

# Teachers' perceptions of Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners' writing challenges

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## Abstract

Writing is one of the most challenging skills for the Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners. The learners, teachers and educators refer to the difficulty of the learners in writing different types of compositions. Among the types of compositions, paragraphs facilitate a learner to opt for bigger compositions as well as for discreet sentences. This study reports the findings about the paragraph writing problems of the Bangladeshi EFL tertiary level learners. Data were collected through questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires were distributed to 6 teachers of English Language and Literature at International Islamic University Chittagong, Bangladesh and semi structured interviews were conducted with two teachers teaching paragraph writing to the students. Findings from the questionnaires have revealed that the revising stage is very difficult for the learners followed by writing and planning stages. Findings from the semi-structured interviews with the teachers have corroborated the findings of the questionnaire. The findings draw attention to the different types of problems in the writings of paragraphs by the Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners and provide implications.

**Keywords** Writing challenges, Paragraph writing, Teacher's perception, ELT

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

English is considered a global language (Nunan, 2003) and a lingua franca of the present day world (Hossain, 2013; Jenkin, Cogo, & Dewy, 2011). People of different categories across the globe learn the language for different purposes. English for Academic Purpose (EAP) has developed to cater to one such purpose. Among the learners those who opt for EAP intend to develop all the four skills of English: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Out of the four skills, writing is considered to be the most difficult skill.

Writing skill is needed to pursue higher studies, to get established in career, to write assignments and answers to questions, to write a job application, to manage a job as well as to retain a job. Though development of the writing skill is necessary in many respects, developing mastery in it is not



easy, and the difficulties of the English writing skill are experienced by the ESL/EFL learners and teachers differently.

A number of studies (Patwary & Sajib, 2018; Afrin, 2016; Rass, 2015; Mohammad, 2015; Khansir & Ahrami, 2014; Mustaque, 2014; Al-Khasawneh, 2014; Khansir, 2013; Alhaysony, 2012; Crompton, 2011; Sun & Shang, 2010) pointed out the difficulty of the writing skill for the learners in general as well as for Bangladeshi learners in particular. They have examined the problems of writing in different contexts using different instruments: writing samples of the learners, questionnaires and interviews. Among the different types of writing tasks, paragraph writing requires special attention. It is a widely practiced writing task in different exams. Moreover, it facilitates the writer to develop understanding about writing a multi paragraphed composition like the essay or to move back to the discussion of discreet sentences. However, it is taken for granted that teachers are the best judges to point out the problems of writing skill of the EFL learners. Very few studies (Bao & Sun, 2010; Ahmed, 2010; Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed, 2010; ; Huang, Cunningham, & Finn, 2010; Nazim & Ahmad, 2012; Butt & Rasul, 2012; Hammad, 2014; Afrin, 2016) reported findings about learners' problems in writing English from teachers' perspectives.

#### Statement of the problem

Writing skill is one of the much-needed skills of the English language. But developing proficiency in this skill is a daunting task. Learners face different problems in case of developing their writing skill. The writing skill problems cause the learners to remain jobless or they fail to retain the job they are in. In addition to the problems identified in the writing tasks of the learners and through the learners' perceptions, there is a strong need to identify the problems of developing writing skill in the English Language. Again, identifying problems in writing paragraphs helps the learners and the teachers to be aware of the problems that might appear in attempting the bigger compositions. Few studies (Bao & Sun, 2010; Ahmed, 2010; Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed, 2010; Huang, Cunningham, & Finn, 2010; Nazim & Ahmad, 2012; Butt & Rasul, 2012; Hammad, 2014; Afrin, 2016) have focused on identifying the English writing problems from teachers' perspectives. So, there is a need to conduct a study in the context of International Islamic University Chittagong to come up with a better understanding about the English writing skill problems from the teachers' perspectives. Teachers are the best evaluators of their learners' writing problems. Examining the problems of the English writing skill from the

teachers' perspectives will facilitate the learners, teachers and policy makers to take effective and informed decisions as to how to overcome the problems of the English writing skill of the learners at IIUC in particular and the other ESL/EFL learners in general.

### Objective

The present study has adopted the following objective to guide the study. The research objective of the present study is to find out the perceptions of the university English teachers about the writing problems at the planning stage, writing stage and revising stage faced by their EFL tertiary learners in writing paragraphs in English.

### Research question

To fulfill the objective of the research this study has formulated the following research question. The research question of the current study is:

What are the perceptions of the university teachers about the writing problems at the planning stage, writing stage and revising stage faced by their EFL tertiary learners in writing paragraphs in English?

### Review of the literature

Problems in English writing skill have attracted attention of the researchers, teachers and linguists across the globe. Teachers' perceptions about the learners' writing skill problems have been focused in a number of studies.

The study of Bao and Sun (2010) examined problems in the way of teaching grammar, time of correcting errors, way of correcting errors and causes of learners' problem in grammar. Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed (2010) investigated the writing problems of Egyptian student teachers through questionnaire and interviews from the perspectives of seven lecturers. In Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed's (2010) study, the findings showed that the student teachers had the problem of writing a thesis statement, a topic sentence, maintaining transition of ideas and sequence of ideas. The study of Huang, Cunningham and Finn (2010) explored the writing problems of ESOL learners through semi-structured interviews with three teachers. The three teachers in the study of Huang, Cunningham and Finn (2010) shared their experiences about the writing difficulties in relation to the content, particularly in brainstorming and generation of ideas to develop the content, and presenting the content, specifically in writing the introduction and the conclusion of the content. The teachers in Huang, Cunningham and Finn (2010) mentioned grammar as the least difficult skill for their learners.

Similarly, Nazim and Ahmad in 2012 brought out the common writing problems among the preparatory year students of a Saudi university through questionnaire responses from fifteen teachers. Nazim and Ahmad's (2012) study reported problems at the grammatical, mechanical and sentence levels among others. In Pakistan, Butt and Rasul's (2012) study presented the perceptions of ten degree college teachers collected through semi structured interview. The study of Butt and Rasul (2012) highlighted the grammatical problems such as basic problems with parts of speech, use of verbs, their tense, prepositions, pronouns, spellings and punctuations. Hammad (2014) used semi structured interviews with three teachers of Palestine to identify the essay writing problems of the learners. The study of Hammad (2014) reported learners' problems in the areas of word for word translation, lack of content knowledge, grammatical errors, cohesion errors, lack of proofreading and lack of academic style. In a study conducted in Bangladesh, Afrin's (2016) study employed semi structured interviews with twelve teachers and found problems of non-English major undergraduate learners in many respects. Afrin's (2016) study revealed Bangladeshi learners' writing problems, for example, vocabulary, and grammatical problems, and irrelevant ideas in the composition. Afrin (2016) hinted at the problem of generalization of her findings because of conducting the study in only one private university. Again, in Bangladesh, Mustaque (2014) had the limitations of teachers' participation in giving comments about the problems of the learners. The study of Mustaque (2014) proposed that an in-depth study should be made for the identification of learners' problems. The writing problems in English presented in different studies and in different contexts are found in the case of the tertiary EFL learners in International Islamic University Chittagong. To develop a better understanding of the writing problems of the Bangladeshi EFL learners in general and of the learners of IIUC in particular, teachers' perceptions about their writing problems need to be studied.

Hence, in line with Mustaque's (2014) proposal to include teachers for more in-depth study and with Afrin (2016) to develop a generalized idea about the writing problems of the Bangladeshi tertiary level EFL learners at the planning stage, writing stage and revising stage of writing a paragraph, the present study is being conducted. Therefore, to fulfill the gap of teachers' perception about the writing problems the present study formulates the research objective to know the perception of the teachers about the writing problems their learners encounter at planning stage, writing stage and revising stage of writing paragraphs.

### 3. Method

#### Design

The design of the present research is a case study in which data have been collected through questionnaire, and semi structured interviews with the teachers. The research is conducted in the Department of English Language and Literature in International Islamic University Chittagong, Bangladesh. The current study has adopted Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed's (2010) questionnaire with some modifications in it. It is a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with 22 items divided into three categories. The first five items are on the planning stage, followed by the 14 items on the writing stage and the last three items are on the revising stage. The questionnaires were distributed to the six teachers who were assigned to teach a course titled "From Paragraph To Essay" to the learners at different times. The two teachers who were teaching the course at the time of study were chosen for a semi-structured interview. The two interviewee teachers have been referred to in this study as T-1 and T-2. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Later on, the tape scripts and the recording of the interview data were sent to the interviewees to check verbatim presentation of their interview statements (Appendix- A & B: Frist pages of the interview transcripts are attached). The questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively by using SPSS (Version 16) and the interview data were analyzed through content analysis.

#### Results and discussions

The answers to the question (What are the perceptions of the university teachers about the writing problems at the planning stage, writing stage and revising stage faced by their EFL tertiary learners in writing paragraphs in English?) were elicited through the questionnaires distributed to the six teachers, and from the findings of the semi-structured interviews with the two teachers. The findings from the questionnaire data are discussed first under three sections: planning stage, writing stage, and revising stage. The questionnaire findings are interpreted according to the criteria given in Table-1.

**Table 1**

*Mean score interpretation criteria*

Range of scores	Difficulty levels
3.55	High
2.5-3.4	Medium
1.00-2.4	Low

Then, the semi-structured interview findings are presented in three sections and all the items of the three sections are presented individually. Finally, findings from both the sources are triangulated.

### Questionnaire findings

#### *Planning stage*

Questionnaire data show the teachers' perceptions about their learners' difficulties at the planning stage of writing a paragraph. Table-2 shows the mean scores and standard deviation of the planning sub stages in writing a paragraph. Table-2 shows the teachers' perception that the items 1-3 are more difficult than the other items. Based on the mean score interpretation criteria of the Table-1 these three items (1-3) have high levels of difficulty for learners out of the five items of the planning stage. The mean scores of these three items "Organizing the ideas according to type of paragraph" (Mean=4.00; SD=0.63), "Planning interesting ideas to my topic" (Mean=4.00; SD=1.10) and "Planning according to the features of paragraph" (Mean=4.00; SD=0.63) indicate the high difficulty levels. The other two items of the planning stage "Generating relevant ideas to my topic" (Mean=3.17; SD= 1.33) and "Brainstorming the topic of the paragraph" (Mean=2.50; SD=1.22) indicate medium difficulty level for the learners as perceived by the teachers.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive statistics of the items of planning stage*

Items	Mean	SD
1. Organizing the ideas according to type of paragraph	4.00	0.63
2. Planning interesting ideas to my topic	4.00	1.10
3. Planning according to the features of paragraph	4.00	0.63
4. Generating relevant ideas to my topic	3.17	1.33
5. Brainstorming the topic of the paragraph	2.50	1.22
Overall mean score	3.53	

In sum, the planning stage in writing a paragraph is highly difficult for the learners as perceived by the teachers. The overall mean score of the planning stage, which is 3.53, is indicative of the high difficulty level of the planning stage. Among the sub-stages of planning, the least difficult stage is brainstorming. The mean score of brainstorming (Mean=2.50; SD=1.22) indicates that some learners may be able to brainstorm because they are the tertiary level learners and others may not do it effectively. The teachers also perceive that "Generating relevant ideas to the topic" (Mean=3.17; SD= 1.33) appears more difficult than brainstorming. After that, there is the

problem of high difficulty level in terms of planning according to the features, planning interesting ideas, and organizing the ideas (Mean=4.00, SD=1.10; Mean=4.00, SD=0.63; Mean=3.17, SD= 1.33 respectively). The overall results collectively concur that the planning stage is highly difficult for the learners, with brainstorming the ideas as the least difficult skill and organizing the ideas as the most difficult skill. The overall difficulty might be the result of lack of idea or lack of focus on the different sub-stages of the planning stage in the case of writing a paragraph.

### *Writing stage*

Questionnaire data pointed out the teachers' perceptions about the writing stage difficulties faced by the learners. Table-3 below demonstrates the mean scores and standard deviations of the different sub-stages of the writing stage. Based on the mean score interpretation criteria in Table-1, Table-3 shows that the twelve items starting from 1 to 12 are of high difficulty levels and the other two items 13-14 are of medium difficulty levels for the learners. Among all the items, "Using idioms" has the highest mean score (Mean=4.17; SD= 0.41) and "Using the appropriate layout and design" has the lowest mean score (Mean= 3.00; SD= 0.89). Among the highly difficult items of the writing stage some items have the same mean scores. The mean score for items 1-4 is 4.00 or above while the mean scores for items 5-7 are 3.83. Additionally, the mean scores for items 8-10 are 3.67 and the two items 11-12 have the means at 3.50. Again, the remaining two items 13-14 of the writing stage have the means (Mean=3.17, SD=0.98; Mean=3.00, SD=0.89) of medium difficulty levels.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive statistics of the items of writing stage*

Items	Mean	SD
1. Using idioms	4.17	0.41
2. Writing grammatically correct sentences in paragraph	4.00	0.63
3. Linking sentences using appropriate cohesive devices / linking words	4.00	0.63
4. Developing topic sentence into a complete paragraph	4.00	0.63
5. Using word collocation	3.83	0.98
6. Using the most appropriate word/ vocabulary in a paragraph	3.83	0.75
7. Writing a good topic sentence for paragraph	3.83	0.41
8. Using ellipsis (contracted form) smoothly while writing paragraph	3.67	0.52
9. Using substitution to make the written text cohesive	3.67	1.03
10. Using reference ties in the writing	3.67	1.03
11. Using synonyms	3.50	0.84

Items	Mean	SD
12. Writing a good concluding sentence for the paragraph	3.50	0.84
13. Using antonyms	3.17	0.98
14. Using the appropriate layout in writing a paragraph	3.00	0.89
Overall mean score	3.71	

Table 3 indicates the overall mean score of the writing stage at 3.71 which indicates high difficulty level of the writing stage for the learners. The teachers perceive that the learners have the least difficulty in “Using the appropriate layout and design in writing a paragraph” (Mean=3.00; SD=0.89) and they have the highest difficulty in “Using idioms” (Mean= 4.17; SD= 0.14) in writing an English paragraph. The difficulty is seen in “Writing a good topic sentence for paragraph” (Mean=3.83; SD= 0.41), in “Developing topic sentence into a complete paragraph” (Mean=4.00; SD= 0.63) and in “Writing a good concluding sentence for the paragraph” (Mean= 3.50; SD=0.84). The problem is also seen in “Linking sentences using appropriate cohesive devices/linking words” (Mean=4.00; SD=0.63) and in “Writing grammatically correct sentences in paragraph” (Mean=4.00; SD=0.63). Again, the challenges appear in the means of expression through “Using idioms” (Mean=4.17; SD=0.41, “Using word collocation” (Mean=3.83; SD=0.98), and “Using the most appropriate word/vocabulary in a paragraph” (Mean=3.83; SD= 0.75). Similarly, challenges are also seen in “Using ellipsis smoothly while writing a paragraph” (Mean=3.67; SD=0.52), “Using substitution to make the written text cohesive” (Mean=3.67; SD=1.03), “Using reference ties in writing” (Mean=3.67; SD=1.03), “Using synonyms” (Mean=3.50; SD=0.84), and “Using antonyms” (Mean=3.17; SD=0.98).

In brief, descriptive statistics of the teachers’ questionnaire data about their perceptions regarding their learners’ problems exposed different writing stage difficulties faced by the learners. The overall mean score at 3.71 for the writing stage items indicates high difficulty level of the learners’ writing stage in line with the Mean Score Interpretation Criteria of Table-1. The teachers perceive that the learners’ problems are seen in using the structural features, organizational features and cohesion of a paragraph. Additionally, the difficulties are also seen in maintaining grammatical accuracy of a paragraph and in word/phrase level expressions for example, vocabulary, antonym, synonym, collocation, and ellipsis in a paragraph. The learners’ problems of the writing stage might be attributed to different causes. The causes might be lack of ideas, or lack of practice. Influence of the mother tongue, tendency to write more rather than to maintain academic conventions also might be the causes of difficulty for the learners.



*Revising stage*

Descriptive statistics of the teachers' questionnaire data revealed their perceptions that the learners encounter problems in the revising stage also. Revising stage problems include revising the cohesion of a paragraph, revising the coherence of a paragraph and revising the unity of a paragraph. Table-4 displays the findings of the revising stage difficulties of the learners as perceived by the teachers. Based on the Mean Score Interpretation Criteria of Table-1, the questionnaire data about the teachers' perception show that the learners have high level of difficulty in all the three items of revising stage. The first two items "Revising the cohesion of paragraph" and "Revising the coherence of paragraph" have the same level of high difficulty (Mean= 4.33, SD=0.82). Similarly, the other item "Revising the unity of paragraph" (Mean= 4.00, SD= 1.10) is highly difficult for the learners as corroborated by the teachers' perceptions. Table-4 indicates the teachers' observations that the learners have high level of difficulty in the overall revising stage of paragraph writing. The overall mean score at 4.22 points to a very high difficulty level of the revising stage for the learners.

**Table 4***Descriptive statistics of the items of the revising stage*

Items	Mean	SD
1. Revising the cohesion of paragraph	4.33	0.82
2. Revising the coherence of paragraph	4.33	0.82
3. Revising the unity of paragraph	4.00	1.10
Overall mean score	4.22	

In sum, the teachers observe that the learners face difficulty to revise their written paragraphs for coherence, cohesion and unity. The overall mean score at 4.22 proves the teachers' observations about the challenges of revision for the learners. These difficulties may be attributed to a number of causes. In some cases, they do not have ideas about them, for which they do not revise. Again, sometimes they are not mindful of revising for coherence, cohesion and unity. Furthermore, they are more prone to writing than maintaining coherence, cohesion and unity in writing a paragraph in English.

To sum up, analysis of the questionnaire data collected from the six teachers indicates their perceptions about their learners' writing challenges at the different stages and sub-stages of planning, writing and revising. Among the three stages of writing, revising stage appears as the most difficult with a mean score at 4.22 followed by writing (3.71) and planning (3.53). Findings indicate the teachers' perceptions that the learners have problems with planning and the problem continues in the writing stage and grows most difficult at the revising stage.

### Interview findings

The findings from these semi-structured interviews further support the data elicited through questionnaire findings. In the interviews, the teachers were asked about the problems of the different stages (planning stage, writing stage, and revising stage) their learners face while writing paragraphs in English.

From the interviewee teachers' comments, it was found that the learners had difficulty in the different stages (planning stage, writing stage, and revising stage) of writing a paragraph. Significant excerpts of the comments of the teachers are underlined in the case of the presentation of the interview findings regarding the different items of the planning stage, writing stage, and revising stage. The interview findings of the items of the different stages have been presented from the least difficult to the most difficult in line with the questionnaire findings. That is, the findings of the least difficult item have been presented first followed by the interview findings of the more to the most difficult items.

### *Planning stage*

**I.** The two teachers commented about the skill of brainstorming before writing a paragraph. The teachers' views about brainstorming the topic of paragraph are given below:

**T-1:** I think it is very easy for them as they are at the tertiary level. Or, they can gather ideas from the discussion with others if they are stuck. I think they can brainstorm ideas themselves.

**T-2:** Brainstorming of the topic of a paragraph is difficult for most of my students because most of them do not know what brainstorming is. When it is explained, again they face problem as they do not have practice. This lack of practice causes problem even to those students who are acquainted a bit with the brainstorming strategy. Some of them have idea about it.

The above responses of the two teachers reveal contradictory ideas about the learners' brainstorming skill. T-1 opines that brainstorming is "very easy" for his learners because of their level of study. T-1 also explains that if they fail to brainstorm, they can develop ideas through discussion with others and finally they can brainstorm ideas. However, T-2 feels that brainstorming is "difficult" for his learners and he further explains that the learners do not have idea about brainstorming. He again comments that some of his learners have idea about it, but because of lack of practice they cannot brainstorm ideas. T-2 notes that despite having ideas about

brainstorming technique, lack of practice makes them unable to do it.

The two teachers' conflicting comments can be explained in this way that they might have come across learners of different academic backgrounds, for example urban-rural schools or colleges, and institutes of high or low reputation. As a result, they have different experiences in their perceptions of the learners.

**II.** The interviewee teachers pointed out their learners' ability to generate ideas in writing a paragraph. The two teachers' responses about their learners' generating relevant ideas are mentioned below:

**T-1:** It is easy as they are given academic and familiar topics, but sometimes relevancy may be questioned.

**T-2:** Generating relevant ideas to the topic of a paragraph is difficult for my students. Sometimes, they can generate ideas because they are at tertiary level. The problem is that in most cases, the ideas are not relevant. Ideas are there, but not relevant.

The responses of the teachers point out dissimilarity in terms of level of difficulty and agreement in terms of relevance of generated ideas. T-1 opines that the learners can generate ideas easily if they are given academic and familiar topics. Similarly, T-2 comments that the learners "can generate" ideas because they are the tertiary learners. However, T-2 refers to the learners' ability to generate ideas as "difficult" in the sense that the generated ideas are not relevant to the topic. That means, T-2 might have thought that the ideas which are irrelevant are not ideas at all in the true sense. Therefore, T-2 considered idea generation difficult for the learners. Like T-2's lack of relevance of ideas, the point of "relevancy" of ideas is voiced by T-1 too.

Thus, the two teachers have expressed harmony in relation to the learners' ability to generate ideas, but both of them have questioned relevance of the ideas. These opinions might be attributed to the fact that they might have experienced that their learners' writings are full of many ideas which have questionable relevance to the topic.

**III.** The two interviewee teachers considered their learners' planning according to the features of paragraph difficulty for different reasons. Their responses about planning are given below:

**T-1:** It is difficult as it is problematic as they become confused in choosing the right narrative, proper writing procedure.

**T-2:** Planning according to the features of a paragraph is difficult for my students because they are not taught in line with types of paragraph,

features of different types of paragraphs.

The two teachers' comments reveal that planning according to the features of a paragraph is difficult for the learners. The two teachers referred to the causes of difficulty for two different reasons. T-1 mentions that the learners are confused about the way of writing, and about how the ideas are presented. According to him, because of confusion about the proper technique of writing paragraphs, difficulty develops. On the other hand, T-2 notes that planning for writing a paragraph in line with the features of a paragraph is difficult because the learners did not receive lessons about making a plan for writing a paragraph maintaining its features. They were not taught paragraph writing in line with different types and features of a paragraph.

Thus, both the teachers are in agreement about their learners' difficulty in planning in line with the features of a paragraph, but they have differences of opinions about the causes of difficulty in this respect. The teachers' lack of agreement in relation to the cause of difficulty might be referred to the different groups of learners whom they teach. The learners might be different in their academic backgrounds because of which the two teachers developed two different notions.

**IV.** The teachers in their interviews mentioned that planning interesting ideas for presentation in a paragraph was difficult. However, both the teachers have differences of opinions regarding the learners' causes of difficulty for this item. The interviewee teachers' responses to students' planning interesting ideas are provided below:

**T-1:** It's difficult as it is problematic to organize ideas in a logical order and in an interesting way maintaining cohesion and coherence. Moreover, in cases of many students, interestingness of their ideas is not logical.

**T-2:** Planning interesting ideas to a paragraph topic is difficult for my students because they cannot determine what ideas may be interesting for the topic of a paragraph. The reason behind this failure is the lack of practice. Because of the lack of practice, students discover themselves in a difficult situation. When they are asked to plan interesting ideas to a paragraph, they eventually fail.

The two teachers unanimously identified the skill as difficult for their learners, but the two teachers pointed to different causes of their learners' problems in their comments. T-1 explains that the students find it difficult to plan interesting ideas because the learners experience problem to present the

ideas in a logical order with coherence and cohesion. That means T-1 mentions that lack of logical order, coherence and cohesion makes planning interesting ideas difficult for a topic and puts the learners in difficulty. T-1 further mentions that many learners' written paragraphs are full of ideas, but "interestingness" of the ideas presented by the learners is "not logical". Like T-1, T-2 too mentions that planning interesting ideas for a paragraph proves challenging for the learners. T-2 places different reasons behind the difficulty of this skill for the learners. T-2 points out that the learners "cannot determine" what ideas might be "interesting" for presentation in the topic. T-2, again, mentions that the learners do not go through necessary practice to enable themselves to plan interesting ideas. Furthermore, T-2 observes that lack of practice puts the learners in a difficult situation as a result of which they cannot plan interesting ideas for a topic in spite of being asked to do so.

Therefore, the two teachers' comments indicate that the learners cannot plan interesting ideas for their topics. The teachers' perceptions about their learners' difficulty for this skill are different. The differences of the learners' inability for this skill might be due to their lack of ability to maintain logical order, coherence and cohesion and lack of practice which again might be the results of differences of the learners' academic backgrounds.

**V.** The interviewee teachers have commented that organizing ideas according to the types of paragraph was difficult for the learners. The observations of the two interviewees are provided below:

**T-1:** It's challenging for them to organize ideas in a logical order maintaining organizational features, cohesion and coherence. So far I know, they were not taught paragraph writing as types of paragraphs.

**T-2:** Organizing ideas according to the type of a paragraph is difficult probably they were not taught following the types of paragraph. From my life as a student I can draw the example that students are not taught types of paragraph. Therefore, organizing ideas according to the types of paragraphs does not arise.

Both the teachers mentioned planning according to the types of paragraphs as difficult. T-1 notes that organizing ideas according to the types of paragraphs is "challenging" for the learners because of their not receiving lessons about paragraph writing in line with types of paragraph and their features. Similarly, T-2 mentions that learners find the skill of organizing ideas according to the types of paragraphs difficult because the learners were not taught paragraph writing following different "types of paragraphs".

Moreover, T-2 draws example from his “life as a student” justifying that the learners cannot plan writing paragraphs and organize it because of not having previous experience about it.

Thus, the teachers unanimously agree about the difficulty of learning the skill for their respective learners. Both the teachers concur on the point of difficulty to organize the ideas in writing a paragraph as a result of no focus on the types and features of paragraphs in the previous teaching learning programs of the students.

#### *Writing stage*

**I.** The two teachers commented about maintaining appropriate layout in writing a paragraph. They gave different opinions about maintaining this skill by the learners. Their comments about using appropriate layout in writing a paragraph are given below:

**T-1:** Though the matters of centering the title and indentation are matters of mere habit or practice, a very simple issue to follow, it is not taught this way in schools and colleges. As a result, it becomes difficult. It is not seen in their writing usually.

**T-2:** Using the appropriate layout in writing is easy for my students because this requires only ideas about centering the title and indenting the first line. Some students have no idea about it, but they have it in their writing. Again, some other students do not know as well as do not maintain.

The two interviewees’ answers reveal the conflicting opinions about the matter of maintaining layout and design by the learners. T-1 points out that maintaining layout and design, that is maintaining “centering the title and indentation” are not difficult features to maintain. T-1 further mentions that these are matters of “mere habit or practice”, as a result, they are “very simple issue(s) to follow”. However, T-1 points out that paragraph writing is not taught in schools and colleges focusing on the paragraph structure: layout and design. As a result, T-1 concludes that this “very simple issue to follow” appears difficult for the learners. On the other hand, T-2 comments that maintaining centering the title and indentation are “easy” for the learners because, T-2 thinks, it “requires only ideas” by the learners. However, T-2 adds that some of her learners have “no idea” about it, but they maintain the structural features of a paragraph in writing paragraphs. T-2 further adds that “some other students do not know” about them and “do not maintain”.

This conflicting observation of T-2 might mean that the learners who maintain them but do not know about them as the necessary features of a paragraph might come across these features being taught by someone who knows them but has not taught them as features. T-2's explanation might be for this reason that the learners who do not know about these but maintain them might write a paragraph in a good and presentable way which unknowingly goes in line with the structural features of a paragraph. Again, T-2's observation "some other students do not know as well as do not maintain" might mean that these features are not focused in the case of teaching paragraph writing to the learners.

The observations of T-1 and T-2 can be summed up this way that maintaining layout and design is not difficult, but following these features becomes difficult for the learners. The causes of difficulty might be attributed to lack of focus on them in schools and colleges or to teaching paragraph writing at any level of previous study of the learners.

**II.** The learners' use of antonym is looked at differently by both the teachers. The respondents' answers to using antonyms by the students are as follows:

**T-1:** Regarding their use of antonyms, I again say like before. Students keep writing soon after they are given any topic to write on. They don't think of antonym. They use a word as it comes naturally to them at the time of writing.

**T-2:** Using antonyms is difficult for my students because they don't receive lessons in their classes considering the use of antonyms. Focus is not given on learning antonym or on how to make a word antonym. Rather, the focus is to motivate the students to use a word in any way.

The teachers' comments show different perceptions about the use of antonyms by their learners. T-1 highlights the finding that the learners are not mindful of using antonyms. They "don't think of antonym" at the time of writing in English. T-1 further points out that the learners "use a word as it comes naturally" to them at the time of writing. On the other hand, T-2 perceives that the learners find using antonyms "difficult" because they did not receive any lessons on this before. T-2 further explains that using antonyms or how to transform a word into its antonym using prefix is not focused at the time of learning by the learners.

The perceptions of the teachers can be summed up this way that using antonyms is not focused in teaching-learning process. As a result, they are not attentive to using antonyms at the time of writing. The tendency not to use antonym or not to think of it might be the results of not getting lessons on it. Because of not getting lessons, they do not think of focusing on it.

That is, lack of focus and lack of lessons on it lead to the learners' difficulty in writing English.

**III.** The two teachers have different perceptions about the learners' ability to write a good concluding sentence. Their comments about writing a good concluding sentence for paragraph are given below:

**T-1:** Sometimes it is quite obscure. In course of writing a paragraph, they stop at one point. They stop writing the paragraph at one point. A proper concluding sentence you will not find in their paragraph.

**T-2:** Writing a good concluding sentence of a paragraph is difficult for my students because they do not know much how summing up of all the sentences of a paragraph can be done to provide with a conclusion at the end. Lack of grammatical knowledge is also an obstacle here.

T-1 and T-2's comments point to two different observations about the learners' ability to write a good concluding sentence. T-1 informs that it is not clear whether they can write a concluding sentence effectively or not. To T-1, it is sometimes "quite obscure" whether they can write a concluding sentence. That means, some learners' paragraphs have a good concluding sentence. T-1 further explains that the learners have tendency to complete writing a paragraph all of a sudden. T-1 concludes that the learners' paragraphs do not contain a good concluding sentence. On the other hand, T-2 explicates it a bit in detail. T-2 points out that writing a good concluding sentence for the learners is difficult. T-2 explains that the learners "do not know" the technique of "summing up of all the sentences" in conclusion. T-2 further mentions that "lack of grammatical knowledge" adds to this difficulty of the learners.

The teachers' different observations might be attributed to the differences of the learners' groups. T-1 might not find it in the learners' scripts as a regular phenomenon. Again, T-2's comment might be the result of lack of the learners' practical knowledge and tendency to complete writing hastily. Thus, the learners cannot write a good concluding sentence. Their poor grammatical knowledge also makes it difficult for them to write a concluding sentence. In general, both the teachers agree that the learners' writing tasks do not have a good concluding sentence.

**IV.** The two interviewees refer to use of synonyms in writing in English. The answers of the two teachers to using synonyms by their learners are as follows:

**T-1:** Regarding the students' use of synonyms, what I can share is that students continue writing soon after they are asked to write on any topic.



They use a word or synonym as the word comes to them at the time of writing. They hardly think about synonym.

**T-2 :** Using synonyms is difficult for my students because they don't think of synonym. They simply use a word. To write anything using synonym or to avoid the same word to write any thing is not in their thinking. They use a word in writing a paragraph or any composition as it comes to them at the time of writing automatically.

The two teachers' answers point out that the learners do not think of using a synonym in their writing. T-1 points out that the learners are habituated to writing on any topic soon after they are asked to write. T-1 further points out that they "hardly think about synonym". They simply begin writing using a word which "comes to them at the time of writing". Similarly, T-2 mentions that the learners find using a synonym "difficult" because they do not think of using synonyms in writing. Moreover, T-2 mentions that the learners keep repeating the same word in writing in English. They do not even think of avoiding the same word in writing.

Thus, the two teachers agree on the point that their learners do not think of a synonym to avoid the repetition of a word. This might be the result of the general tendency of the learners to write and to express an idea in the way they think suitable. They might not have received lessons on the significance of using synonyms, instead of repeating the same word.

**V.** The two teachers have given conflicting views about using reference ties. Their comments about using reference ties in writing are provided below:

**T-1:** They use the title or the topic as a clue. Somehow when students keep writing, reference ties come up in writing to an extent. Again, you will find some sentences in their writings in such a way that lack of reference tie makes the sentence or sentences difficult to understand.

**T-2:** Using reference ties in the writing is difficult for my students because they have less idea about them and their use. Few of them can maintain using reference ties in paragraphs.

T-1 and T-2 agree with each other to a certain extent about their learners' using reference ties in writing. T-1 comments that the learners' writing has reference ties to some extent. According to T-1, the reference ties are seen in the learners' scripts because of the learners' focus on the title or topic at the time of writing. Again T-1 points out that there are some sentences in the learners' writing tasks which are not understandable because of lack of necessary reference ties. That means, sometimes they have the problem of using reference ties. On the other hand, T-2 comments that using reference

idea is “difficult” for the learners because they do not have sufficient idea about reference ties. However, T-2 refers to few learners’ competence in using reference ties showing concurrence with T-1’s observation.

The two teachers’ conflicting opinions about the use of reference ties might be the results of differences of the learners’ academic backgrounds. The scripts of the learners with different academic backgrounds tied to perfect or imperfect use of reference ties might lead to the differences of opinions of the teachers.

**VI.** Both the teachers expressed their partially conflicting views about their learners’ using substitution in writing paragraph. The two interviewee teachers’ opinions about using substitutions to make a written text cohesive are given below:

**T-1:** It is difficult for them because these ideas are not focused, as far I know, in the previous classes.

**T-2:** Using substitutions to make the written text cohesive is easy to an extent for my students. Sometimes I have seen some of them to use it in their writing. Many of them have no idea about it.

Both the teachers agree on the point of difficulty to use substitutions in the written text. T-1 refers to it as a “difficult” skill because of no discussion of it in the previous classes. According to T-1, discussion of substitutions was not focused in the previous classes. However, T-2 presents a bit different view about using substitutions in a text. T-2 found “some of them to use it” in their texts, therefore considered it “easy to an extent”. Again, T-2 said that many of the learners “have no idea about it”.

Thus, both of them agree to some extent about the difficulty of using substitutions in the written texts. The difficulty might be due to the differences of learners’ academic backgrounds. While one teacher referred to the fact that it had no focus in the previous classes, the other teacher referred to the easiness of using substitutions by some learners only, and lack of any idea about it by some other learners.

**VII.** Both the teachers found using ellipsis difficult for their learners. The two teachers’ comments about using ellipsis in writing a paragraph are as follows:

**T-1:** They are comfortable with the common ways of expression. They find it difficult to use ellipsis.

**T-2:** Using ellipsis smoothly while writing paragraph is difficult for my students because they consciously or subconsciously compare English sentences with ellipsis with Bangla ones. As Bangla ellipses are different,

due to mother language interference, students cannot smoothly use ellipsis in English. That is, they wrongly construct English sentences with ellipsis resembling parallel Bangla structure.

The two teachers' comments pointed out that using ellipsis is difficult for their learners. T-1 observed that the learners find using "common ways of expressions" easy for them. They find comfort in using general expressions with common sentence structure. Similarly, T-2 commented that using ellipsis is "difficult" for the learners. T-2 further explained the causes of difficulty saying that the learners try to "compare English sentences with ellipsis with Bangla ones" for using ellipsis in their writing in English. T-2 again explained that the learners "wrongly construct English sentences" with ellipsis because of "mother language interference".

T-1 and T-2's comments concur that using ellipsis in writing in English is difficult for the learners. The agreement between the two teachers might reflect the common phenomenon of the learners about using ellipsis in English in Bangladesh context. However, their causes of difficulty in using ellipsis for the learners might appear different. The causes might be synthesized this way that the learners cannot use ellipsis smoothly because of mother language interference. The learners think of using ellipsis in a way similar to the use of ellipsis in Bengali, which might contribute to their common way of expression in writing in English and contributes to difficulty in using ellipsis.

**VIII.** The two teachers admitted the problem of writing a good topic sentence by the learners. The observations of the two teachers about their learners' writing a good topic sentence are presented below:

**T-1:** I have hardly seen a good topic sentence in their paragraphs. Sometimes they write topic sentences that are indirectly related to the topic. When they are asked to write a paragraph on any topic, they somehow start writing. They don't focus on writing an effective topic sentence.

**T-2:** Writing a good topic sentence for paragraph is difficult for my students because they cannot decide what might be a good topic sentence for a particular paragraph. Lack of practice as well as grammatical knowledge causes this failure.

The two interviewee teachers found the problem of writing a good topic sentence in the learners' written paragraphs. T-1 has pointed out that "a good topic sentence" is "hardly seen" in their paragraphs. T-1 further explained that sometimes the learners write "topic sentences that are indirectly related to the topic". That means, the learners' topic sentences do not deal with

specific idea of the topic. They lack plan and focus on writing an effective topic sentence in a paragraph. The problem of topic sentence in the learners' paragraphs is echoed by T-2 too. T-2 commented that writing a good topic sentence is "difficult" for the learners because they are unable to determine which sentence might be a good topic sentence in their paragraphs. T-2 continued that "lack of (their) practice as well as grammatical knowledge" impacts their ability to write a good topic sentence. Rather, they show a tendency to write a paragraph without any plan or focus that they need to stick to. Again, T-2 added, knowledge of grammar also plays a significant role in writing a good topic sentence. Grammatical knowledge is needed to write a controlling idea around which the whole paragraph revolves.

Thus, both the teachers agree on the point that writing a good topic sentence is a problem for their learners. T-1's observation about the problem of writing a good topic sentence might be the result of the learners' lack of focus on it or of the learners' no practice of it. Again, T-2's learners' difficulty arises, according to the teacher, from lack of practice and poor grammatical knowledge of the learners. Lack of practice as well as grammatical knowledge might be the results of putting no emphasis on them, and these make the learners unable to choose a good controlling idea to indicate a specific aspect of the topic.

**IX.** The learners' ability to use appropriate vocabulary as a difficult skill was pointed out by the teachers. Their comments about their learners' using the most appropriate words or vocabulary in a paragraph are mentioned below:

**T-1:** Not sure I am. It is a bit difficult to comment. Students do not think of vocabulary or appropriateness of vocabulary. In some cases they have proper vocabulary to present their ideas. Sometimes it is questioned.

**T-2:** Using appropriate word/vocabulary in a paragraph is difficult for my students because their vocabulary itself is weak. They may think of the appropriate word in Bangla but its parallel English word they do not know. They do not think of appropriateness of vocabulary. They somehow express their ideas.

The two teachers' comments reveal that the learners have challenges in using appropriate vocabulary in writing in English. T-1 expressed uncertainty about the learners' ability to use appropriate vocabulary. T-1 explained the uncertainty in this way that the learners do not regularly and steadily use appropriate vocabulary as in the words of T-1, "In some cases they have proper vocabulary to present their ideas. Sometimes it is questioned". T-1 further explained that the learners "do not think of vocabulary or appropriateness of vocabulary" in writing in English. On the other hand, T-2

considered the learners' using appropriate vocabulary as a "difficult" skill. T-2 further explained that the learners' "vocabulary itself is weak", as a result they do not think of the appropriateness of vocabulary. Without it, the learners may "think of the appropriate word in Bangla (Bengali) but its parallel English word they do not know" which contributes to the difficulty of choosing appropriate vocabulary.

The teachers' thinking about the learners' vocabulary problem might be assigned to different reasons. T-1's comment might be the result of the learners' tendency not to think of the suitability of a word or the learners' tendency to use a word as it comes to them at the time of writing. On the other hand, T-2's observation might be attributed to the cause of weak vocabulary. The learners cannot think of the suitability of a word because of their limited knowledge of vocabulary collection. They use a word from their stock of words without thinking of its suitability. Though they think of a word appropriately in Bengali, they cannot use it in writing because of not knowing its English equivalent or translation. Insufficient reading habit or no special focus on English vocabulary or on suitability of a word might result in the learners' challenge in using proper vocabulary.

**X.** The interviewees considered using word collocation by the learners to be a difficult skill. The two teachers' comments about using word collocation are given below:

**T-1:** I think poor vocabulary and their being non-native users make it difficult for them. The idea of which words collocate with each other does not get attention in the teaching learning process.

**T-2:** Using word collocation is difficult for my students. Its reason is to be found in lack of use of English outside classroom, and poor reading habit of English texts. Moreover, teachers of English language do not give special emphasis on the learning and using of word collocation.

Both the teachers' comments reveal that using word collocation is difficult for the learners. T-1 explained that the learners' "poor vocabulary" and their being "non-native users" of English make the use of word collocation difficult for them. T-2 also considered using word collocation difficult for the learners. T-2 explained that "lack of use of English outside classroom" and poor reading habit of the learners make the use of word collocation difficult for the learners. Both the teachers referred to the lack of "attention" and "special emphasis" in the teaching- learning program for using word collocation as the causes of difficulty for this sub-item of the writing stage.

The two teachers' comments about the difficulty of using word collocation might be attributed to limited reading habit of the learners and no focus on learning and using word collocation in writing English. Consequently, the learners did not develop a good understanding of word collocation, and teachers also did not focus on word collocation, and ultimately it became more challenging for the learners to use word collocation.

**XI.** Developing a topic sentence into a complete paragraph is challenging for the learners. The two teachers' comments about their learners' ability to develop a topic sentence into a complete paragraph are provided below:

**T-1:** The very idea of a topic sentence is misunderstood very often. They are more willing to make an introduction rather than writing a topic sentence in its true sense. Moreover, they hardly have any topic sentence in paragraphs. Therefore, developing the topic sentence into paragraphs does not happen in writing. However, many of them write some sentences which are related to topic. They write some sentences in the body of the paragraph.

**T-2:** Developing topic sentence into a complete paragraph does not arise, because they do not have good topic sentence to develop in the body of their paragraph. However, some of them write supporting sentences which give much information about the topic.

The two teachers' comments identify the difficulty of developing the topic sentence into a complete paragraph. T-1 noted that the learners "hardly have any topic sentence" in paragraphs. "The very idea of a topic sentence is misunderstood" by the learners. Consequently, they give introductory statement about a topic instead of writing a topic sentence. Therefore, T-1 concluded that "developing topic sentence into paragraphs does not happen in writing" of the learners. T-2 also shared the difficulty of developing a topic sentence into a complete paragraph by the learners. T-2 nullified the point of developing the topic sentence into a complete paragraph because the learners have no effective topic sentence in the paragraph. However, both the teachers concurred on the point that the learners write sentences supporting the topic, though the sentences do not develop the topic into a paragraph.

The teachers' comment that the learners' difficulty of developing a topic sentence into a complete paragraph might be attributed to the lack of focus on writing a topic sentence and developing the topic sentence into a complete paragraph in the teaching and learning of paragraph writing.

This lack of focus might lead to the learners' writing no topic sentence in the paragraph and, ultimately, there is no development of the topic sentence in the body of the paragraph.

**XII.** The interviewee teachers perceived that using appropriate cohesive devices/ linking words is difficult for the learners. Their answers to the questions about their learners' difficulty in linking sentences by using appropriate cohesive devices are mentioned below:

**T-1:** It is difficult for them to choose the most appropriate cohesive devices. To maintain cohesion, to use cohesive devices or linking words, whatever you say, is not in the practice of the students. The idea of cohesion is not practiced in the previous classes.

**T-2:** Linking sentences using appropriate cohesive devices/linking words is difficult for my students because they do not know much about them and their use. Furthermore, idea of cohesive devices is not focused in their classes, in their teaching process.

Both the teachers' comments reveal that the learners have difficulty in using cohesive devices. T-1 commented that the learners found it "difficult" to "choose" the "appropriate cohesive devices" to link the sentences of a paragraph. The learners write sentences but the sentences are not well linked because of the learners' not using proper cohesive devices. The comment is shared by T-2 too about using cohesive devices in writing a paragraph. T-2 commented that it is "difficult" for the learners to use appropriate cohesive devices / linking words for establishing connections between the sentences of a paragraph. T-2 further added that the learners "do not know much about them (cohesive devices) and their use". Both the teachers opine that the idea of using linking words does not get attention in the teaching-learning program.

The comments of the teachers about difficulty can be explained in this way that the use of cohesive devices was not focused in the teaching and learning of paragraph writing. This lack of focus might lead to lack of knowledge about the cohesive devices and their use which ultimately might lead to the learners' difficulty in using cohesive device as perceived by the teachers.

**XIII.** The teachers perceived of the challenges faced by the learners to write grammatically correct sentences. The two interviewee's comments about their learners' challenges of writing grammatically correct sentences in a paragraph are given below:

**T-1:** Their accuracy varies time to time depending on the variety of

topics. In most cases, students suffer because of grammar. On one occasion they commit a mistake, but on another occasion they do not commit the mistake. Generally, they have the problem in writing grammatically correct sentences.

**T-2:** Using grammatically correct sentences is difficult for my students because of students' background of communicative English in primary and secondary levels. Sometimes, accuracy varies from time to time. Once, they commit a mistake / error, again in another occasion they do not commit the mistake/ error. Moreover, teachers' evaluation process is also responsible for this reason. Some teachers focus on content and some other teachers focus on accuracy mostly.

The teachers' comments demonstrate that their learners have problems of grammar in writing English. T-1 commented that "Generally they have the problem in writing grammatically correct sentences" in English. However, T-1 noted that the difficulty is seen to "vary" according to the variety of topics. While the learners write correctly on one topic, on another occasion they fail to write correctly. The grammatical difficulty is shared by T-2 too, but with a different explanation. T-2 noted that it is "difficult" for the learners to write grammatically correct sentences in English because of the learners' "background of communicative English" at primary and secondary levels. Like T-1, T-2 mentioned that the learners' ability to write grammatically correct sentences is not regular. They have fluctuation in their performance to write grammatically correct sentences. Again, T-2 mentioned that teachers' evaluation of the learners' writing tasks is also responsible for this.

The above comments of the teachers can be summarized in this way that there was no proper attention to or focus on the learners' part as well as on the teachers' or administrative part for enabling the learners to write correct English. The variation of writing correctly from topic to topic or situation to situation might be the result of no correct grammatical knowledge of the learners. Furthermore, the implementation of the communicative English program at the primary and secondary levels distracted the learners' attention from writing correct English to more use of English for communicative purposes. Thus, lack of focus at different levels from different corners might lead to the difficulty of writing correct English.

**XIV.** The two interviewees had different views regarding the learners' use of idioms. The answers of the teachers to the question about the learners' use of idioms are given below:



**T-1:** Regarding the use of idioms I usually encourage them not to use idioms in formal writing as it may create confusion.

**T-2:** Using idioms is very difficult for my students. Furthermore, idioms include English context and culture in their formation which is why they normally seem alien to non-native English learners.

The two teachers' responses indicate different views about their learners' use of idioms in writing English. T-1 shared that the learners are discouraged to use idioms in formal writings like, paragraphs and essays, because this use of idioms might create confusion in terms of meaning among the readers and writers. T-2 might have indicated difference between literal meaning and contextual meaning of an English idiom. On the other hand, T-2 viewed that using idioms is "very difficult" for the learners in their writing. T-2 further opined that "idioms include English context and culture in their formation", as a result of which idioms are not used usually by the non-native learners of Bangladesh. That is, inherent cultural and contextual meanings of idioms make the idioms incomprehensible to the learners for use in writing.

The views of the teachers mentioned above about the use of idioms by the learners might be the difficulty of understanding the meaning of the idioms in writing English. Both the teachers agreed that the surface meaning and the inherent meanings of English idioms might create difficulty for the learners to use them in writing English. Therefore, because of the confusion developed out of the different meanings of English idioms T-1 asked the learners not to use them in writing English and T-2 considered them difficult to use in writing English.

### *Revising stage*

**I.** The two teachers' responses to the question about their learners' skill to revise a written text to maintain cohesion were a bit different. The teachers' answers to the question about their learners' revising the cohesion of paragraph are given below:

**T-1:** Sometimes they fail to use cohesive devices in sentence but some other times they can use. They fail to maintain cohesion in written texts. Again, like coherence, cohesion is not focused in the teaching and learning process in the secondary and higher secondary levels.

**T-2:** Revising the cohesion is difficult for my students because they are not well informed about it. Without it, idea of cohesion is not properly highlighted in the teaching- learning process.

Their answers reveal that revising the paragraph for cohesion of a

paragraph is difficult for their learners to a great extent. T-1 pointed out that sometimes they can maintain, sometimes they fail to maintain cohesion. T-1 again shared that the idea of cohesion was not focused in the previous lessons in the previous classes. This idea was found in T-2's comment also. T-2 referred to lack of paying attention to the discussion of cohesion. In addition, T-2 informed that establishing cohesion is challenging for his learners because the learners were not well informed about this in the previous English courses they took.

T-1 has partially agreed that the learners are able to revise a text to maintain cohesion in some cases. However, the teacher's comments point to the fact that the learners are unable to revise to maintain cohesion in some other cases. Both the teachers unanimously pointed to the fact that the learners did not get lessons about having cohesion in a text. Therefore, it might be concluded that the learners' difficulty to revise any text for cohesion might be due to no discussion on it in the courses of the previous classes.

**II.** The two teachers' comments about their learners' revising the coherence of paragraph are provided below:

**T-1:** Sometimes they fail to maintain coherence but some other times they can maintain. Sometimes, they maintain an order in writing sentences, sometimes they can not. My personal experience says that the idea of coherence is not focused in the teaching process.

**T-2:** Revising the coherence is difficult for my students because of lack of good and clear idea about it. They continue to remain inattentive even after idea is clarified to them if practice is not done on regular basis. Furthermore, generally it is not focused in teaching writing to the students.

The above observations of the two teachers show that they experienced the learners' ability of maintaining coherence a bit differently. T-1 referred to some learners who can maintain coherence in the writing tasks. Again, T-1 referred to some other learners who cannot maintain it in their written texts. On the other hand, T-2 also pointed out learners' difficulty to establish coherence in written texts. T-2 further explained that despite clarification of the idea of coherence to the learners, they are unable to show it in their texts because of lack of practice. However, both the teachers agree on one point that the idea of coherence is not focused in the teaching learning program of writing.

The two teachers' different comments regarding their learners' ability of revising the paragraph for coherence might be due to the differences of learners' academic backgrounds. Again, the teachers' agreement about lack

of focus on coherence in the teaching-learning program might be similar to the situation that prevails in the case of teaching writing in general and teaching paragraph writing in particular to the learners without putting emphasis on coherence.

**III.** The teachers identified the problem of unity in their learners' writing. The teachers'

responses to the question about their learners' ability to revise the unity of paragraphs are mentioned below:

**T-1:** I think they are more encouraged to write as much as it is possible rather than writing a paragraph maintaining unity. They generally tend to write to a great length. It makes them fall short of time to revise the unity of paragraph.

**T-2:** Revising the unity is difficult for my students because they are not taught in this way. They have the tendency to focus on the length of writing, not on the unity of writing.

The two teachers highlighted the problem of their learners to revise unity of the written paragraphs. Both the teachers agreed that the learners tend to focus on writing more than maintaining unity of the written paragraphs. However, the two teachers pointed out different reasons behind lack of unity in the learners' written texts. T-1 mentioned that learners have a tendency to opt for longer text than for unity in text. T-1 further explained that the tendency to write longer text makes them suffer from scarcity of time which causes them to fail to revise unity of a paragraph. On the other hand, T-2 pointed out, like T-1, the learners' tendency to write more and added that because of having no discussion on it in the previous lessons the learners have difficulty in revising a paragraph for its unity.

In conclusion, the two teachers' responses concur on the point that the learners have difficulty in revising a paragraph for its unity, but they have differences of opinions to some extent. The differences of opinions might be due to the differences of learners' academic background and differences of experiences as teachers.

Thus, analysis of the questionnaire data collected from the six teachers and the analysis of the semi-structured interview data collected from the two teachers indicate the writing challenges of the learners. The challenges include different stages and sub-stages of planning, writing, revising paragraphs. Findings from both the sources concur on the learners' difficulty in writing paragraphs.

Questionnaire data elicited from the six teachers show the learners' difficulty in the planning stage. Teachers opine that their learners have

difficulty in different sub-stages of planning. The findings of difficulty in different sub-stages of planning are commensurate with Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed (2010). In Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed (2010) most of the teachers referred to the difficulty of brainstorming and idea generation for the learners. This finding is also partially in line with Afrin (2016), Hammad (2014) and Huang, Cunningham, and Finn (2010). Interviewee teachers in these studies pointed to the problem of gathering relevant ideas (Afrin, 2016), lack of content knowledge (Hammad 2014) and problem of necessary content and idea generation (Huang, Cunningham, & Finn, 2010). Questionnaire responses of the teachers and their interview responses indicate the learners' challenges in different sub-stages of the writing stage. The results of the teachers' questionnaire responses of this study to the questions about writing a topic sentence, supporting details, developing the topic sentence into a complete paragraph and writing a concluding sentence confirm the teachers' responses in Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed (2010). The challenges of writing a topic sentence and a concluding sentence also agree with Ahmed (2010) and Huang, Cunningham, and Finn (2010). The finding about developing content is partly in agreement with Ahmed (2010) and Huang, Cunningham, and Finn (2010). The findings of the teachers' questionnaire responses to the questions about the problems of using ellipsis, cohesive devices, substitution, synonym, antonym, appropriate vocabulary, English idioms, and word collocation support the teachers' questionnaire findings in Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed (2010) and Ahmed (2010). Again, the finding of this study about the difficulty of using cohesive devices supports the finding of Hammad (2014). Furthermore, the challenge of using appropriate vocabulary is similar to the finding of Afrin (2016). The study of Nazim and Ahmad (2012) confirms the findings about the troubles of using synonyms and antonyms in this study. Additionally, the trouble of writing grammatically correct sentences confirms the findings of several studies (Afrin, 2016; Nazim & Ahmad, 2012; Butt & Rasul, 2012; Huang, Cunningham, & Finn 2010). Again, the finding of this study about easiness of using reference ties is partly in line with Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed (2010). Finally, the finding of this study about using appropriate layout and design concurs with Hammad (2014).

The questionnaire results of this study about the learners' challenges for revision for coherence, cohesion and unity support the questionnaire findings of Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed (2010). Moreover, Interview findings of this study also concur with the interview responses of the study of Ahmed Abdel Hamid Mohamed (2010).

### Implications of the study

The findings of the current study have a number of implications for the learners, teachers, and curriculum designers/educational decision makers. The learners can be informed of the limitations they have in writing paragraphs. The other teachers can develop a richer repertoire of the learners' writing problems in English. Developing a richer repertoire helps the teachers address the writing problems more effectively. The curriculum designers and/or educational decision makers should take necessary initiatives so that the teachers as well as the learners may be well-informed about the problems in writing paragraphs in English.

### Limitations of the study

This study has some limitations in different aspects for example, sample, instruments and writing task type. The samples of this study were drawn from only a private university and the number of sample teachers was only 6 as respondents of questionnaire and 2 as interviewees. If the samples were drawn from other universities, the study might have given different results. Moreover, this study focused only on the problems of paragraph writing.

### Recommendations for further studies

Based on the findings and limitations discussed before, this study recommends to carry on further studies. The study recommends further studies on the learners and teachers of other public and private universities. This study also recommends further studies using other instruments.

### **Conclusion**

The present study analyses the problems the Bangladeshi EFL tertiary learners face in the case of writing a paragraph. The problems include difficulties in the planning, writing and revising stages of writing a paragraph as perceived by the teachers. The findings show that the learners have problems in all the three stages. The interviewee teachers in their interviews have explained the problems with references to academic backgrounds of the learners. This in-depth study draws attention of the stakeholders in relation to the writing problems of the learners so that they might take necessary steps to overcome the writing problems.

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**APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW  
TEACHER PARTICIPANT T-1**

R. Ok, before we opt for interview, I'd like to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form, that you understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any question, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I. Yes. I had read and understood it.

R. Would you like to ask any question before we start the interview?

I. Nothing.

**Q. 1. Which stage is very much difficult for the students in case of writing a paragraph? Is it the planning stage, or the writing stage or the revising stage?**

Thank you too for choosing me to talk about this issue. Actually, I am interested to talk about this issue. O----- Yes. Well. A question is which stage is most difficult for your learner in writing a paragraph. I think it is planning. Because most of the time they can not choose the right steps in writing a paragraph. Some times they confused to choose the best possible topic sentence or they can not- they fail to organize the ideas in a chronological order. So, I think planning is the most difficult stage for them in writing a paragraph.

**Q.2. What is your idea about brainstorming of your students?**

I think it is very easy for them as they are at the tertiary level. Or, they can gather ideas from the discussion with others if they are stuck. I think they can brainstorm ideas themselves.

**Q.3. Students' generating ideas- relevant ideas, are they able to do this?**

It is easy as they are given academic and familiar topics, but sometimes relevancy maybe questioned.

**Q.4. Then, interesting ideas- planning interesting ideas----- Can your students plan interesting ideas related to the topic?**

It's difficult as it is problematic to organize ideas in a logical order and in an interesting way maintaining cohesion and coherence. Moreover, in cases of many students, interestingness of their ideas is not logical.



**APPENDIX B**  
**INTERVIEW**  
**TEACHER PARTICIPANT T-2**

R. Ok, before we opt for interview, I'd like to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form, that you understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any question, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I. Yes. I had read and understood it.

R. Would you like to ask any question before we start the interview?

I. Nothing.

**Q.1. What is your idea about brainstorming of your students?**

Brainstorming of the topic of a paragraph is difficult for most of my students because most of them do not know what brainstorming is. When it is explained, again they face problem as they do not have practice. This lack of practice causes problem even to those students who are acquainted a bit with the brainstorming strategy. Some of them have idea about it.

**Q.2. How would you evaluate students' generating ideas- relevant ideas? Can they generate ideas?**

Generating relevant ideas to the topic of a paragraph is difficult for my students. Sometimes, they can generate ideas because they are at tertiary level. The problem is that in most cases, the ideas are not relevant. Ideas are there, but not relevant.

**Q.3. Then, Interesting ideas- planning interesting ideas-----? Can they plan interesting ideas to make the text interesting to read?**

Planning interesting ideas to a paragraph topic is difficult for my students because they cannot determine what ideas may be interesting for the topic of a paragraph. The reason behind this failure is the lack of practice. Because of the lack of practice, students discover themselves in a difficult situation. When they are asked to plan interesting ideas to a paragraph, they eventually fail.

**Q.4. Are they able to organize ideas according to type of paragraph?**

Organizing ideas according to the type of a paragraph is difficult. Probably they were not taught following the types of paragraph. From my life as a student I can draw the example that students are not taught types of paragraph. Therefore, organizing ideas according to the types of paragraphs does not arise.

