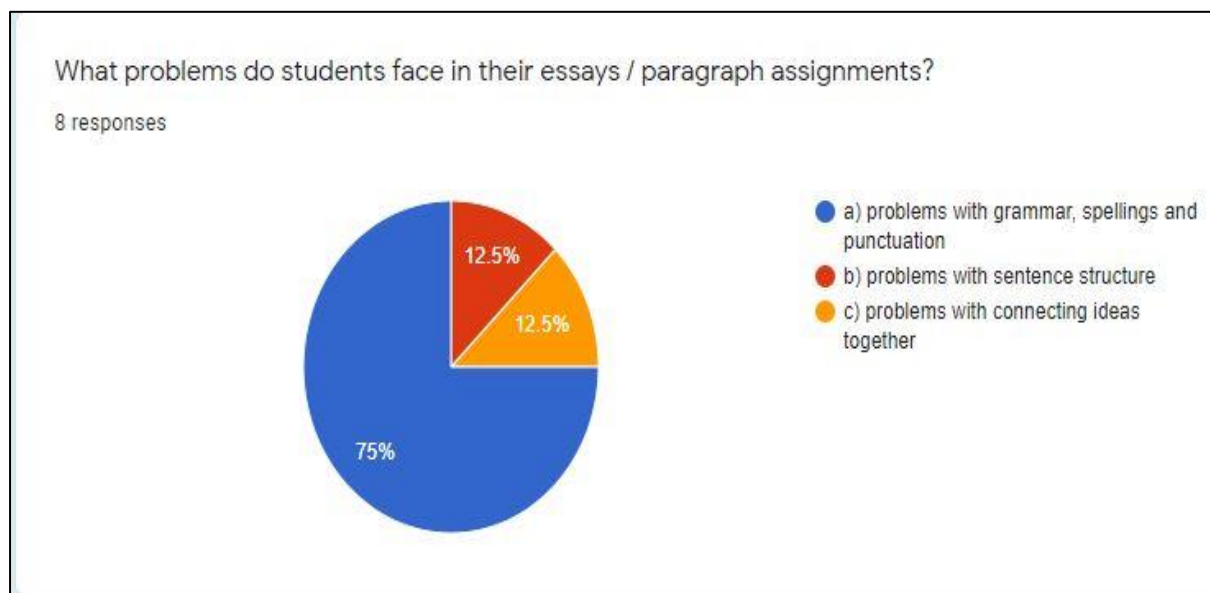
While results from the previous question show that most teachers can easily set up equipment and set assignments, results of this question reveal that there is a certain aspect of the online platform that most find challenging and that is giving feedback, which 67.5% of teachers chose. The rest 37.5% of teachers do not have any problem in any of the options mentioned, hence they have an easier teaching experience compared to the other participants.

The trainings given by the institution to use the online platform was sufficient.

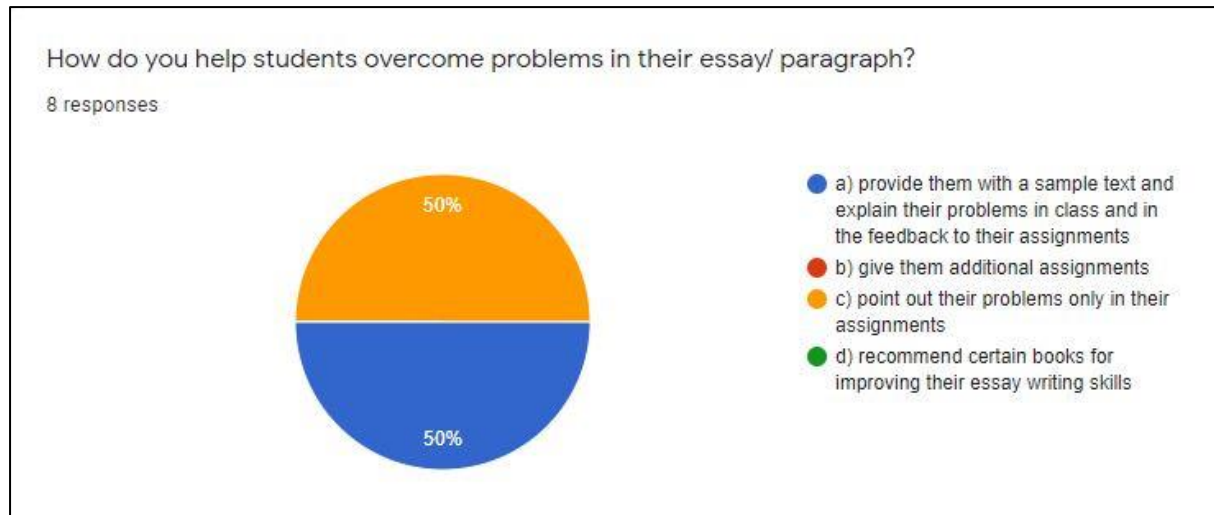
8 responses



Institutional support in using specific technology is another important aspect of the way technology can be incorporated into making teachers implement it (McDonough et al., 2013). Majority of teachers think that the training provided by the institution to use its online portal was sufficient as 62.5% and 12.5% agreed and strongly agreed respectively with the matter. While 25% decided to remain 'neutral' on the matter, this allows for the assumption that the teachers side both ways, depending on certain situations.



According to a majority of the participating teachers, the problems that students face the most while writing essay or paragraph as ESL learners is regarding the form of their write-up or the grammar, spellings and punctuation. While 12.5% teachers found students having problems with sentence structures and 12.5% found students' scripts where they had difficulty to connect ideas together.



Half of the creative writing teachers in the online class, provide students with a sample text and explain students' problems in class and in feedback to their assignments. Providing sample text is an aspect of product writing, in this case some teachers also provide sample texts when they see a majority of ESL learners facing problems with various parts of their essay/paragraph writing. The other half of the teachers point out the students' problems in their essay/paragraph assignments only.

Chapter Five: Findings

This research explores the ways teachers teach ESL essay writing to elementary students of an English Medium School online in light of Product and Process Approach. In addition, it addresses the teachers' competence of technological skills and challenges they face while teaching essay/paragraph writing online. The main findings of the study are as follows:

- **Techniques of teaching essay/paragraph writing in online ESL classrooms:** providing clues before writing; asking questions to help students form their own sentences and complete writing a paragraph; providing sample text and explaining the introduction, body and conclusion and later provide points on the given topic; explaining the difference between narrative and descriptive essays and then provide points of a topic; relating to teachers' own experience relevant to a topic; introducing topic sentences and making students form the main idea and supporting details. Each creative writing teacher uses any one of the methods mentioned above.
- **Writing in one-go or draft:** Half the teachers taught essay writing in one-go, while the other half of the teachers taught students to write a draft, although two of them did it sometimes.
- **Group work:** an aspect of process writing was done during in-person classes once or twice a term but due to limitation of face-to-face interaction, less time and more students, it became impossible to include in online classes.
- **Linguistic aspect focused while giving feedback:** Half of the teachers prioritize content and form while giving feedback. While the other half prioritize mostly on grammar because some feel that form affects the content and sentence structure.
- **Approach used to teach essay/paragraph writing:** All in all, no teacher strictly follows all aspects of either product or process approach to teach essay/paragraph writing online. Some teachers who use product approach provide sample text and due

to the limitation of face-to-face interaction, teachers are more inclined to the product approach to teaching essay writing, as students write individually since group work is not possible, and teachers can give one final feedback to students' work, so there is a focus on final product. Some who teach writing a draft or generating ideas teach one or two aspects of process writing online. During in-person classes, teachers combined product and process approach to essay/paragraph writing depending on syllabus completion and time.

- **Teachers' level of computer skills:** Half of the teachers know the basic functions of MS Word, but have less grasp over other MS Office software. While the other half of the teachers are very confident in using all MS Office software.
- **Features of the portal convenient to teachers:** personalized and password protected account; lack of video and mic option for students prevents disturbances in class; answer students' questions by typing even after class ends.
- **Features that hinder teachers' teaching:** lack of video and mic options also makes students reluctant to take notes during class or even attend them; student to teacher ratio is more in online class, hence teachers have to be careful on the level of input they provide. Therefore, more than teacher's knowledge of technology getting in the way, certain features of the portal provide more challenges for teachers.
- **Pros and cons of question and answer box:** Teachers can pick which questions to respond to; some students are encouraged to participate as they feel less intimidated. Overall less students' responses make it difficult for teachers to comprehend the non-participating students' progress; delay in syncing students with teachers' portal reduces class time as teachers need to repeat their explanation.
- The cons impact teachers' teaching more, hence six out of eight teachers prefer in-person interaction more than using the question and answer box.

- **Pros and cons of feedback system:** Marking feature available for assignments sent as pdf. Lack of a feature to highlight/cross over assignments sent as images, makes teachers rewrite whole lines or paragraphs; word constraints in the comment box limit some of their feedback.
- **Online assignments providing enough essay writing practice or not:** More than half of the teachers think that 1 or 2 assignments are not enough to improve students' essay writing skills, while the rest think students get enough practice as neither the word limit for Class- IV nor the number of sentences for Class-II has reduced.
- **Learner's errors in ESL essay/paragraph writing:** most of the teachers found errors in the form (grammar, verb use, etc.), and few found errors in sentence structure or content.
- **Challenging task in online teaching:** Majority of teachers (62.5%) chose giving feedback to be the most challenging task, while the rest did not find any tasks difficult.
- **Institutional support:** Most teachers (62.5%) agreed and (12.5%) strongly agreed that training from the institution to operate online portal was sufficient, and helped them better adapt to online teaching. While the rest chose to be neutral on the matter.
- **Suggestions from teachers to improve teaching essay/paragraph writing online:** make class more interactive by providing audio and video options for students; reducing number of students assigned to each teacher, to increase student participation; incorporating the feature to edit over images using red pen; and introduce checking of regular class work apart from assignments, to help students improve their essay writing skills as they will practice more.

Chapter Six: Limitations

The limitations of this research paper are given as follows:

- There were eight participants in this research, which is a small number. Moreover, the research focused on one English Medium School, hence the teachers' responses are less varied and does not provide a generalized picture of the approaches teachers use and challenges they face while teaching essay/paragraph writing online in other English Medium Schools and other institution systems around the country.
- Since the research focused on one school in Dhaka, there is a limitation that the findings have not been able to portray the varied technological facilities and advancements of other types of schools in and out of Dhaka.
- The research explored the use of different approaches used to teach essay writing online, essay writing itself is a broad term, for example, argumentative essay, narrative essay, opinion essay are some genres of essays and each of them will require different instructions and varied use of online technologies. Since the research used essay writing as a general term, this is also a limitation.
- The research is limited to Class II-V creative writing teachers, hence the views of creative writing teachers of other classes have not been represented.
- Interviews appointments via phone had to be rescheduled for some teachers, which slowed down the completion of data collection.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The pandemic of 2020, has introduced new changes and challenges in ESL classrooms, particularly in Bangladesh due to the transition to online teaching. The data from the interviews revealed that while teaching essays/paragraphs, each teacher only use some aspects of process or product approach. Some features of the portal leave teachers with little scope to use the process approach and hence they side towards the product approach where students work on assignments individually and teachers focus on the final product as the feedback system allows for one final feedback. Group work and peer feedback are not possible. As there are limitations in real-time written and verbal exchanges between students in the school portal which allow student-teacher interaction only through the comment box during live classes. The lack of monitoring also makes students reluctant to comment their problems according to most teachers, whereas one teacher thinks online classes make some students more responsive as they find the experience less daunting. Interaction, therefore, is not equivalent to offline classes according to most of the teachers, although the school is in the process of integrating interactive class options like Google Meet or Zoom. All teachers have knowledge about MS Word because they were all exposed to it in either their schools or universities. Moreover, in their survey responses most teachers claimed that training provided by the institution to operate the online portal was sufficient; this implies that teachers are gradually adapting to online teaching. However, certain features of the portal provide some challenges to teaching essay/paragraph writing online which include, disproportionate student to teacher ratio, causes teachers to be more mindful about the input they provide as more number of students leads to greater variety in comprehensive abilities. In terms of giving feedback, teachers type the corrections. However, some would prefer highlighting/crossing options on the images of assignments, although the portal has the feature of marking on assignments sent as pdf. A greater number of teachers agreed that 1 or 2 online assignments on essays/paragraphs are not sufficient to

develop students' essay writing skills, as during in-person classes some teachers did sentence making or picture writing relevant to an essay/paragraph topic. But due to time constraints, more students and limitations of face-to-face interaction with students, teachers are unable to do so. There is also an issue of being overwhelmed by students' responses when asked questions. A small number of teachers think students are getting adequate practice as the word limit or number of sentences has not been reduced in the assignments. Most teachers found that students have more problems with the form of the essay/paragraph and less problems with sentence structure or connecting ideas. This reflects in the interview results where half of them focused solely on form while giving feedback, and the other half focused on both content and form. Teachers focusing on grammar alone believe that grammar affects content hence if mistakes are lessened in grammar the content will also have less mistakes. A majority of teachers' responses regarding preferring in-person classes compared to online classes, match with the findings of Jun & Lee (2012), where participating teachers teaching an online ESL writing course in a University reported the same. However, the study by Wijeyewardene et al., (2013), where students were kept engaged with assignments and presentations although it might be strenuous for teachers to provide feedback contrasts the findings of this study where teachers reported they are instructed to provide two or three assignments in total in a specific term, this implies that the teachers' workload is manageable. Lastly, there needs to be more research into the approaches used to teach ESL essay writing online in Bangladeshi elementary schools where online class observation/recordings can play an important role alongside interviews and surveys to provide valuable insights regarding better way to provide feedback, making student number manageable during live classes, finding better ways to keep up students' motivation and to monitor students during online exams.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for interview:

Based on research question 1 **(Which approaches are used by teachers to teach English essay writing online and what makes them use this approach?):**

1. How do you teach English essay writing online and has it changed from the way you taught during in-person classes? What are the reasons for teaching essay/ paragraph writing the way you do?

Based on research question 2 **(To what extent does the teachers' knowledge of technology get in the way of teaching essay writing in English online?):**

2. How efficient are you in browsing the internet or using Microsoft Office, Google classroom, Google meet or other similar software and when did you learn them?

3. What are the features of the online platform/software that your institution uses and how does it affect your teaching of English essay/ paragraph writing?

Based on research question 3 **(What challenges do teachers face in interacting with students online and how effective are the online writing tasks in fulfilling teacher's objectives of teaching essay writing?):**

4. How does the question & answer/chat box work as an alternative to communicating face-to-face with students during in-person classes? How does the online platform affect the way of giving feedback to student assignments?

5. What type of writing assignments are given to students in the online portal and does it equalize the amount of written work students did during in-person classes to learn essay writing?

Questionnaire for survey:

Basic information of the participant:

Age: ☐ 18-25 ☐ 26-32 ☐ 33-39 ☐ 40-47 ☐ 48-55 ☐ 56-62 ☐ 63-69 ☐ 70-77

Gender ☐ male ☐ female ☐ other ☐ prefer not to say

Academic qualification: _____

Class (can choose multiple options): ☐ Class II ☐ Class III ☐ Class IV ☐ Class V

1. How do you begin making students write an essay/paragraph?

a) provide a sample text

b) give a topic and ask students to brainstorm

c) provide them some ideas before writing

d) Other: _____

2. What do you think makes a good essay/paragraph?

a) good grammar and punctuation

b) well- organized ideas and good content

c) both (a) and (b)

3. I teach students to write a draft, revise and make final corrections before submitting online essay writing assignments.

a) strongly agree

b) agree

c) neutral

d) disagree

e) strongly disagree

4. How do you motivate students to write essays during online classes?

a) tell them the topic is important for exams

b) provide them with plenty of ideas to choose from so they can start writing

c) it is difficult to motivate students during online classes, since I cannot monitor them in-person

d) Other: _____

5. What type of internet access do you have at home?

a) Wi-Fi

b) Mobile data

c) None of these

6. Do you need other family members' or colleagues' help while setting up equipment for online classes or uploading assignments?

a) strongly agree

b) agree

c) neutral

d) disagree

e) strongly disagree

7. What task do you find the most challenging among the ones listed below in an online environment:

a) teaching essay format

b) upload assignments

c) give feedback

d) none of the above

8. The trainings given by the institution to use the online platform was sufficient.

a) strongly agree

b) agree

c) neutral

d) disagree

e) strongly disagree

9. How do you give feedback to students' assignments?

a) discuss in online class

b) write comments when assignments are submitted

c) write comments but discuss any student's write-up if they ask

10. What problems do students face in their essays / paragraph assignments?

a) problems with grammar, spellings and punctuation

b) problems with sentence structure

c) problems with connecting ideas together

11. How do you help students overcome problems in their essay/ paragraph?

- a) provide them with a sample text and explain their problems in class and in the feedback to their assignments
- b) give them additional assignments
- c) point out their problems only in their assignments
- d) recommend certain books for improving their essay writing skills

12. Is it easier or difficult to give feedback to students and what is your reason for that?

- a) easier, because most students have similar problems and it does not take much time to check
- b) difficult, because different students have different problems and it takes a lot of time to check