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Academic Writing Difficulties of Bangladeshi Students at a Higher Institution in Malaysia

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Abstract

Students who come from non-English background and pursue study in English at tertiary level in Asia, particularly in Bangladesh face great difficulty in their academic writing classes. In order to improve learners' academic writing, teaching of academic writing in classrooms plays a vital role in English language classrooms/higher education since in most of the language courses, academic writing skill is never taught at tertiary education in Bangladesh. Considering the backdrop into consideration, this study aimed to investigate the academic writing difficulties encountered by Bangladeshi students at University Utara Malaysia (UUM). To this end, under survey design, primary data were collected by conducting survey questionnaires; 38 Bangladeshi students were selected by using non-probability purposive sampling technique. Data of this study were analysed, employing SPSS (22 version) software package. From the significance test of the first hypothesis, the study found that the influencing factors had significant impact on academic writing difficulties of Bangladeshi students at UUM. And from the second hypothesis, the current study found that the potential problems had also significant impact on academic writing difficulties of Bangladeshi students at UUM. Finally, some recommendations have been proposed to overcome academic writing difficulties of Bangladeshi student at UUM.

Keywords: Academic writing, academic writing difficulties, Bangladeshi students, English as a second language (ESL) learner. University Utara Malaysia

Introduction

Globally, undergraduates at English medium university face significant difficulties to overcome their academic study. English may be one such challenge, particularly toward the start of their academic study, and especially for non-native speakers (NNS) of English. An exploration into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has demonstrated that the students should have capability in that particular language areas and skills to have the

capacity to adapt to academic demand (Cumming, 1994; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Graham, 1987; Sarudin, 1994). The difficulties confronted by these students are distinctive, relying upon the level of their studies whether they are undergraduates or graduates.

Writing is one of the essential skills in instructing English. It has constantly possessed a significant spot in most English language course. Writing is a correspondence with others verbally, and it is additionally an activity and a procedure of finding and arranging one's thought, putting them on paper and reshaping and reconsidering them. Furthermore, Bracewell as referred to by White and Arndt (1991) concurs that writing is not easy. Bracewell additionally clarifies that written work is the most perplexing and demanding of every single intellectual activities attempted by people. In this manner, non-native English learner is confronting the most difficulties skill (writing) to be developed. Indeed, the difficulties in writing for the most part are found in an academic writing. Heinkel (2004) states that in accordance with the previous study, substantial number of non-native learners encounter many difficulties when they learn a foreign language. But, again the objective is almost downplayed because of negligence towards academic writing course at higher education in Bangladesh (Alam & Sinha, 2009). Abedin, Majlish and Akter (2009) claim that the tendency to avoid academic writing continues even at the tertiary level.

Problem Statement

Haque (2009) says that the tertiary education in Bangladesh cater to the need-based present day courses to serve the developing nation in near future. Universities in Bangladesh offer subjects by demand of the job market, and the most well-known subjects are BBA, CSE, ECE, EEE, Pharmacy, LLM, English, and BTE. For the better execution of the undergraduates, the universities offer mandatory courses in English (Rahman, 1999), which incorporate all the four language skills, namely reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Undergraduates need to pass these courses alongside their core courses. But the inquiry is that whether all the four skills are enhanced or not. Though Bangladeshi universities are offering compulsory credit or non-credit English language courses, including four language skills and also grammar courses, but they are not specifically academic writing program, and the availability of these courses seems to be unavailable. Moreover, in the writing course, there is hardly any mark allocated for academic writing where successful communication and for higher education abroad, academic writing is needed (Long, 1987). Learners' academic writing skill is not assessed even at the tertiary level (Abedin, Majlish, & Akter 2010). The use of academic writing strategies seems to be absent whereas learning can be facilitated by the academic writing strategies (Chand, 2007). Context and culture are also ignored in teaching of academic writing skill.

The difficulties of academic writing are another concern that has been perceptibly considered by researchers. Academic writing is not simple expertise to be accomplished, particularly for second language learners. Mohan and Lo (1985) affirm that as a rule, many English as a Second Language Learners (ESL) learners discover academic writing as problematic. A research led by Bacha (2012) in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) connection has uncovered that instructors locate undergraduates' academic writing as weak. It is thought to be particularly troublesome for those "non-Anglicized etymological and

social and foundations" (Al Fadda, 2012, p. 123); for instance, Asians are accepted to face more issues in academic written work (Casanave & Hubbard, 1992). Similarly, it is underlined by Rabab'ah (2003) who expresses that learners who are from Asian universities for the most part experience difficulty in getting used to the necessities of English academic writing. Another study by Mohan and Lo (1985) has displayed the regular issues experienced by ESL learners. White and Arndt (1991) state that a second language learner will require much time to make a thought in critical writing. Furthermore, Bracewell as referred to by White and Arndt (1991) concurs that written work is difficult. Bracewell additionally clarifies that written work is considered as the most complex activities experienced by people. Actually, the difficulties in writing as a rule are found in an academic writing. Heinkel (2004) states that in accordance with the previous research work, many non-native undergraduates encounter difficulties learning a foreign language.

Therefore, for master level students, academic writing refers that specifically thesis writing, project paper and some assignments which are almost similar with initial research. Notably, many students have completed their undergraduate study by mixed mode, likely Bangla and English medium. When they have to study under English medium instruction in full length, they face difficulties in academic learning, especially in writing skill. In writing thesis, numerous master's level undergraduates have some different elements of the challenges they are confronted with. The thoughts, structure, lack of vocabulary, and paraphrasing or summarizing are a few cases of the challenges in writing thesis that the undergraduates generally encounter. For second language learners in particular, the factor of the challenges in acquiring second language might be similar experience for them as hard as to write thesis. Accordingly, in this exploration, the variables to be underlined are the components raised by Brown (2007). Considering the background into mind, the present research aimed at investigating the most influencing factors and potential problems that had significant impact on academic writing difficulties of the Bangladesh students at UUM.

Research Objectives

This study attempted to reveal the problems confronted by Bangladeshi masters level students in academic writing skill at University Utara Malaysia (UUM). In addition, this study highlighted the most influencing factors and potential problems that had significant impact on academic writing difficulties of the Bangladesh students at UUM. This study puts forward the issues confronted by graduate understudies in higher education and recommends some solution to overcome the difficulties by addressing their problems and weakness. Additionally, the current study has addressed the ways to improve the level of those students in the academic writing skill.

Research Questions

Based on the problems and purposes stated in the previous sections, two research questions are endeavoured to address in the study:

1. What are the influencing factors for academic writing difficulties encountered by Bangladeshi students at University Utara Malaysia?

2. What are the possible potential problems for the academic writing difficulties among Bangladeshi masters' level students' at UUM?

The research questions aimed to investigate the academic writing difficulties of Bangladeshi masters' level current students at University Utara Malaysia.

Literature Review

Nobody can deny that academic writing has significance to master English language as well as to be effective in learning for all disciplines where English is the medium of instruction. Academic writing is the fundamental certainty in learning process, which is not keeping away from or be negligent in instruction. Second language learners cannot think any instructive processes, namely academic writing, particularly assignments, project papers, and thesis writing. Bjork and Raisanen (1997, p. 8) propagate that the substance of writing lies in the way that it is "a thinking instrument. It is a device for language improvement, for basic considering and for learning in all disciplines." Abdulkareem (2013) affirms that academic writing fundamentally affect learners' advancement in a second language.

Rahman (1999) draws attention to the fact that a student of Bangladesh gets around 1600 contact hours in English before entering the university; on the other hand, 1000 hours instructional time is adequate to accomplish capability in a language. In any case, regrettably the undergraduates can not communicate properly in the foreign language even after a tremendous timeframe is spent upon this subject. Similarly, they have got an English language subject of their four year bachelor degree period. As Bangladeshi students are not taught academic writing at higher secondary level and also tertiary level of education, students have faced academic writing difficulties when they go abroad for their higher study (Alam & Sinha, 2009).

On the other hand, Chou (2011) has led a study on the students' viewpoints toward academic writing, and the analyst figures show that they consider academic writing as significant since it is the beginning stage for their allocated work and an approach to tell other individuals about their interests.

Moreover, Oshima and Hogue (1999) additionally have narrated that academic writing is not quite the same as some other types of writing (i.e. composing), similar to personal writing, literally writing, journalistic composition or even business composing. Similarly, for master's level students, academic writing refers the types of writing, namely thesis writing, initial research writing, and articles, etc.

Education system in the university: An Overview

At tertiary level of education, Bangladesh has four unique sorts of educational institutions that offer undergraduate and graduate programs. They are colleges under National University, autonomous public universities, private universities, and madrasahs. At present, English is taught as a compulsory course from class one till class 12. Consequently, the most of the universities have not offered writing course in four year

bachelor programme though there have a language course (about 100 marks) by including four skills and grammar unlikely English department which does offer the mentioned course. Though English department usually offers one more courses on academic writing and reading.

Bangladeshi Context

Maniruzzaman (2002) recognizes writing as a challenging skill for the remote language learners on the grounds that this ability requires significant trials by the learners. In the event of acquiring our first language, we listen and talk, and afterward we learn writing, but as it may come to the fore that it is absolutely inverse when we are learning English-reading and writing and after that at times listening and speaking. The author guarantees that this is the motivation behind why Bangladeshi undergraduates face difficulty in the case of writing English or academic writing, and they have to make enough attempts to gain this skill. Be that as it may, the genuine certainty is that undergraduates are given a few chance because as Saha (2008) explains that in the schools, colleges and even in the university education, Bangladeshi learners are very few enrolling into academic writing course which is directed to way of writing academic field, like research writing. Moreover, Alam and Sinha (2009) claim that the neglect of academic writing course or skill in our language classes makes the learners feeble in language as well as academic writing skill too. It has been found that for a large portion of the language courses in Bangladesh, academic writing is never taught just academic writing skill, and public universities generally offer an English language course around 100 marks/3 credit hours course including four skills except English language department (Saha, 2008).

English Language Teaching Policy in Bangladesh

In 1990, an overview report of National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) gave a disappointing picture of English language skills among students in light of the fact that it has found that agreeing to the syllabus and course readings, the lion's share of the undergraduates fail to accomplish palatable levels of capability in learning in English language (Ara, 2009). Until 1980, English was taught as an obligatory subject in B.A. (Hons) and degree Pass Course, but it was discontinued; in 1992 the Bangladesh Government passed a law to reintroduce English as a mandatory subject for all B.A. (Hons) and Pass Course understudies (Rahman, 1999). Even though this law should be actualized from 1994-1995 session, the 1995-1996 session did not guarantee it. The National Committee on Training Policy 1997 (Das, 2009) proposed four year degree course and one year expert's course at the tertiary level. Since the freedom of Bangladesh, numerous approaches continue changing with respect to the showing and learning of English (Ara, 2009). Since 1991, similarly NCTB has been attempting to enhance the nature of English language teaching in Bangladesh, yet tragically none of the arrangements has helped the undergraduates to build up their capability in the English language. Jahan (2008) says that in the wake of learning English for 13 to 15 years, the undergraduates of Bangladesh can not convey their thoughts in English. In such manner, Bhattacharjee (2008) accuses the repetitive changes in the educational programs and need to include English language core courses as far as four skills and also academic writing course for students and post graduate and undergraduates are concerned.

Perceptions of Students towards Academic Writing

In a second language acquisition (SLA), undergraduates are required to comprehend the method of academic writing, namely, growing up procedures, utilizing sufficient methodologies, and figuring out the best answers for their problems. Most researchers have focused on teaching academic writing successfully among advanced level undergraduates for their writing skills, elements of academic writing, and written task. Moreover, Daoud and Al-Hazmi (2002) have argued that non-native students of the English language can investigate another phase of academic writing by getting so as to measure self-mode of learning and the chance to think basically to convey what needs would be; subsequently, it would make academic responsibility to get and produce something significant through writing. Non-native learners can add to their exactness towards academic writing by taking part in different projects within teaching and learning situations. Undergraduates can accomplish their academic purposes by adding to specific parts of social elements, namely informative association, valuation for social foundation, and participating in important and intelligent errands. This will be accomplished by making undergraduates to manage the targets of the English language educational programs and language aptitudes that are utilized as a part of classroom exercises.

Theoretical framework

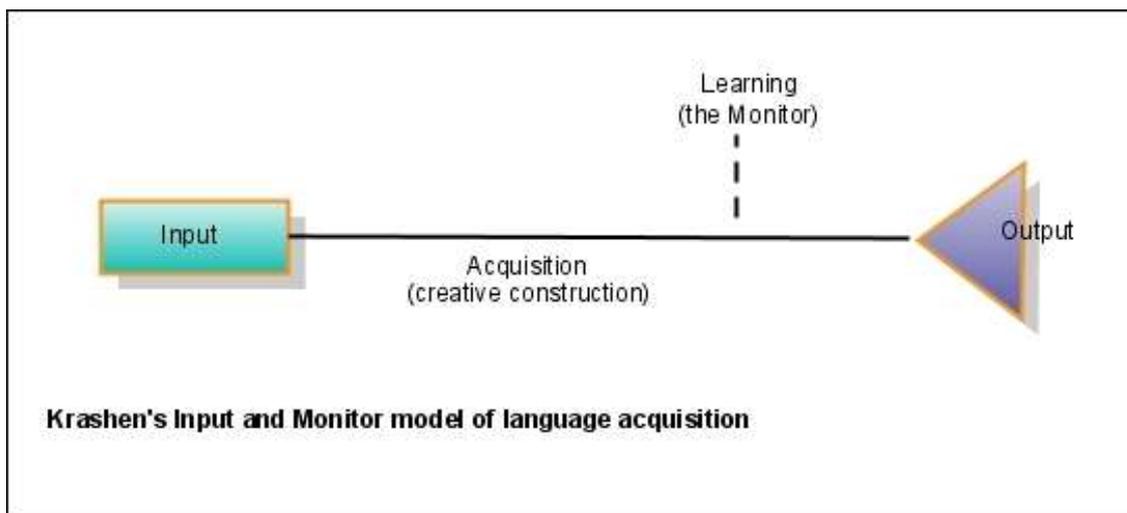


Fig 1. Krashen's input and monitor model

According to Krashen's (1981) input theory, language input is the most essential condition of language acquisition. Input is the L2 data which the learners acquire and it becomes innate only when that data is assimilated into their inter-language system. Krashen's (1981) view is that acquisition takes place when the input is a little beyond the learner's current level of competence which is termed as "the $i+1$ level" Krashen (1985). The conceptual framework of this present research work has followed Krashen's input monitor model.

Conceptual Framework of the Study/ Research Model of the Study

In this study, the researchers have tried to follow the Krashen’s Input and Monitor model, which is similar to the Conceptual framework of the study/research model of the study. On the basis of the above-mentioned discussion, the theoretical framework of this current research paper is given below.

Research Model of this Study

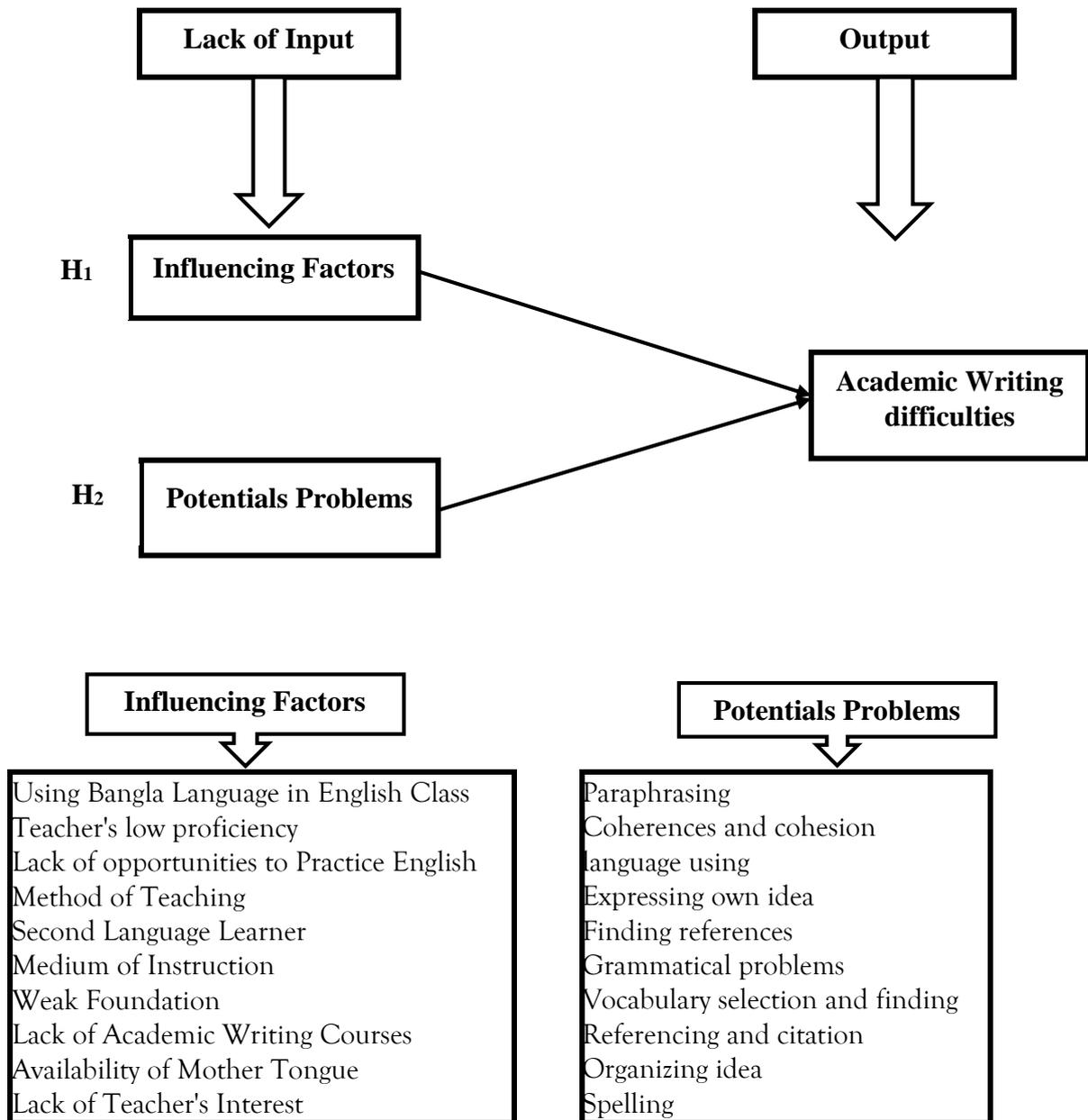


Fig 2. Research model of this study

Hypotheses

In this study, the researchers have used two hypothesis:

01. Influencing factors have significant impact on academic writing difficulties.
02. Potential problems have significant impact on academic writing difficulties

For hypothesis 01, the term “influencing factors” has considered the following variables, namely using Bangla language, teachers’ low proficiency, lack of opportunities, method of teaching, second language learner, medium of instruction, weak foundation, lack academic writing course, availability of mother tongue, lack of teacher’s interest.

For hypothesis 02, the term “potential problems” has considered the following variables, namely paraphrasing, language using, coherence and cohesion, expressing own voice, finding a relevant references, grammatical problems, vocabulary selection and findings, referencing and citation, organising idea and spelling.

Methodology

This research employed survey design under quantitative approach in nature. The purpose of the study has revealed academic writing difficulties among Bangladeshi postgraduate level students at UUM and also to generate awareness for the implementation of this skill. The investigation was conducted through close ended questionnaires. The target of this research was to investigate the academic writing difficulties in English among Bangladeshi post-graduate level students from different disciplines at University Utara Malaysia.

The quantitative approach consisted a questionnaire survey to post-graduate level students to investigate their academic writing difficulties. The questionnaire was useful for surveying 38 students (please refer to **Appendix A**) from different backgrounds at University Utara Malaysia. The most noticeable and an easy way for the research to collect the data is from the target population (Creswell, 2012) since it is simple and quick for the respondents to complete.

Population and Sample

A population is the total of all the individuals who have a certain characteristics and are of interest to a researcher (Creswell, 2012) and aggregate or totality of all object, subjects or members that confirm to a set of specification. The total students of postgraduate students at UUM were 38 students. The scanned page with proper authority seal has been provided at the end of this research (**Appendix A**). For the objective of this research, the subjects consisting all 38 post-graduate level students from different educational backgrounds were chosen, including males and females. Notably, they completed (under bachelor/graduation) their first degrees in their own county, Bangladesh. All were current Bangladeshi post-graduate level students at University Utara Malaysia.

Procedure and Instrument

For the data collection, the researcher distributed the questionnaires to the students and collected from the students on 3rd week of January, 2019 at University Utara Malaysia. During the data collection, the respondents was given instruction only in English language. Moreover, the respondents was given one hour to complete the questionnaire and revise it. Only one instrument was used in conducting this study with a view to collecting data questionnaires that were given to the students. After reviewing previous literature concerning academic writing difficulties, a questionnaire was adapted from Al-Khasawneh (2012) to measure the potential difficulties faced by graduate students in academic writing and the causes that led to these academic writing difficulties.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Since the main objective of this study was to explore the difficulties of Bangladeshi students in academic writing at higher institutions of Malaysia, the respondents for this study were selected from post-graduate level at UUM. A total 38 respondents were selected for this study by using purposive sampling method.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire for this study contained altogether 23 questions. All questions were taken from prior literature review. A quantitative research design was used to analyse data. This questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section contained demographic questions (i.e. Q. 1 to Q. 3), and the second section contained the main research questions (Q. 4 to Q. 23), where the respondents were asked to put their opinions about the difficulties of Bangladeshi students in academic writing at Malaysia. All questions are closed-ended.

Measurement and Scaling Technique

According to Malhotra and Dash (2006), measurement means assigning numbers or symbols to characteristic of objects according to certain pre-specified rules, and scaling involves creating a continuum on which measured object are located. In this study, a 5 point Likert Scale was used where 5 is the upper most level of unity, and 1 is the lower most one. Likert Scale is a widely used rating scale that requires the respondents to indicate a degree of agreement or disagreement with each of a series of statements about the stimulus objects. It is a scale with five response categories where-

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Data collection and Analysis Process

All the data of this study was collected from UUM students by using purposive sampling technique. More specifically, 38 respondents were surveyed by 20 questionnaire questions to collect the data for this study. Based on the nature of the study, and the small

sample size, the *one sample t-test* was chosen as a significant test for testing research hypotheses. After collecting data by distributing questionnaires, the analysis process was done in three steps, namely firstly data entry, secondly processing and analysis where statistical pie charts and tables were used to compare and analyse the data in this research, and thirdly two hypotheses of this study were been tested by using SPSS software.

Findings and Analysis

Reliability Assessment

In order to prove the internal reliability, this study performed Cronbach's Alpha Test of Reliability. Applying this test specifies whether the items pertaining to each dimension are internally consistent, and whether they can be used to measure the same construct or dimension of service quality. According to Nunnally (1978), Cronbach's alpha should be 0.7 or above. But some of studies also considered 0.6 as acceptable. In this study, the value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.559 which is around the standard value, i.e. 0.6. Thus, it can be concluded that the measures used in this study were valid and reliable.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

From the demographic profile of the respondents, it was found that out of 15 respondents, 80% were male, and 20% were female respondents. All the respondents were from post-graduate level students at UUM where 40% was from IT discipline, 33% was from business, 20% was from Law, and 7% was from Humanities discipline.

Findings of Main Research Questions

In this section of the survey, i.e. Q.4 - Q.23, respondents were asked to demonstrate their level of agreement/disagreement with particular statements, anchored in some influencing factors and potential problems towards academic writing difficulties. Q.4-Q.13 were based on the influencing factors that had impact on academic writing difficulties and Q.14 - Q.23 were based on potential problems towards academic writing difficulties. The responses of 'Agree or Strongly Agree' were aggregated into one category, responses of 'Disagree or Strongly Disagree' into a second category and Neutral into a third category. The findings of all the statements are shown below by using tables and pie charts.

Findings of influencing factors that have impact on academic writing difficulties:

Respondents' Opinions Regarding 'Bangla Language Using' In this question (Q.4), respondents were asked to show their opinions about the statement "Using Bangla Language in English Class".

Table 1:

Using Bangla Language in English Class

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	23	60.0	60.0	60.0
Strongly Agree	15	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

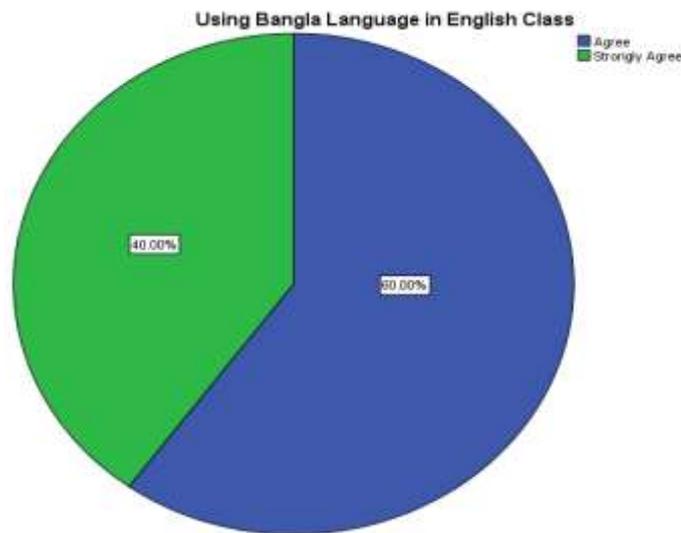


Fig 3. Using Bangla language in English classes

All the respondents, i.e. 100% (60% + 40%) respondents were found to agree that using Bangla language in English class was one of the major influencing factors of academic writing difficulties.

Hypothesis Testing:

Usually, in quantitative study, tests of significance are used to decide whether certain inferences can be drawn regarding any differences or relationships between variables. To do the significant tests, SPSS software was used. SPSS automatically calculates the significance (or *p*-value), which is the probability of the null hypothesis (H_0) as being accepted. Hence the level of probability of 5% or less is commonly taken as an appropriate level for most general research, including this study. As a result,

H₀ is accepted if the significance level is greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$)

H₀ is rejected if the significance level is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$)

Thus, the first hypothesis of this study is:

Hypothesis-1 (H₁): There is a significant impact of influencing factors on academic writing difficulties.

H₀: Influencing factors have no significant impact on academic writing difficulties.

H_A: Influencing factors have significant impact on academic writing difficulties.

Concerning the hypothesis 1, the term “influencing factors” considered the following variables, using Bangla language, teacher’s low proficiency, lack of opportunities, method of teaching, second language learner, medium of instruction, weak foundation, lack academic writing course, availability of mother tongue, lack of teacher’s interest.

As Likert scale was used in the main research question of this study, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree and 3 (neutral) is the middle point of this scale. So “3” has been chosen as test value for this one sample t-test.

Table 2

SPSS Output of One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Using Bangla Language in English Class	38	4.40	.507	.131
Teacher's low proficiency	38	3.53	.834	.215
Lack of opportunities to Practice English	38	4.53	.640	.165
Method of Teaching	38	4.60	.828	.214
Second Language Learner	38	4.60	.507	.131
Medium of Instruction	38	4.53	.516	.133
Weak Foundation	38	4.13	.915	.236
Lack of Academic Writing Courses	38	4.67	.617	.159
Availability of Mother Tongue	38	4.20	.414	.107
Lack of Teacher's Interest	38	3.93	.884	.228

Table 3

SPSS Output of One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Using Bangla Language in English Class	10.693	37	.000	1.400	1.12	1.68
Teacher's low proficiency	2.477	37	.027	.533	.07	1.00
Lack of opportunities to Practice English	9.280	37	.000	1.533	1.18	1.89
Method of Teaching	7.483	37	.000	1.600	1.14	2.06
Second Language Learner	12.220	37	.000	1.600	1.32	1.88
Medium of Instruction	11.500	37	.000	1.533	1.25	1.82
Weak Foundation	4.795	37	.000	1.133	.63	1.64
Lack of Academic Writing Courses	10.458	37	.000	1.667	1.32	2.01
Availability of Mother Tongue	11.225	37	.000	1.200	.97	1.43
Lack of Teacher's Interest	4.090	37	.001	.933	.44	1.42

From Table 3, it can be seen that the significant values of all variable are less than 0.05. Since the first hypothesis (H_1) was developed based on these variables where the significant value of all 10 variables were less than 0.05; as a result, null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, and alternative hypothesis (H_A) was accepted.

So for hypothesis 1 (H_1), it can be said that the influencing factors had significant impact on academic writing difficulties.

Hypothesis-2 (H_2): There is a significant impact of potential problems on academic writing difficulties.

H_0 : Potential problems have no significant impact on academic writing difficulties.

H_A : Potential problems have significant impact on academic writing difficulties.

Regarding hypothesis 2, the term “potential problems” considered the following variables: paraphrasing, language using, coherence and cohesion, expressing own voice, finding a relevant references, grammatical problems, vocabulary selection and findings, referencing and citation, organising idea and spelling.

For hypothesis-2 (H_2) the test value was also 3, and the same reason is mentioned in hypothesis-1 (H_1).

Table 4*One-Sample Statistics*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Paraphrasing	38	4.5333	.74322	.19190
Coherences and cohesion	38	4.6000	.50709	.13093
language using	38	3.8667	.63994	.16523
Expressing own idea	38	4.2667	.79881	.20625
Finding references	38	4.0000	.53452	.13801
Grammatical problems	38	4.2000	.77460	.20000
Vocabulary selection and finding	38	4.0000	.65465	.16903
Referencing and citation	38	4.1333	.63994	.16523
Organizing idea	38	4.2000	.94112	.24300
Spelling	38	3.4667	.74322	.19190

Table 5

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 3					
		f	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Paraphrasing	7.990	37	.000	1.53333	1.1217	1.9449
Coherences & cohesion	12.220	37	.000	1.60000	1.3192	1.8808
language using	5.245	37	.000	.86667	.5123	1.2211
Expressing own idea	6.141	37	.000	1.26667	.8243	1.7090
Finding references	7.246	37	.000	1.00000	.7040	1.2960
Grammatical problems	6.000	37	.000	1.20000	.7710	1.6290
Vocabulary selection & finding	5.916	37	.000	1.00000	.6375	1.3625
Referencing & citation	6.859	37	.000	1.13333	.7789	1.4877
Organizing idea	4.938	37	.000	1.20000	.6788	1.7212
Spelling	2.432	37	.029	.46667	.0551	.8783

From Table 5, it can be said that the significant values of all variables were less than 0.05. As the second hypothesis (H_2) was derived from these variables, and their significant value were less than 0.05; thus, null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, and alternative hypothesis (H_A) was accepted.

So for **hypothesis-2 (H_2)**, it can be concluded that potential problems had significant impact on academic writing difficulties.

Discussion

The aim of this section is to discuss the results in order to get the research objectives of this study. The primary data of this research was collected by conducting face-to-face survey at UUM, and the data were analysed by using SPSS software. The SPSS findings have been presented, using graphic figures, e.g. tables, charts, averages, etc. The findings of the presentation has enabled some elementary questions to be answered, describing the

data. After analysing the findings, the hypotheses, which was based on the literature review, was tested by using SPSS software.

The findings of the study also showed that students faced many difficulties in academic writing. Moreover, the term “influencing factors” considered the following variables, using Bangla language, teacher’s low proficiency, lack of opportunities, method of teaching, second language learners, medium of instruction, weak foundation, lack of academic writing course, availability of mother tongue, lack of teacher’s interest. Furthermore, another term “potential problems” considered the following variables, paraphrasing, language using, coherence and cohesion, expressing own voice, finding a relevant references, grammatical problems, vocabulary selection and findings, referencing and citation, organising idea and spelling.

Discussion of main research questions

In the survey i.e. Q. 1- Q. 3 represented demographic information and under Q. 4 - Q. 23, respondents were asked to demonstrate their level of agreement/disagreement with particular statements, anchored in some influencing factors and potential problems towards academic writing difficulties. Q. 4 -Q. 13 were based on influencing factors that had impact on academic writing difficulties and Q. 14 - Q. 23 were based on potential problems towards academic writing difficulties.

Discussions on influencing factors that have impact on academic writing difficulties

Concerning academic writing difficulties of Bangladeshi students at University Utara Malaysia, the respondents agreed that the most influencing factors had significant impact on academic writing difficulties.

Respondents’ Opinions Regarding ‘Bangla Language Using’: In this question (Q. 4), respondents’ were asked to show their opinions about the statement “Using Bangla Language in English Class”. All the respondents i.e. 100% (60% + 40%) of respondents were found to agree that using Bangla language in English class was one of the major influencing factors of academic writing difficulties.

Method of Teaching: In this case, 73.3% + 20% = 93.3% respondents agreed that ‘method of teaching’ was another major influencing factors of academic writing difficulties where 6.7% respondents were found to disagree with this statement.

Medium of Instruction: In accordance with this statement, (46.7 % + 53.3 %) i.e. 100 % respondents said that ‘Medium of Instruction’ was one of the most influencing factors in academic writing difficulties for Bangladeshi students in their higher study in Malaysia.

Availability of Mother Tongue: In line with this statement, (46.7 % + 53.3 %) i.e. 100 % respondents said that ‘Availability of Mother Tongue’ was another most influencing factors in academic writing difficulties for Bangladeshi students in higher study at Malaysia.

Teachers' Low Proficiency: Around 67% (33.3 % + 13.3 %) respondents showed their level of agreement with this statement whereas 4.7% respondents were neutral, and 6.6% respondents showed their level of disagreement.

Lack of Academic Writing Courses: In this case, 73.3% + 20% = 93.3% respondents agreed that 'Lack of Academic Writing Courses' was another major influencing factors of academic writing difficulties where, 6.7% respondents were found to be neutral with this statement.

Based on the result analysis, the most influencing factors that had significant impact on academic writing difficulties investigated by Bangladeshi respondents, and the factors were using Bangla language in English class, second language learner, method of teaching, medium of instruction, lack of academic writing course and availability of mother tongue. The responsible factors were also supported by study of Keong and Mussa (2015) who rationalized that the caused difficulties in academic writing were using Arabic in English classes, few opportunities to practise English, methods of teaching English, insufficient practical writing in educational institutions and weak foundation. So, it can be inferred that these are the most influencing factors that have significant impact on academic writing difficulties.

On the other hand, teacher low proficiency and weak foundation were the most significant factors for Arabic learners by Keong and Mussa (2015). But Bangladeshi respondents had different opinion on these variables. e. g. teacher low proficiency was slightly over three fifth and weak foundation was more, i.e. two third respondents of this study.

Potential problems that have significance impact on academic writing difficulties:

The result from the analysis showed that potential problems had significant impact on academic writing difficulties among Bangladeshi students at University Utara Malaysia.

Respondents' Opinions Regarding 'Coherences and Cohesion': The question had the most significant impact on the potential problems and with this statement, (46.7 % + 53.3 %) i.e. 100 % respondents believed that 'Coherences and Cohesion' was one of the fundamental potential problems in academic writing difficulties for Bangladeshi students in higher study in Malaysia. This found result was supported by the studies of Wenyu and Yang (2008) and also Hassan (2015) who mentioned that Coherences and cohesion was the most potential problems on academic writing difficulties for non-native learners.

Paraphrasing: In this case, 66.7% + 20% = 86.7% respondents agreed that 'Paraphrasing' was one of the key potential problems of academic writing difficulties, and 13.3% respondents were found to be neutral with this statement.

Expressing own idea': In this case, 46.7% + 33.3% = 80.0% respondents agreed that 'Expressing own idea' was another crucial potential problems of academic writing difficulties, and 20% respondents were found to be neutral with this statement.

'Finding references': Once again, around 73.3% + 13.3% = 88.6% respondents agreed that 'Finding references' was another important potential problems of academic

writing difficulties for Bangladeshi students, and 13.3% respondents were found to be neutral with this statement.

‘Referencing and citation’: According to this statement, (60 % + 26.7 %) i.e. 86.7 % respondents assumed that ‘Referencing and citation’ was also one of the foremost potential problems in academic writing difficulties for Bangladeshi students in higher study in Malaysia, and 13.3% respondents were found to be neutral concerning this statement.

Based on the result analysis, the second level potential problems that had significant impact on academic writing difficulties were proved by questionnaire respondents, and the considered items were the following variables: paraphrasing, language using, expressing own voice, finding a relevant references, vocabulary selection and findings, referencing and citation and organising idea. Furthermore, a more recent study done in the context of Malaysian universities indicated almost the same findings, and the studies related Arab students by Ali Hassan (2015), Khairy (2013) and also Keong and Mussa (2015).

On the other hand, there have some factors that showed less potential problems on academic writing difficulties justified by respondents of the study, e.g.

‘Grammatical mistake’: In this case, 60% + 33.3% = 93.3% respondents agreed that ‘Grammatical problems’ was one of the main potential problems of academic writing difficulties, and 6.7 % respondents were found to disagree with this statement.

‘Spelling mistake’: In the same way, around a half of the respondents i.e. 40% + 6.7% = 46.7% respondents agreed that ‘Spelling’ was another potential problems of academic writing difficulties, and 46.7% respondents were found to be neutral, and 6.7% respondents were found to disagree with this statement.

However, based on a study by Keong and Mussa (2015) and Al-Khasawneh and Maher (2010), the findings gathered from their study showed that grammatical problems and spelling mistakes were another potential problems on academic writing difficulties among the Arab learners. However, this study had noted that grammatical and spelling mistakes were less potential problems that had significant impact on academic writing difficulties.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To be efficient in English language it is necessary to be efficient in four skills, especially in academic writing skill (Abedin, Majlish & Akter, 2009). But in Bangladesh, academic writing skill is always avoided throughout the whole academic life of a student. Saha (2008) says that even at the tertiary level this skill is not taught. That is why, Bangladeshi students abroad have faced difficulties in academic writing in the beginning of the semester. Based on the result, it is perceived that most of the Bangladeshi universities do not have well-integrated syllabus on academic writing for undergraduates and post graduate (masters) students to provide the chance of adequate practice of academic writing skills. Inappropriate syllabus and insufficient course support do not permit teachers to do practise the academic writing skills by the students in the classrooms. So, language teachers

hardly pay attention towards this skill. This research was conducted to investigate academic writing difficulties experienced by Bangladeshi masters level students at UUM.

Practical implication

Shaha (2008) notifies that by focusing on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), English language teaching (ELT) in Bangladesh has come out to teach the four language skills though it is not enough for Bangladeshi students who intend to study abroad, but still academic writing course is not adequate in our country whereas development of academic writing skill is compulsory to communicate in English and for higher education abroad. The present study can benefit the academics, syllabus designers and ELT professionals to implement the academic writing skills by finding the most influencing factors and potential problems that have significant impact on academic writing difficulties. Since there is hardly any research on this skill, it will also help the research community like researchers.

Recommendations for future study

The result analysis in the study has clearly showed us the influencing factors and also potential problems that have significance impact on academic writing difficulties. Many factors can be observed regarding the results of the questionnaires. These factors should be taught with precision at schools, colleges, universities, and English training institutions. The students need to see the whole picture of the methods used in academic writing that involves the use of certain strategies and steps to improve their academic writing skills.

There are some other factors that can be developed for future research to help students produce a good piece of academic writing. Notably, students and teacher might have realised some influencing factors and also potential problems on academic writing difficulties as well as they can improve their lacking in the field. Even more, motivation towards writing by using different styles of sentence structures, good vocabulary, and organizing their ideas and critical thinking can be addressed. This study may help to remove the students' academic writing difficulties by getting their weakness and also might be able to help to improve academic writing or writing skills.

Based on the results, it may be informed that effective and ideal English language courses need to be introduced to help the learners to be better in academic writing skills for higher education in abroad. Some recommendation for effective academic writing at the tertiary level of Bangladesh universities can be considered:

1. syllabus should specify the academic writing skills and university authorities need to offer course and provide the necessary logistic support for the teaching of this skill;
2. outlines should be prepared by allocating marks (at least 100 marks) for the academic writing skills
3. teachers need to be trained to take the language classes;

4. teachers need to be mentally prepared to teach the academic writing activities with the existing constraints

Based on the results of this study, it may be generally concluded that the existing condition of English academic writing skill in Bangladeshi universities requires intensive treatment.

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Appendix A: The Total Number of Postgraduates Students at UUM

Nationality **Bangladesh**

COLLEGE	PROGRAMME	Total
UUM CAS	Doctor of Philosophy	9
UUM COB	Doctor of Philosophy	18
	Master of Human Resource Management	1
	Master of Science (Finance)	1
	Master of Science (Management)	1
	Master of Science (Occupational Safety and Health Management)	1
	Master of Science (Technology Management)	2
UUM COLGIS	Doctor of Philosophy	5
Grand Total		38


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Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. Gender: Male; Female
2. Level of education:
3. Background/discipline:

(A) Influencing factors that have significant impact on academic writing difficulties

Item number	items	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
04	Using Bangla language in English classes					
05	Teachers' low proficiency in English					
06	Lack of opportunities to practise English academic writing					
07	Lack of employment of the method in teaching English (in terms academic writing)					
08	As a second language learner					
09	Medium of instruction					
10	Weak foundation					
11	Lack of academic writing course in educational institutions					
12	Mother longue available using (Bengali Language)					
13	Lack of teachers interest (lacking of research knowledge)					

(B) Potential problems that have significant impact on academic writing difficulties

Item no	items	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
14	Paraphrasing					
15	Language using					
16	Coherence and cohesion					
17	Expressing own voice					
18	Finding relevant references					
19	Grammatical problems					
20	Vocabulary selection and finding					
21	Referencing and citation					
22	Organizing idea					
23	Spelling					