

Teachers' Perceptions of Dakhil Textbooks in Developing Writing and Critical Thinking Skills in Bangladesh

¹Md. Mansur Hoshain, ²Mohammad Shakhawoat Hossen,
³Mohammad Sadikur Rahman & ⁴Mst. Munjuara Khatun

¹M Phil Research Fellow, IML, The University of Dhaka, E mail: tusardada@gmail.com

²Lecturer in English, University Women's Federation College, Dhaka.

Email: mshakhawoat@gmail.com

³Lecturer, Baraigram Govt. Honours College, Natore, Email: mdsumonm1983k@gmail.com

⁴Assistant Teacher (Sociology), Sangalshi Hazipara Alim Madrasah, Nilphamary,

Email: Munjuara30@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research paper examines the perceptions of teachers on how effective the English textbooks are in nurturing critical thinking and writing skills in the students at the Dakhil level in Bangladesh. The study uses a mixed-methodology that gives the study breadth and depth of analysis. The quantitative strand survey questionnaires were administered to 36 English teachers in 18 Dakhil madrasahs in both rural and urban areas through the use of a structured questionnaire comprising 10 Likert questions on critical thinking and writing based activities. The validity of the questionnaire was determined by expert review and it had a high level of reliability (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.85$). Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential tests (t-test, ANOVA). In-depth interviews with 5 purposely selected teachers were the qualitative strand with the addition of the classroom observation and content analysis of the writing exercises in the textbooks. The thematic codification was used to identify the insights and challenges of teachers. The findings indicate that although teachers do recognize the structured grammar and composition activities in the textbooks, they do not see many possibilities to teach higher-order thinking and creative writing. The qualitative data indicate the overemphasis on rote-based activities and exam-based writing.

The paper reaches the conclusion that enriched tasks that involve textbook revision are important in improving the critical thinking and writing abilities of students at the Dakhil level.

Keywords: *Mythology, shaping agent, construction, national identity*

I. INTRODUCTION

During the recent years, the role of English language education in Bangladesh has been highly important because of the ties it has with higher education, employment and international communication (Hamid and Honan, 2012). In this context, the Dakhil level, as the second phase of the madrasa system of education, is an important determinant of student academic base. The major teaching resource at this level is English textbooks that will dictate the teachings and student learning objectives. In addition to the competence in language, the development of critical thinking and writing prowess has proved to be crucial in the success of the learner in the 21st century (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). Critical thinking helps the students to analyze, evaluate and produce knowledge whereas the writing skills help to convey and express. Nonetheless there is concern on how Dakhil textbooks contribute to the development of these competencies.

Although the Bangladesh government has attempted to revise English curricula used in secondary and madrasa education, some research suggests that textbooks in Bangladesh tend to emphasize memorization and other test-oriented activities rather than high-order thinking and creative writing (Rahman, Kabir, and Afroze, 2006; NCTB, 2012). Educators in the Dakhil level commonly complain of difficulties in making a student writings or solving problems as a result of the strict structure of textbooks and the essence of rote learning (Barman, Sultana, and Basu, 2006). Therefore, students can become restricted in their thinking skills, argument building, or ideas that they can develop effectively on written work. This brings a distance that exists between the planned curriculum and classroom practices. Since the importance of textbooks is critical in directing instruction, it is important to know how teachers perceive their effectiveness in developing critical thinking and writing skills so that the curriculum can be developed to enhance pedagogy.

The research is important due to a number of reasons. First, it adds to the literature on the teaching of English language (ELT) in Bangladesh, especially on the under-researched setting of madrasa education. The study concentrating on the perceptions of teachers shows the reality of the practice of classroom application and the weaknesses and strengths of the available textbooks. Second, the results can guide policy makers and curriculum developers in the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) to develop materials that combine activities that support reasoning, creativity, and real writing activities. Third, the research offers lessons to instructors and teacher educators to change teaching methods that focus on memorization and encourage critical reading and analysis of texts. Finally, the study will foster the better practices of English language teaching that would equip Dakhil students with academic achievement and involvement in the society.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

This study aimed at exploring the perception of teachers on using Dakhil English textbooks to develop critical thinking and writing abilities of students, establish pedagogical success and obstacles.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of textbooks is the most prevailing teaching material in the Bangladesh secondary and madrasas education systems, where it determines the practices of teachers as well as the learning of the students (Hamid and Baldauf, 2008). Nevertheless, they do not only impact the language input, but also classroom pedagogy and intellectual interest of students. Textbooks in place of other materials like computers are not only an additional tool in such a setting as Dakhil where resources are limited but is frequently the only systemic resource to advance skills like skills in critical thinking and writing. They therefore become essential in promoting higher order competencies. Based on the conceptualization of Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) critical thinking deals with the analysis, evaluation, and generation of knowledge. It is associated with the capacity of the learners to interrogate the texts and demonstrate independent thinking in ELT (Facione, 2015). Although the national curriculum boasts of imparting these skills (NCTB, 2012), the current studies indicate that there is little practical implementation of the skills into textbooks. This imbalance underscores the necessity to raise an issue as to whether the Dakhil textbooks are actually in tandem with the goal of critical thinking. The process of writing is not only mechanical but also building meaning and individuality (Hyland, 2019). However, in Bangladesh, writing is formulated as a rote activity that aims at exams (Rahman, 2010). This examination bias makes writing memorized and not creative. In the case of Dakhil students, it is a method that limits the formation of genuine writing skills that are needed in the development of academic and professional purposes. Some researchers also point to rote learning as one of the endemic obstacles in the Bhutan education system (Barman, Sultana, and Basu, 2006). Textbooks not only fail to encourage questioning; they quite often serve to strengthen repetition and memorization. This culture especially in madrasas does not encourage questioning and thinking independently. Textbooks ought to be a source of change as opposed to rote learning, which this research provides.

Educators are intermediaries between the will of the curriculum and the reality of the classroom (Richards, 2015). Their usefulness is however dependant on the manner in which textbooks are organized. In case textbooks focus on closed-ended activities, the teachers might feel limited to encourage critical thinking. The perceptions of teachers are not merely passive reflections of the way the textbooks can enable them to encourage thinking and writing. Textbook assessment studies in the world are focusing on the proportion between language input and skills growth (Mukundan and Ahour, 2010). In Bangladesh, poor communicative and creative aspects are seen in most of the evaluations (Rahman, Kabir, and Afroze, 2006). Placing Dakhil textbooks in the context of this scholarship, it could be said that their effectiveness cannot be presumed but will have to be evaluated critically by the point of view of teachers. Madrasa education has always been accused of being conservative

and exam-based (Ali & Begum, 2015). In this regard, the English textbooks have the two-fold challenge of tackling the language acquisition and rival a traditional curriculum. Dakhil textbooks need to be more carefully inspected than standard schools, in the light of this peculiar tension. Research has shown that critical thinking can be cultivated even in the Islamic education system provided there is a redesigning of curriculum and pedagogy (Halstead, 2004). Many of the Dakhil textbooks though lack the provisions of tasks that facilitate questioning or reasoning. This implies that it is not that Islamic education cannot be combined with critical thinking but the problem lies in the lack of textbook design.

The input of teachers in the evaluation of textbook effectiveness is essential because teacher is the one who comes in direct contact with the student (Tomlinson, 2012). However, in Bangladesh, the perceptions of the teachers are usually not fully represented during policy deliberations. In the absence of teacher suggestions, the reform of the curriculum will be top-down and may not be in touch with the classroom realities. Authentic writing implies practical purposes and audiences (Hyland, 2019). Regrettably, such assignments are seldom presented in Dakhil textbooks, and the focus is made on model essays or memorization forms. This undermines the ability of students to formulate arguments or dig ideas. Authentic writing opportunities should be integrated in textbooks to ensure that writing after exams has a meaning. Textbooks at the global level incorporating problem solving, project based activities and reflective writing have been successful in creating success with critical thinking (Cunningsworth, 1995). When one compares the practices with that of the exam-oriented design in Bangladesh, it is evident that there is a gap. Localization of content, by incorporating elements of the international models, might add more flavour to Dakhil textbooks. Despite everything that has already been said about communicative English and textbook inadequacies in Bangladesh, there are not many researches that concentrate on the issues of critical thinking and writing in Dakhil textbooks. This is the gap that my study will address. Having attracted the perceptions of teachers, this study is a valuable addition to the research due to its value of filling the gap between theory and practice in the madrasa setting.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY

This study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the Dakhil English textbooks in fostering critical thinking skills and promoting writing in the teaching process. The quantitative component revealed generalizable trends, while the qualitative aspect provided nuanced classroom experiences, ensuring both breadth and depth (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). A stratified random sampling method was employed to select a sample of 36 English teachers from 18 Dakhil madrasahs located in both rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. Additionally, 5 teachers were purposefully selected to gather qualitative data regarding their experiences and interests in utilizing textbooks. The teachers were grouped into three categories: Group 1 (1-2 year teaching experience), group 2 (3-4 years teaching experience) and group 3 (above 4 years teaching experience). The investigation utilized a 10-item Likert scale questionnaire, demonstrating robust reliability

(Cronbach's alpha = 0.85) and featuring several closed-ended statements. Conversely, the semi-structured interviews encompassed open-ended questions that emphasized opportunities for creativity, challenges to creativity, the extent of reasoning, the potential for creative problem-solving, and the scope of composition assignments within the textbook content. Data collection was executed in two distinct phases: the initial phase involved a survey that achieved a complete response rate, while the subsequent phase comprised in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted with the participants' consent and lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. The analysis of quantitative data was conducted utilizing descriptive and inferential statistics, specifically t-tests and ANOVA, facilitated by SPSS. Additionally, the thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed to systematically examine the textual data collected through interviews, resulting in the development of codes and themes. In order to verify the accuracy of the interviews, member checking made it easier to do methodological triangulation, which enhanced validity amongst instruments. Informed consent was obtained, with participants guaranteed confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw at any time. This design ensured comprehensive and validated outcomes regarding the efficacy of Dakhil English textbooks in educational practice.

V. FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

The study utilized a mixed-method approach for data collection and analysis, as previously outlined. Appropriate statistical methods were employed for the analysis of the data. The results of the analysis are outlined below;

Findings from the Questionnaire

The 36 English teachers were assessed on 10 Likert-scale items, which determined the likelihood of the textbooks to improve the skill of critical thinking (5 items) and writing skills (5 items). The following table displays the summary of the findings through the mean and standard deviations.

Teachers' Ratings of Dakhil English Textbooks on Critical Thinking and Writing Skills (N = 36)

Dimension	Item Example	Overall Mean (M)	SD	Interpretation
Critical Thinking	Texts encourage analysis of issues	2.68	0.85	Low effectiveness
	Exercises foster evaluation of multiple perspectives	2.55	0.79	Low effectiveness
	Problem-solving tasks are included	2.40	0.83	Very low effectiveness
	Students encouraged to generate new	2.72	0.82	Low effectiveness

	ideas			
	Activities stimulate questioning and reasoning	2.60	0.76	Low effectiveness
Subscale Mean		2.59	0.81	Weak in promoting critical thinking
Writing Skills	Grammar tasks support composition	3.82	0.68	High effectiveness
	Guided essay models provided	3.75	0.72	Moderate to high effectiveness
	Opportunities for creative writing	2.70	0.74	Low effectiveness
	Exercises promote coherence and cohesion	3.45	0.70	Moderate effectiveness
	Tasks reflect authentic writing contexts	2.82	0.79	Low effectiveness
Subscale Mean		3.31	0.73	Moderate in writing support

Mean Ratings of Textbook Effectiveness on Critical Thinking vs. Writing Skills

Subscale	Mean Score	Interpretation
Critical Thinking	2.59	Weak – Textbooks are less effective in fostering critical thinking
Writing Skills	3.31	Moderate – Textbooks moderately support writing skills

The chart shows that the teachers find the textbooks to be slightly more effective in the development of writing skills than critical thinking. Nonetheless, the two dimensions are underdeveloped, and the level of writing assistance is moderate and the level of critical thinking is perceived to be low.

Results from t-test and ANOVA: The t-test results indicate that urban teachers ($M = 3.45$) rated tasks related to the inclusion of writing assignments in the Alim English textbook slightly higher than rural teachers ($M = 3.18$), $t(28) = 2.01$, $p < 0.05$. There was a significant difference between these two groups of teachers about this issue. Conversely, the ANOVA results indicate that there were no significant differences among the groups with varying teaching experience regarding their perceptions of critical thinking activities in the Alim English textbook ($F(2, 27) = 1.24$, $p > 0.05$). The findings indicate that the context, whether urban or rural, influenced perceptions of writing-related issues. In contrast, the teacher's experience did not significantly affect perceptions regarding the opportunity to engage in critical thinking.

Qualitative Findings

Interpretation of the qualitative data that was gathered and analyzed using interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of writings in the textbook was performed in a thematic manner. Four major themes emerged:

Excess on Rote Learning: Educators always emphasized the preeminence of textbook tasks that were rote-based. One teacher remarked, “Most of the exercises are model-oriented, and students do not think, but rather memorize.” This was supported by observations in the classroom where students would more often depend on copying of already known essays rather than on original thoughts. Analysis of textbook showed that it had high tendency of repetition and repeat based questions.

Low Ability to think at higher level: Though textbooks had exercises involving comprehension and grammar, teachers have reported the lack of activities that involved analysis, assessment, or synthesis. There was a lot of absence of activities like problem-solving, arguing about various points of views, or coming up with original arguments. A rural teacher noted, “No comparison, contrast or justification of ideas is required and students simply answer what is provided.” This is consistent with the low mean scores of quantitative findings in items of critical thinking.

Average support of writing mechanism, low creativity: Study teachers admitted that the given textbooks taught grammar structure and assisted the students with writing, sentence structure, and essay organization. But the case of writing and being creative was seldom promoted. As one urban teacher stated, “Yes, students are taught to write formal letters and essays, but they hardly have an opportunity to write about their own experience freely.” Writing exercises subjected to content analysis made it possible to confirm that the tasks were not based on real-life situations but on exam-oriented types of writing (e.g., application writing, formal letters).

Teaching situation and teacher adaptation: Teachers articulated that systemic factors e.g. teaching culture, which emphasized exams coupled with big classes amplified the textbook constraints. Nonetheless, according to some teachers they modified some tasks to provoke more critical work, e.g. adding the use of debates or reflective journal writing and textbook exercises. This is an indication of possibility of teacher agency in spite of structural constraints.

Triangulation of Findings

Quantitative and qualitative strands are combined to enhance the validity of the results.

1. **Convergence:** Interview findings ($M = 2.59$ critical thinking) and survey findings ($M = 2.59$ critical thinking) ruled out that textbooks are helpful toward higher-order thinking.

2. **Complementarity:** Although quantitative data indicated moderate effectiveness in writing skills ($M = 3.31$), qualitative information made the explanation clear that such effectiveness is largely mechanical and exam-based, rather than creative.
3. **Divergence:** Urban contexts indicated higher rating of writing skills (quantitative) and qualitative narratives indicated that in an urban setting, creativity and authenticity in writing was less.

VI. DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS

The results of the research show that there is a distinct mismatch between the possible potential of Dakhil English textbooks to improve the abilities of critical thinking and writing. The quantitative data provide information that the Critical Thinking Subscale had a mean of 2.59 which was considered as weak and the Writing Skills Subscale had a mean of 3.31 which was considered as moderate effectiveness. These findings are congruent with the findings of the qualitative research that was repeatedly pointing to the fact that textbooks focused too much on rote learning and examination-related activities (Theme-1). In their observations, teachers reported that the majority of assignments, particularly, comprehension and grammar ones, are based on memorizing the material instead of encouraging analytical thinking, which were also replicated by the observations in the classroom and the analysis of the material. As an example, there were no problem-solving tasks and exercises that require multiple thoughts or generating ideas, which are related to low quantitative scores on critical thinking items, including problem-solving tasks are included ($M = 2.40$) and activities stimulate questioning and reasoning ($M = 2.60$).

Such overlap of quantitative and qualitative strands highlights the lack of the textbooks in regard to the higher order thinking skills. Critical thinking as noted by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) and Facione (2015) necessitates that students are given a chance to analyse, examine and develop knowledge. The fact that such works are not done in Dakhil textbooks indicates that the intellectual development of students is limited by the strict organization of the teaching resources. Furthermore, the results are similar to the earlier research done in Bangladesh that suggests that students are not taught to think critically in secondary schools due to rote learning and test-based programs (Rahman, Kabir, and Afroze, 2006; Barman, Sultana, and Basu, 2006). On the contrary, the teachers found the textbooks moderately helpful in terms of writing abilities, which is reflected in the subscale mean of 3.31. The quantitative items like grammar tasks support composition ($M = 3.82$) and guided essay models provided ($M = 3.75$) got higher scores implying that textbooks use in cultivating mechanical writing competence and organizational skills are effective. But qualitative information provides insight that this assistance is mostly constrained to structured and exam-based tasks (Theme 3). There are little authentic writing opportunities, creativity, and reflective expression, which are witnessed in urban and rural classrooms. In this way, the average quantitative results are supplemented with the qualitative information demonstrating that the writing support, existing as it is, is formulaic and not favorable to the independent or creative thinking.

The perceptions of the teachers are also influenced by contextual factors. Urban teachers rated the writing activities slightly higher than the rural teachers ($t(28) = 2.01, p < 0.05$) with the availability of resources and the exposure to the instructional strategies that contribute to better writing. However, qualitative stories reveal that large classes, time restrictions, and teaching culture with focus on exams are considered to be systemic constraints despite the contexts (Theme 4), hindering the possibilities of developing critical thinking and authentic writing. The convergence and complementarity of these findings through triangulation are that quantitative tests are finding weak critical thinking and moderate writing support and qualitative tests are giving substantive explanations to these patterns. The identified divergence, namely, moderate writing support in quantitative and restricted creativity in qualitative, highlights the fact that the effectiveness of textbooks is multidimensional, and it cannot be represented by numerical ratings only. Altogether, the results imply that a prompt revision of the textbooks is necessary in order to combine reasoning, problem-solving, and authentic writing tasks and allow teachers to develop the competencies in critical thinking and writing within the Dakhil framework.

VII. CONCLUSION

The research indicates that the use of Dakhil English textbooks is only moderately effective in terms of supporting the writing skills ($M = 3.31$) but weak in terms of supporting the critical thinking skills ($M = 2.59$) which reflects a significant lack of the promotion of higher-order thinking skills. The results of quantitative and qualitative research are consistent, indicating that textbooks focus on rote learning and the evaluation of exams and leave little room to creativity, problem-solving, and writing in a natural manner. Although some mechanical help is provided under structured grammar and composition drills, they do not help in encouraging independent thinking. The above insights illustrate the need to revise the curriculum to include activities that promote the use of reasoning, analytical, and meaningful writing to improve the critical thinking and writing abilities of the Dakhil students.

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