



## Writing Habits of the Undergraduate Level EFL Learners: A Survey

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**Abstract**

From personal to professional, intellectual to recreational; writing benefits a student in every sphere of life. The significance of writing in learning a new language is also undeniable. In Bangladeshi schools and colleges, reading and writing-based English learning system provides students with a lot of opportunities to practice writing and improve their writing skills. Unfortunately, the majority of the undergraduate level students are found very incompetent in writing English. It is assumed that students are used to writing only academic subjects. They prefer to memorize notes and write only for academic purposes, more particularly for exam purposes. The current study attempts to justify the assumption through a five-point Likert-scale survey. A questionnaire consisting of ten questions is used to investigate what the students write or like to write in English other than their academic subjects regularly. The study discovers that the majority of the students do not regularly write non-academic English texts like stories, poems, letters, memorable events, news reports, etc. They write them occasionally. Besides, there are a significant number of students who either rarely or never write this type of writing. This shows that the students are either not truly interested in extra-curricular writing activities or not aware of the benefits of extensive writing. Although there are a lot of things that they can write regularly to develop their writing skills, they don't do that and consequently can't develop good writing habits in their daily lives.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is an organized and dominant means of communication. "A person with good writing skills is always victorious at expressing oneself," stated Sadiku (2015, p.31). It is one of the four fundamental skills of a language that helps a language learner in various ways. For example, writing facilitates language learning. According to Anh (2019, p.74), "... it plays a crucial role in language production." According to Kumar (2020, p.79), "In order to use the language specifically and correctly, non-native English speakers should know the writing processes, elements, and features." Hedge (1988) described as in ELbashir (2023, p.53), "Learners learn better in English language classes when they write more, for example, to reinforce the understanding of newly acquired vocabulary or grammatical ideas or to aid in the acquisition of novel language elements." Bora (2023, p.2) explained, "Writing as a skill unlike

speaking, allows the learner to ideate and create words and sentences after due diligence. It provides an order to one's thoughts and enables them to be presented in a structured way. While writing, a learner can choose the right vocabulary, form the right sentence construction, apply cohesion and present the ideas in a correct full way." Reid (1993) asserted as in Gautam (2019, p.75), "Writing skill possesses an invaluable importance for the sake of enabling students to understand how the distinct components of a language harmoniously act together."

According to Bora (2023, p.2), "Writing enables a learner to develop their thinking and imaginative abilities and allows them to record their ideas." He further mentioned, "Writing helps learners in building their analytical, rational and critical thinking skills." "It motivates thinking, that is, it can help learners to organize their ideas and develop their critical thinking skills to summarize, analyze, and criticize," affirmed Rao (2007) as in Oshchepkova & Alkhaldi (2018, p.174). According to Yulianti (2018) as in Vejayan & Yunus (2022, p.1303), "Pupils critical thinking is developed through writing as it allows pupils to express and deliver their idea in a structured manner." Khazrouni (2019) also noted as in Suastra & Menggo (2020, p.433), "English writing skill has an important role for EFL learners to develop several skills in their English learning, such as analyzing, arguing, critical thinking skills."

Good writing skill determines the academic success of the students. According to Tan (2011) as in Safa (2018, p.15), "This language skill assumed to be of great importance to academic success since it is the commonest assessment measure for academics to evaluate their students, and students' weak writing ability may put their academic success considerably at risk." Besides academic success, good writing skill also ensures the students' professional success. Bora (2023, p.2) mentioned, "If a student has good writing skills, it will not only help them in working on their grades but will also prepare them for the professional world. Writing will help learners to learn how to draft personal and official letters. Learners will be able to prepare their resumes or CVs attractively." Lee & Schmidgall (2020, p.1) said, "The ability to write effectively is an important workplace skill across professions and business sectors." Gautam (2019, p.74) added, "An individual with sound writing skills is regarded high in dignity and receives elevated opportunities everywhere in competitive examinations, job opportunities, promotions and social services." Not only that; according to Bhandari (2024, p.51), "Students may learn about themselves and solve their real-life issues via diaries and personal narrative writing. Writing helps learners develop socially and links them to the world around them so that they are aware of many things."

## **2. RESEARCH RATIONALE**

In Bangladesh, students usually start learning English through writing. They begin their academic lives learning how to write English alphabets. Gradually, they learn how to write sentences and compose paragraphs. Reading and writing-based English learning systems give the learners ample opportunities to practice writing English and develop their writing skills. From the pre-primary level to the intermediate level, every student gets exposed to writing English in different forms and ways. So, by the time the students complete their intermediate level of study and step into the tertiary level, they must have developed their overall writing skills. Unfortunately, the majority of the undergraduate level students are found very incompetent in writing English. Besides making a lot of grammatical mistakes, they are unable to express and develop the main idea of the writing. Paragraphs are neither related to the central idea of the writing nor organized logically. Moreover, the students lack imagination and creativity in writing. This researcher hypothesizes that the students are used to writing only academic subjects. They like to memorize notes for exam purposes and are habituated to writing down memorized scripts in the exams. Most of them are not involved in any non-academic writing like writing stories or poems, personal letters, news reports, etc. Adas & Bakir (2013) have the same view as Kumar (2020, p.82), “Students don't write very often, and the rest of what they write is restricted to classrooms.” However, since the significance of extensive writing in learning a language as well as in the student’s academic and professional lives is unquestionable, it becomes very necessary to identify whether or not the students are conscious of its value and practicality. The chief objective of the current study is to recognize students’ awareness of the significance of extensive writing in both academic and professional fields, their regular habits of writing non-academic English texts, and overall their attitude towards developing their writing skills.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Participants**

The participants of the present study were undergraduate-level students of Bangladesh Agricultural University. All of them were pursuing their four-year BSc (Honors) courses in different faculties (Faculty of Fisheries, Faculty of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, and Faculty of Agricultural Engineering and Technology) of the university. A total of 212 students participated in the survey. Among them, 102 were in level 1, semester 1 pursuing a BSc in Fisheries (Honors) course, 72 were in level 1, semester 1 pursuing a BSc in Agricultural Economics (Honors) course, and the rest 38 were in level 1, semester-2 pursuing

BSc in Food Engineering (Honors) course. All the level-1, semester-1 students from the faculty of Fisheries and the faculty of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology studied English as a 2-credit compulsory theory course while the level-1, semester-2 students from the faculty of Agricultural Engineering and Technology studied English as a 1-credit compulsory practical course. All of the participants were the direct students of this researcher and were purposefully selected for this research.

### 3.2.Data Collection

The data for the present study were collected through a five-point Likert-scale survey sheet (see the Appendix). There were a total of ten questions in the survey sheet regarding the participants' regular habits of writing English. The survey was conducted during the class time in the respective classrooms. Prior to conducting the survey, the purpose of the survey, the questions of the survey, and the rules of participation were well explained to the participants. The participants were asked to put tick marks on appropriate options. They were also requested to anonymously participate in the survey and honestly express their usual habits of writing English.

### 3.3. Data Presentation

Table 1. English writing habits of the learners (data in figures with percentage)

	<b>Writing Habits</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Very Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
1.	Do you write stories, essays, poems, etc. in English?	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	12 (5.66%)	82 (38.68%)	118 (55.66%)
2.	Do you write your daily life experiences in English in your personal diaries?	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	10 (4.72%)	95 (44.81%)	107 (50.47%)
3.	Do you write most memorable events of your life like your school study tour, first college day, etc. in English?	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	15 (7.08%)	92 (43.40%)	105 (49.53%)
4.	Do you write personal emails/letters in English?	11 (5.19%)	29 (13.68%)	105 (40.09%)	47 (22.17%)	20 (9.43%)

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5.	Do you write applications for various purposes in English where English is not mandatory?	14 (6.60%)	22 (10.38%)	112 (41.51%)	36 (16.98%)	28 (13.21%)
6.	Do you write news reports for English dailies or magazines?	0 (0.00%)	6 (2.83%)	20 (9.43%)	88 (41.51%)	98 (46.23%)
7.	Do you take notes in English on various occasions?	31 (14.62%)	34 (14.15%)	86 (38.68%)	31 (14.62%)	30 (14.15%)
8.	Do you write your daily to-do lists in English?	21 (9.91%)	25 (11.79%)	104 (49.06%)	34 (16.04%)	28 (13.21%)
9.	Do you write messages/ comments/replies in English on social media?	30 (14.15%)	35 (16.51%)	110 (51.89%)	25 (11.79%)	12 (5.66%)
10.	Do you participate in any writing competitions?	2 (0.94%)	12 (5.66%)	103 (48.58%)	54 (25.47%)	41 (19.34%)

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The survey results show that the students are really not interested in writing stories, essays, poems, etc. in English. Except for 12 out of 212 students who sometimes write English stories, essays, poems, etc., all the other students either rarely or never write literary texts. Actually, writing literature is not a common practice among the students even in their native language. So, it is natural that general students would not be interested in writing literary texts in a foreign language. Moreover, while literary texts written in the non-native language often get very challenging to read and understand, writing them in a foreign language would definitely be more challenging and even sometimes frustrating. Therefore, the data shown in the first row of the table is not surprising at all.

However, for the second survey question concerning writing daily-life experiences in English in personal diaries and the third question concerning writing most memorable events of life like school study tour, first college day, etc. in English, we notice almost the same results. No students either always or very often write their daily-life experiences or most memorable events of life in English. Only a very few occasionally write them and the majority rarely or never write them at all. For these two cases, there should have been at least some students, who would regularly write their daily life experiences and the most memorable events of life. This indicates

that students don't like to write anything out of their academic syllabus. Like writing literature, writing memorable events or personal experiences in a foreign language might also be annoying to the students.

On the other hand, a few students marked that they always or very often write their personal emails or letters in English and also various applications in English where English is not mandatory. But the majority of the students occasionally and a considerable number of students either rarely or never write personal emails, letters, or applications in English. Writing personal emails or letters in English is a mandatory topic of the English syllabus taught in Bangladeshi schools and colleges. So, all the students know how to write them, and they also write them in the English exam. Interestingly, the students don't prefer to write their personal emails or letters in English in practical life. This may be because they think that the receiver of the letter either might not be interested in reading emails/letters written in English or might not understand.

Among 212 participants, only 6 participants very often and 20 sometimes write news reports for English newspapers or magazines. Rest of the students either rarely or never write news reports in English. Writing reports is another topic students are taught in schools and colleges. The students learn it for exam purpose but don't apply the knowledge in practical life.

According to the survey results, a considerable number of students always and very often write down notes in English on various occasions. A significant number of students are also found who write their daily to-do lists in English and also write messages, comments, and replies in English on social media. The reason behind the larger number of students in these three categories is, perhaps, the shorter volume of writing. While writing notes, lists, messages, comments, etc., students usually don't write much. Moreover, this type of writing is often written in short and separate sentences that neither requires much grammar nor any coherence. Yet, majority of the students occasionally write them in English and also a substantial number of students either rarely or never write them in English.

Finally, concerning participation in the writing competitions, a tiny number of students are found who always and very often participate in the writing competitions. As usual, the majority of the students are found who occasionally participate and a large number of students are found who either rarely or never participate in the writing competitions. In Bangladeshi schools and colleges, writing competitions are organized on various occasions. Since this type of



competition is extra-curricular and participation in it is always optional, students usually don't participate except a very few.

To sum up, it is very clearly observed from the survey results that the majority of the students do not have regular habits of writing non-academic English texts. They actually find no interest in writing any non-academic English writings, especially stories, poems, daily life experiences, memorable events of life, and news reports. Some students are found to have some interest in writing certain items in English like personal letters, applications, messages, notes, etc. The majority of them are also not interested in participating in any writing competitions. In Bangladesh, although the students begin their academic lives with writing, they basically write for academic purposes. They usually don't engage themselves in any extra-curricular writing activities. Moreover, when they write for academic purposes, more particularly for exam purposes, they like to write memorized answers. They are used to writing learnt items and so they don't like to write anything that requires imagination and creativity. The tendency to write from the memory has basically prevented them from developing their overall writing habits.

In the opinion of this researcher, there are two potential reasons for students' reluctance to engage in non-academic or extra-curricular writing activities. The first one is the unawareness of the students about the importance of writing in language learning. The students seem to be ignorant of the fact that writing plays a fundamental role in language learning. Writing helps students not only in developing their vocabulary and grammar knowledge but also in building their imaginative and critical thinking skills that allow them to present the language in a more organized and planned way. Furthermore, the students seem to be unaware of the fact that good writing skills ensure their both academic and professional success. On the other hand, the second possible reason for students' reluctance to engage in non-academic writing is the exam-oriented education system. In Bangladesh, students' academic performances are particularly judged by different types of exams like class tests, semester final exams, etc. Whether someone is a good or bad student is determined mainly by the marks the student obtains in exams. So the students basically read and write for exam purposes to ensure good marks. Since scripted and memorized answers ensure good marks in the exams, the students always try to memorize answers and write from memory. In a semester-system education scheme where the institution runs two or three semesters per year, students always remain busy with different types of exams. So they usually don't get enough time to be engaged in non-academic or extra-curricular writing activities. Moreover, since most non-academic writing like writing stories, poems, letters, etc., require imagination and creativity, and since imaginative and creative

writings require more time and practice, students show no interest in writing them either due to busy academic schedules or mark-oriented exam system where fixed and learned answers are preferred.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

If someone wants to improve his/her writing skills, s/he must write a lot. A language learner is supposed to write in the target language on a regular basis. However, the current study showed that the undergraduate level EFL learners are very reluctant in writing. Although they have to write for academic purposes, they love to write fixed and memorized texts. They have no curiosity in writing any imaginative and creative writings. There are, in fact, a lot of things that they can write to enhance their writing skills like stories, poems, personal experiences, memorable events, news reports, etc. But they give no importance to write any non-academic texts. This indicates that the students are not aware of the significance of extensive writing, and this unawareness has consequently contributed to the development of their poor writing habits. Hence, the class teachers need to play a vital role in awakening the students. Firstly, the teachers should tell and make the students understand the importance of extensive and non-academic writing in every sphere of life; from personal to professional, from intellectual to recreational as well. They should encourage the students in imaginative and creative writing and develop such writing activities in the classroom that require the students' critical thinking skills to perform. They should also encourage the students and show them ways to engage themselves in various non-academic writing activities like writing stories, poems, daily life experiences, memorable events of life, news reports, etc. Moreover, the teachers should design and develop such questions that require creativity and critical thinking skills to answer. Fixed and memorized writings should also be discouraged.

The main goal of the study was basically to draw attention to the reluctance and carelessness of the undergraduate level EFL learners in writing English especially non-academic or extra-curricular writings which is a very common but alarming issue in Bangladeshi English language learning context. The findings of the study will not only help the English language teachers to understand their students' attitudes towards language learning and their daily habits of writing English but also help the students to point out their weaknesses. The study actually tried to make the students aware of their poor writing habits so that they become more serious about writing, and improve their writing skills. I hope that the implications of the findings of the present study will also contribute to the more successful teaching and learning of writing skills in the language classroom.



The study, however, has some weaknesses. For example, the study was conducted with a small number of participants. All the participants were of almost the same ages with the same educational backgrounds. Although both male and female students participated in the survey, the study didn't differentiate between male and female students' responses. On the other hand, the survey questionnaire consisted of only ten questions with ten writing concepts. There might be many more areas of writing that could have been included in the survey. Finally, the study adopted only a quantitative research approach. If a qualitative approach was also adopted besides the quantitative approach, more realistic results could have been achieved. So, prospective researchers in this field should conduct their research keeping all the limitations mentioned above into consideration to achieve a holistic scenario of the learners' writing habits.

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**Appendix-1**

	<b>Writing Habits</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Very Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
1.	Do you write stories, essays, poems, etc. in English?					
2.	Do you write your daily-life experiences in English in your personal diaries?					
3.	Do you write most memorable events of your life like your school study tour, first college day, etc. in English?					
4.	Do you write personal emails/letters in English?					
5.	Do you write applications for various purposes in English where English is not mandatory?					
6.	Do you write news reports for English dailies or magazines?					
7.	Do you take notes in English on various occasions?					
8.	Do you write your daily to-do lists in English?					
9.	Do you write messages/ comments/replies in English on social media?					
10.	Do you participate in any writing competitions?					

**AUTHOR'S BIO**

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