

Free-hand Writing in English, a Fear for the First Semester Under-Graduate Students of Prime University: Reasons and Remedies

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Abstract:

The study explores the reasons of fear for the first semester undergraduate students of a private university in Dhaka city. Data were collected from 60 students studying in the first semester at different departments and also from 10 teachers teaching English at different departments. Besides 7 classes were attended and observed. Data were collected from the respondents following a mixed method approach. Major findings of the study show that poor skill in English, demotivation, inadequate vocabulary, spelling mistakes, defective sentence patterns and inadequate grammar knowledge are the reasons of students' fear. However, in order to acquire freehand writing skill the students need to overcome all the deficiencies and follow the proper strategies to reach their goal. The free-hand writing skill can be achieved by increasing vocabulary, learning basic grammar and spelling, continuing proper practice every day and obviously by following teachers' proper instructions.

Keywords: Skill, strategy, fear, motivation, instruction, practice, acquire.

Introduction

Freehand writing is always challenging for the students of nonnative countries; even the native speakers feel challenged to produce their writing off hand. The students of our country face maximum problems in their freehand writing and in many cases; they grow up with demotivation towards freehand writing as

they cannot cope with the situation. Researches show that students' poor skill in English makes them demotivated to develop their skill on freehand writing as they underestimate themselves or by their friends or teachers that hinder their efforts in freehand writing. However, it is one of the most important skills to be learnt for the learners of English language. It is mandatory in getting a good job, making business with the literate personalities in national and international arena, exchanging views with the foreigners through social media, getting a large number of readers worldwide and working with the people of higher level. To give importance to this particular skill and to define writing skill David Nunan states "Writing is the mental work of inventing ideas, thinking about how to express them, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader" (1991: 88). On the other hand, Kellogg affirms, "The writing skill is a major cognitive challenge, because it is at once a test of memory, language, and thinking ability. It demands rapid retrieval of domain-specific knowledge about the topic from long-term memory". (200, p.143)

Realizing the importance of freehand writing skill for the students specially at undergraduate level as this level of education is a gateway to achieve and implement knowledge for their future life the researcher tries to explore the difficulties and the reasons of fear the students encounter in their life while freehand writing. Moreover a list of remedies is mentioned based on the findings of this study.

Objective of the Study:

The purpose of the study is to find out the ways of improving free-hand writing skill of the first semester students at Prime University in Bangladesh. And the other specific objectives are:

1. To discover the causes behind the fear of the students
2. To spot out the shortcomings prevailing in teaching free-hand writing skill
3. To find out the causes behind the inadequacy of learning free-hand writing skill
4. To identify the ways of removing fears from the students
5. To discover the ways of removing the difficulties in learning free-hand writing skill

Research questions:

1. What are the reasons of fear in English freehand writing?
2. What types of strategies should be taken to improve students' freehand writing skill?

Rational of the study:

The students of Bangladesh before taking admission at university learn English almost 12 years but in most cases they can neither speak nor write when they feel the necessity. Moreover it is beyond their capacity to write on any topic without taking any preparation as they not only lack applied grammar knowledge but also hardly have ideas on the context. So freehand writing for the students has been a matter of fear in our country. A great number of studies were accomplished regarding the common mistakes in writing but there are a few studies concerned to discover the fear of the students in writing. That's why the present study will be helpful for the teachers, students and the concerned to go into the case as well as to ensure the maximum outcome in this regard.

Review of Literature:

Mouri (2016) found that Classroom is fantastic vicinity for practicing and improving writing skills for the students. They want extra motivation and supportive surroundings for their writing. Regular writing things to do can build students' self belief and remove their concern closer to writing. Our educationist, instructors as well as parents must work together to make supportive and tremendous surroundings to exercise writing. Teachers and students also have to work together to overcome the difficulties and challenges.

Al-Ghabra (2015) found that the use of the hand in writing prompts many areas in the talent that are associated to memory and comprehension. She additionally emphasized on the necessity of updating curriculum to focus on the usage of handwriting to decorate and guide the students' reception of information. She noted educating the trainers and organizing writing units that are joined to the gaining knowledge of institutions.

Iftanti (2016) found that writing is viewed as painful undertaking indicating that oral subculture is a whole lot higher than writing one. The students' works are sufficiently kept in the libraries, even though to submit these is an awful lot extra worthy. Therefore, it is critical to enhance the students' writing skills via a meaningful way namely writing journal article. The talent of writing journal article is categorized as one of the writing skills derived from Process/Cognitive approach. Writing journal article is essential to enhance their writing skills.

Chowdhury (2015) found that students of this level face many troubles but grammatical errors are the largest problem for most of the students. Apart from grammatical problems, problems with data organization,

translation problems, spelling errors and the usage of inappropriate vocabularies are frequent issues among the students. The researcher also discovered that students face writing issues not only due to inabilities however additionally for the drawback in the schooling system.

Blicblau, McManus, & Prince (2009) found that graduates need training and opportunities to exercise writing efficiently in these genres in English. Successful tutorial mentoring requires the supervisor to be conscious that this is each a instructing and a gaining knowledge of process, and to work in a relationship the place the student strikes from being a passive to an active learner.

Kellogg & Raulerson (2007) stated that advanced writing skills are necessary thing of tutorial overall performance as well as subsequent work-related performance. However, the students hardly ever obtain superior ratings on assessments of writing capabilities. In order to acquire greater stages of writing performance, the working memory demands of writing methods must be decreased so that executive attention is free to coordinate interactions amongst them. This can in principle be finished via deliberate practice that trains writers to advance executive manage through repeated possibilities to write and through timely and applicable feedback. Automated essay scoring software may also provide a way to alleviate the intensive grading needs placed on instructors and, thereby, extensively amplify the quantity of writing exercise that students receive.

Escribano (1999) found that text evaluation is an essential capability for constructing schemata for writing. Comparing characteristics of text kinds helps the student to be successful matching the reader's with the writer's expectations. Writing is seldom performed completely in one rhetorical mode, so college students need to exercise special discoursed features so they can assemble good, clear portions of writing. As readers, we have certain expectations about the content, structure, improvement and graphic look of numerous sorts of written texts. These expectations are used by each writer and readers in composing and reading, and when they coincide, readability and comprehension are facilitated. Therefore, familiarity with different kind of texts will help reader and writer to trade records satisfactorily.

Kellogg (2008) stated that writing capabilities usually boost over a path of more than two a long time as a infant matures and learns the craft of composition via late childhood and into early adulthood. The novice author progresses from a stage of knowledge- telling to a stage of information reworking traits of person writers. Professional writers increase in addition to an professional stage of knowledge-crafting in which representation of the author's deliberate content, the textual content itself, and the prospect of reader's interpretation of the text are automatically manipulated in working memory. understanding transforming, and especially knowledge-crafting, arguably take place when adequate govt interest is on hand to grant a high degree of cognitive control, over the upkeep of a couple of representations of the textual content as properly as planning conceptual content, generating text, and reviewing content material and text. Because govt attention is restricted in capacity, such manipulate depends on lowering the working reminiscence needs of these writing methods thru maturation and learning. It is counseled that students might best research writing skills via cognitive apprenticeship education packages that emphasize deliberate proactive.

Cavkaytar & Yasar (2018) found that students confirmed improvement in the “outer structure” dimension of written expression, in the “inner structure” and in language and expression dimension of written expression, this improvement used to be determined as restrained in contrast to “outer structure” dimension. During the improvement of written expression abilities the teaching writing procedure through balanced literacy aspects in interactive educating surroundings makes progress in these skills. It was discovered that the utilization of balanced literacy factors in written expression affected the students’ type participation positively. Moreover, it was once viewed that the interactive educating surroundings helped students in enhancing intellectual skills.

Research Methodology:

The research is basically both qualitative and quantitative with more emphasis on the qualitative side. It is actually done on the basis of a questionnaire survey and classroom observation. The researcher also had direct interviews with the teachers as well as the students. He observed the classroom frequently and had a talk with the authority too.

Samples:

The respondents (teachers and students) were chosen from Prime University. The teachers who teach the first semester students were only selected for the interview and questionnaire. And the students who have just admitted themselves in the university and are studying in first semester were also selected for the interview and questionnaire. Overall 60 participants from the university responded to the questionnaire. They were from different departments of the university.

Data Collection Tool:

The instruments of a qualitative research are assessment through questionnaire, observations of the classroom, interviews, opinions, elucidation and graphic analysis. The researcher tried to make the questionnaire appropriate and authentic by following the main three characteristics (validity, practicality and reliability) of any questionnaire. The researcher also had interviews with the teachers and students, took opinions, and observed the classroom activities. Entries of secondary sources akin to the theoretical background of writing skill and the experimental evaluation over the collected information are combined rationally to get the truth of the study. The responses and views of the teachers and students have made the questionnaire productive.

Data Collection Procedure:

The researcher individually collected the information from Prime University through two questionnaires having 35 questions with fixed answers from the specified alternatives and three open ended questions. The researcher made the survey during the class time of the students, sometimes after finishing the class hour and sometimes during the lunch hour. It was also done with teachers at their free time like after finishing the class and sometimes before starting the class. The researcher also talked with the respondents over phone.

Data Analysis Process:

By following the qualitative procedures of collecting and analyzing the data the researcher drew the findings of the classroom observations and views of the respondents (teacher as well as students) with a good care to remove the fears of free-hand writing of the learners, basically the first year first semester students in Prime University. The study also includes the other learners whose conditions are also the same in free-hand writing. The study also analyses the present condition of teaching and learning free-hand writing in Bangladesh. The study might help teachers as well as learners to make a fruitful environment where the learning will take place. The study might also be effective in case of acquiring the other skills of English easily as it will help the targeted learners to complete their higher education at Prime University.

Discussions and Findings

To remove the problems prevailing in the free-hand writing skill, it is inevitable for the learners to have enough practice. To emphasize on practicing regularly David Nunan states, “Writing almost always improves with practice” (1991, p.92). He also says, “When practice writing sessions are integrated regularly into your syllabus, students will become more comfortable with the act of writing” (1991, p.93). He further mentions, “It is both a process and a product. The writer imagines, organizes, drafts, edits, reads, and rereads. This process of writing is often cyclical, and sometimes disorderly” (1991, p.88). To emphasize the same issue Ericsson also mentions, “A central factor in the development of expert performance across a wide range of both physical and cognitive task domains is the use of deliberate practice”. (2006, p.683)

In spite of having so many problems in the writing skill only 20% students are trying to improve this skill and 30% try sometimes and other 50% students do not try at all. To enhance the practice session David Nunan also states, “Practice writing should provide students with different types of writing as well. Short responses to a reading, journal entries, letter writing, summaries, poetry, or any type of writing you find useful in your class should be practiced in class” (1991, p.93).

Being afraid of any work actually, it drags the people backward. 65% first year, first semester students at Prime University in Bangladesh are actually afraid of free-hand writing where only 35% are not afraid and 80% teachers confessed that their students are afraid of free-hand writing.

Grammar sometimes makes a mess in the mind of learners and destroys their interest in learning language. 80% students replied that they face problems with grammar where only 20% students answered that they do not have any problem with grammar. 70% teachers believe that all the students face difficulty using grammar during their free-hand writing and only 30% teachers believe that some of their students sometimes face difficulty using grammar during their free-hand writing.

Regarding handwriting and spelling Graham and Harris declare, “The mastery of handwriting and spelling is also a necessary condition for writers to begin to develop the control of cognition, emotion, and behavior that is needed to sustain the production of texts” (2000, p.3). But in the case of the students of first year first semester at Prime University, spelling is another issue which actually annoys the learners during their free-hand writing in English. 60% students said that they face problems with spelling where only 20% students said they sometimes face problems and other 20% replied that they do not face any problem regarding spelling. 50% teachers stated that their students make mistakes in spelling English words during their free-hand writing practice and other 50% teachers said that some of their students sometimes make mistakes in spelling English words during their free-hand writing practice.

Diction or choice of words or putting the right words in the right place is one of the key issues in free-hand writing and the condition of choosing words in free-hand writing of the students under survey is a bit frustrating. 70% students could not put the right words in the right place, whereas only 30% students could do that. On the other hand, 50% teachers said that their students know a very small number of words and for this reason they cannot use appropriate words where necessary and other 50% teachers disagreed with them.

For free-hand writing, producing the ideas quickly and freely is very important but 85% students could not do that; only 15% students said that they can do it. The answer was almost the same when the teachers were asked whether their students can produce ideas quickly and freely during free-hand writing. 50% teachers replied “yes” and 50% replied “no”. On the other hand, Benjamin & Chun avow, “Gains in informative and analytical writing ability are, moreover, taken as a good indicator of the value added by higher education” (2003, p.26).

To remove the common mistakes from writing a student needs to revise the scripts but 40% students replied that they revise their scripts and remaining 60% students do not revise their scripts after completion of their writing. On the other hand, 80% teachers said that their students sometimes revise and 20% of them said they always revise after finishing their writing.

To acquire something it is necessary to make the thing enjoyable and interesting but the students covered in the study do not enjoy free-hand writing. 80% students replied that they do not enjoy free writing and they also stated that they do not even enjoy the free-hand writing class.

It is a crying need for the teacher to give feedback properly in the class but the actual scenario is really different. When the students were asked whether their teachers give feedback properly in the class or not almost, all of them said that only a few teachers do so. Regarding feedback in the class David Nunan avows, “The students often feel that the evaluation of their writing is completely subjective”. (1991, p.94). On the other hand, he also says, “Feedback should not entail “correcting” a student’s writing. In order to foster independent writers, you can provide summery comments that instruct students to look for

problems and correct them on their own”. (1991, p.93) He again states, “If you write comments on students’ paper, make sure they understand the vocabulary or symbols you use. Take time to discuss them in class. Be cautious about the tone of your comments”. (1991, p.93)

It is true that to achieve something first it is necessary to set a goal and after that being motivated one can reach there. To emphasize setting goals and motivation Daly mentions, “Setting and achieving goals help to build the student’s motivation to improve. Such training ought to especially benefit students who are highly apprehensive about their writing abilities and hold low expectations for success”. (1985, p.43) To assert almost the same thing David Nunan declares, “It is important to understand both and to convey goals to students in ways that make sense to them” (1991, p.92). To support the same Henry also proclaims, “People who were attracted to writing after childhood may even refer to themselves as ‘late bloomers’” (2000, p.37).

Reasons behind the fear of the students in free-hand writing skill

There are always some reasons which actually erect obstacles in the field of acquiring the free-hand writing skill. David Nunan mentions, “The greatest dissatisfaction with writing instruction comes when the teacher’s goal does not match the student’s, or when the teacher’s goals do not match those of the school or institution in which the student works” (1991, p.92). On the other hand, Boice pronounces that, “Writing in marathon sessions is a kind of blocked practice that students and perhaps even some of their professors use to meet deadlines. Such writing binges can cause anxiety, exhaustion, and writer's block” (1985, p.91). Freedman & Calfee declare, “Fatigue, mood, and motivation add variability to the outcome in ways that are hard to control” (1983, p.75). In addition to these points the teachers of Prime University mentioned some other points. These are:

- a. The students cannot follow the lecture of the teacher properly.
- b. They feel shy in the class.
- c. The students are not willing to learn.
- d. They lack in attention and interest.
- e. They lack in patience.

- f. They consider English a difficult language.
- g. They lack in reading habit.
- h. They do not try at all.
- i. They lack in vocabulary.
- j. They lack in confidence.
- k. They lack in grammatical and other related knowledge to acquire writing skill.
- l. They lack in ideas.
- m. They lack in practice.
- n. They do not get enough time to practice in the class.
- o. They do not complete their homework.
- p. They cannot accommodate ideas.
- q. They are de-motivated.
- r. They have basic problems in writing.
- s. They have ideas but cannot express.
- t. They are not conscious of the importance of writing.
- u. They lack in ideas about sentence construction.
- v. They lack in ideas about spelling.
- w. They lack in consciousness/awareness about writing.
- x. Many of them do not know how to use punctuation and capitalization.
- y. They only think of passing in the exam.
- z. They lack in syntactical knowledge.

Strategies to remove the problems and improve free-hand writing skill

To remove the problems prevailing in the free-hand writing skill and to improve it David Nunan emphasizes brainstorming; word mapping; quick writing (1991, p.97). On the other hand, Astin (1993) mentions, “Self-assessment and assessing marks with comparing the spending hours can improve writing skill and other cognitive skills” (1993, p.7). McCutchen avows, “A high degree of verbal ability is necessary to generate cohesive text that clearly expresses the ideational content” (1984, p.266).

Nickerson, Perkins, and Smith acknowledge that, “Writing ability further depends on the ability to think clearly about substantive matters” (1985, p.9). And Fayol announces, “The learning strategies for pre-writing, drafting, and

revision that manage the demands of composition” (1999, p.13). But Zimmerman and Risemberg proclaim, “Composing an extended text appears to require the self-regulation of planning, text generation, and reviewing through meta-cognitive control of these processes” (1997, p.73). In addition to those strategies, the teachers of Prime University mentioned some other suggestions to remove the problems and improve writing skill of English. These are:

- a.** They need more and more practice or exercise every day with proper guidance inside and outside the classroom.
- b.** The teachers as well as the guardians should motivate the students for a bright future.
- c.** They need to have both the grammatical knowledge and the knowledge of spelling.
- d.** They need to increase the habit of reading.
- e.** They are to work in a group or pair.
- f.** They need to use e-materials.
- g.** They need to complete their homework every day.
- h.** They must have a good store of vocabulary.
- i.** The teacher or instructor must provide feedback properly and regularly.
- j.** The free-hand writing skill should be more focused in the secondary and higher secondary levels.
- k.** Both the teachers and the students should be motivated.
- l.** The students need to go through more and more skill based courses
- m.** The teachers should find and analyze the errors committed by the students.
- n.** The teacher or instructor should learn about the basic knowledge of the students.
- o.** They need to have adequate knowledge of sentence structure while writing.
- p.** They need to be taught grammatical items through fun.
- q.** Making the class interactive might be helpful.
- r.** The teacher or instructor should inspire them to write free-hand answers rather than memorized answers.
- s.** The students have to be conscious and have to grow interest in free-hand writing.

Recommendations:

To remove the problems and to improve the free-hand writing skill, the first year first semester students of Prime University need to follow some strategies. Not only the students but also the teachers as well as the proper authority should take some necessary steps by following the recommendations to remove the problems still prevailing in the free-hand writing skill of the students. Examining all the points the researcher finally comes to make some recommendations to be implemented by teachers. These are:

- a. Let the students practice writing every day inside and outside the class.
- b. Motivate them.
- c. Take care of their basic grammar, spelling and vocabulary.
- d. Let them read more, work in pairs and groups.
- e. Let them use e-materials.
- f. Never forget to give feedback properly in the class.
- g. Never let them down in the secondary and higher secondary levels.
- h. Never skip analyzing the errors committed by the students.
- i. Make the class interactive.
- j. Never let them memorize.
- k. Let them be conscious and grow interest in free-hand writing.

Conclusion

The study has focused on the fear of the students of the first semester in free hand writing and identified the reasons of fear among the students. These are poor skill in English, demotivation, inadequate vocabulary, spelling mistakes, defective sentence patterns and inadequate grammar knowledge. Besides the researcher offers a number of recommendations based on the findings from the respondents. The major findings of data show that by taking some necessary steps and following the prescribed strategies the students can improve their ability in freehand English writing.

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