

## Teaching ‘English Writing Skill’ at the HSC Level in Bangladesh: An Evaluation

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### Abstract

*As a practicing teacher of English at college level in Bangladesh for a quite long time the researcher has observed that the collective proficiency of English writing skill of the HSC level students is disappointing when examination system in Bangladesh is writing based; so, the researcher has felt the urge for an evaluation of teaching English writing skill at this level. The objectives of the study are to evaluate the present status of English writing, to identify the methods in use for teaching English writing, to assess the environment of teaching-learning English writing and to estimate the effectiveness of the curriculum provided items for developing English writing skill at the HSC level. The study has been conducted during January and February-2019 following quantitative method. The participants of the study have been Bangladeshi 200 HSC level students and 20 college level English teachers. The previous studies in this area have been reviewed for accumulating secondary data and the questionnaire survey with students and teachers has been the method of collecting primary data. The study has revealed that techniques and environment of teaching English writing needs enrichment. Recommendations have been made for teachers’ training ensuring environment for teaching English and further studies.*

**Key Words:** Evaluation, Teaching English, Writing Skill, HSC Level, Teaching Environment

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## 1. Introduction

English is a technology rather than a language which the HSC level students must master to compete in the present globalised world and 'writing' plays an important role here. Besides, among the four main skills, writing is the most difficult and most important skill not only in the academic sector but also in a professional field which requires accuracy and standard level of writing. Writing matters a lot in the success or failure at the HSC level, as 40% of the total marks for English has been allocated for writing test. Apart from the assigned 40% marks, a student's overall performance mainly depends on his/her writing performance as the students are mostly tested on writing skill. As a result, students who are not competent in writing skill do not get good marks in English. Similarly, students having a good command in writing skill usually get higher marks or can face the challenge of writing on any topic in the examination. Usually, the examinees are evaluated on the basis of their writing performance (Roy, 2008). Therefore, it is really important for learners of any language to learn how to write specially in English.

In the context of a good written task it can be said that if a student presents her theme in a reasonable, intelligible and logical manner and if she writes with complete accuracy except for slips, and in the appropriate style, it will be considered as a good writing. In a good piece of writing the writer demonstrates a sense of mastery of the language and of the ability to handle the topic with complete competence. At the Higher Secondary level, a good written task refers to a well-ordered, well supported details of the concerned topic (Roy, 2008).

It is to be admitted that the performance of the students at the Higher Secondary level in writing is not quite up to the mark in accordance with the standard of a good writing. Evaluation of teaching English writing skill is extremely important at the HSC level as this level is the preparatory stage for entrance into the university. The researcher has chosen this topic because one of the greatest problems lies in writing skill in the academic field. Many students are fluent in speaking, but they are not skilled in writing English. Here it is mentionable that English is introduced in Bangladesh at the primary level and its teaching continues till the tertiary level. Even then, learners in Bangladesh still find formal writing troublesome. So, further investigation has been necessary to evaluate why after ten years of formal instruction in English learners fail to develop their writing skill.

The general objective of this study is to evaluate teaching English writing skill of the HSC level students in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are to evaluate the present status of English writing skill of the HSC level students in Bangladesh, to identify the methods in use in teaching English writing skill at this level, to assess the environment of learning-teaching English writing skill at the relevant level and to estimate the effectiveness of the curriculum provided items for developing English writing skill at the consistent level in Bangladesh. This study has answered the following research questions to fulfill the research objectives:

- 1) What is the present status of English writing skill of the HSC level students in Bangladesh?
- 2) Which methods are usually in use and rarely in use in teaching English writing skill at this level?
- 3) What is the environment of learning-teaching English writing skill at the consistent level?
- 4) How effective are the items taught for developing English writing skill at the relevant level?

In this study, introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and discussion, recommendation and conclusion have been presented chronologically.

## **2. Literature Review**

The previous studies related to English writing skill been have reviewed by the researcher to find research gaps in this area, to explore the gist of the preceding studies in this field, to keep the present study on soldiers of the earlier studies, to design the methodology of the study and to set the context of the paper. In the following discussion, the researcher has presented the findings from the previous studies about English writing skill.

International teacher trainer Jeremy Harmer (1998: 79) has revealed that the reasons for teaching English writing to the students as a foreign language include reinforcement, language development, learning style and most importantly development of writing as a skill in its own right. It is really important to teach writing as it is generally more difficult to learn how to write than how to speak. As we see that children in every language automatically learn to speak gradually as they are exposed to the particular linguistic environment, but learning to write takes a more conscious effort. To be proficient in writing in a second language is a matter of long practice.

According to Anita Pincas (1982), writing is an instrument of both communication and self-expression. Most people, especially when writing in a foreign language or second language, use it primarily to communicate with other members of their own community or the wider world. Writing is one of the most important productive skills. For a second language learner, it is so important to learn how to write in the target language.

Nunan (1991) feels that writing skill has a great significance in real life situations. Lack of competence in this skill leads to communication problems in real life as writing is sometimes extremely important or the only media for communication. Since many students enter into higher study after the HSC, they need to have a good command on English particularly in writing skill as they have to take examinations in writing. A sound competence in writing skill is sometimes mandatory in some professions. Therefore, students should be given opportunities in class to practice those types of writing that they need in the real world beyond the boundary of the classroom.

The most important reason for teaching writing is that it is a basic language skill, just as important as speaking, listening and reading. Students need to know how to write letters, how to put written reports together, how to reply advertisements and increasingly how to write using electronic media. They need to know some especial conventions of writing. (Harmer, 1998:79-80).

When we speak to somebody, the listener can express his/her reactions to us but when anybody reads a piece of writing, the speaker is not in front of him/her. That is why a piece of writing should be such that a reader can get the message. So, a good written task should be explicit and clear in context with reference. A good written task should be well organized and carefully formulated. A written text should conform more to conventional rules of formal than oral text. Writing should usually use a generally acceptable standard variety of the language (Ur, 1996:pp 160-161).

According to Leki (2004, p.30),

“An outline is a structured method of exploring your thoughts on a subject. Some writers like to use the freer invention strategies to generate ideas. Then they make an outline to organize their ideas. Thus, outline can be a transition between inventing and writing a first draft. In this way, it functions as a plan for writing.”

It can also be done after writing a draft. In this way it works like a checklist to verify the reliability of the paper presented.

One way of encouraging drafting, reflection, and revision is to have students involved in collaborative writing. A pair or group of students working together on a piece of writing can respond to each other's ideas making suggestions for changes, and so contributing to the success of the finished product (Harmer, 2004:11).

Scripts are rated on five aspects of writing: content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics of writing. It is one of the best known and most widely used analytic scales created by Jacobs et al (1981).

Listing is one of the most useful ways for writers to get started again when their mind get blocked. Listing is thus faster than free writing. Once the writer has decided a topic for writing, they will need to find out what they know about the topic and anything related to it. The writer then writes down everything that comes into their mind about the topic but do not write sentences. This technique is hardly followed in Bangladesh while teaching writing skill (Leki, 2004, p.23).

Ilona Leki (2004, p.25) recommended that asking WH-questions like who, what, when, where, why and sometimes how may help the writer to clarify the subject they are going to discuss in a composition. This technique, like listing the questions and finding details about the subject and for restarting writing helps to stop writer's block. Here the writer is the one who both asks and answers the questions which is a new way of learning to write. This technique is the most

innovative one in writing. It means to gather all the information about the topic from the writer's mind and associating them with all the sub points of the topic. It is done by making branches like the branches of a tree.

According to Ilona Leki (2004, p.28), "Looping is more similar to free writing, but it is more focused. Looping can help you focus your thought on a subject, find the core or center of your thought, and pinpoint a main idea on which to elaborate." She said, this invention technique can be used at any time in writing process. It can be more useful when the writers' ideas seem chaotic and vague. Cubing involves looking at an idea from six different points of view and each presenting one of the six sides of a cube. The writer will look quickly from these six angles to have several perspectives on the subject; describe it, compare it, analyze it, associate it, apply it and argue for or against it.

Ilona Leki (2004, p.140) believes,

"Revision is not a punishment for writing a bad text. All experienced writers revise. In fact, revising can be quite pleasurable, even easier, and more interesting than writing the first draft. Think of revising as a game or puzzle that you control and manipulate."

Barnes (2012) has revealed that the students should avoid all the electronic devices such as computers and other gaming equipments that can be a great distraction while doing revision. So, they should remove them from their learning environment whilst they try to revise. If the students have enough willpower to leave out them for a few hours, they can avoid those gaming devices to ensure full focus on the work. This can be an unusual and effective revision strategy for the students.

Keh (1996:305) feels that "Peer feedback is versatile with regard to focus and implementation along the 'process' writing continuum". Peer feedback is referred to by different names e.g. peer response, peer editing and peer evaluation. In this method, students read each other's writing in pairs and groups and offer comments and do corrections. The students may use a similar list for correction as the one given above. Peer feedback takes place in the classroom under the guidance of a teacher. This activity is a good exercise for the students as it involves them in communicating with their classmates. The opportunity to discuss each other's essay and writing gives valuable feedback. Students write with more specific focus because they know that their peers will also be reading their paper.

Peer evaluation is helpful because it can raise the analytical power of the students. For example, when students read their classmates' essays they can find their mistakes and at the same time, this helps to remind them to correct and avoid similar mistakes in their own work. It also helps to provide a wider sense of audience and saves teachers' time (Mendonca and Johnson, 1994).

The previous studies related to the topic "An Evaluation of Teaching English Writing Skill at the HSC Level in Bangladesh" have been searched by the researcher in public and private universities in Bangladesh and data available in the internet sources and it shows that no study has been

conducted on the same topic and there are some research gaps in this area with regards to methodology, content and contribution. Then the researcher has selected the topic and has conducted the study. However, the researcher is substantially benefited reviewing the previous studies getting an insight into the definition and importance of writing, aspects of a good writing, outline for planning and generating ideas before starting a writing task, importance of involving students in collaborative writing, writing mechanics, gathering ideas using WH-questions, looping and cubing in writing, importance of revision in writing, disadvantages of use of the electronic devices in learning writing skill, peer feedback and peer evaluation for improving writing skill. Now, the researcher is to define the methodology of the study.

### **3. Methodology**

To collect data for the study, the researcher has followed quantitative research method. Research design, sample, instruments, data collection procedure and data analysis of the study have been described below.

#### **3.1. Research Design**

The study has been conducted through an empirical study of an extensive questionnaire survey with the HSC level students and college level English teachers in Bangladesh.

#### **3.2. Sample**

Purposive sampling method has been followed. The HSC level 200 students and 20 college level English teachers have been the respondents for the study from 10 colleges of Dhaka division of Bangladesh. Here, the researcher has chosen students of class xii as his sample as the class xi students have just started their study at this level.

#### **3.3. Instruments**

The student questionnaire and teacher questionnaire have been the instruments for the study. The research instruments were pre-tested with ten students and three teachers in order to determine the content validity, face validity and for clarity of language.

#### **3.4. Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher has maintained formality with the principals of the 10 colleges and then he has collected data from the students and English teachers of the colleges. With the help of the teachers, the researcher has distributed the student questionnaires among the students and provided guidelines and instructions to the students for responding the questionnaire. And after an introductory talk with the teachers, the researcher has handed the questionnaires over to the English teachers. The students normally have taken 40-45 minutes and the teachers have taken 20-25 minutes to answer the items in the questionnaire. Afterwards, he has taken the questionnaires in return from them.

#### **3.5. Data Analysis**

The responses in the respective questionnaires were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS 20 software in the form of mean and standard deviation. The participants have been asked to respond

to the statements of the questionnaire using Likert-scale of five points ranging from never to always. For the purpose of interpretation of data, the values have been divided as follow:

Always	Very Often	Often	Seldom	Never
5	4	3	2	1

After the interpretation of data, the findings have been presented comparatively with the findings from the students and findings from the teachers.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The findings have been presented and discussed to answer four research questions. The first research question “What is the present status of the English writing skill of the HSC level students in Bangladesh?” has been designed to get an overview of the present status of English writing skill of the HSC level students.

##### 4.1. Findings and Discussion on the Students’ Mistakes in English Writing

The following table has answered the first research question.

Table-1: Students’ Writing Mistakes

Grammar Items	Students		Teacher	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Spelling	3.8050	.59897	3.9000	.61559
Tense of verb	3.9450	.80948	4.0500	.82558
Right form of verb	3.8100	.60476	3.9000	.61559
Pronoun reference	2.6900	.76605	2.8000	.80131
Narrative style	2.8500	.66310	2.9500	.67082
Capitalization	3.9500	.92291	3.9500	.94451
Punctuation marks	3.5550	.91716	3.7500	.94451
Auxiliary verbs	4.0000	.62607	4.8000	.64889
Preposition	3.9000	.53987	3.9000	.55251
Omission or use of article	3.8950	.75951	3.9000	.78807
Wrong choice of words	4.0000	.49874	4.0500	.51042
Subject-verb agreements	4.3450	.79317	4.4500	.81273
Number	4.1000	.62607	4.2000	.64072
Average Mean Score	3.7573	-	3.8923	-

The above table presents the picture of the writing skill of the pertinent students who make the mentioned grammatical mistakes quite very often as the average mean score of the responses from the students and teachers are 3.7573 and 3.8923.

The second research question “Which methods are usually in use and rarely in use in teaching English writing skill at this level?” has been designed to make a difference between the frequently used methods and rarely used methods in teaching English writing skill of the concerned students. The following table-2 and table-3 have clarified the issue.

#### 4.2.1. Findings and Discussion on the Usually Practiced Teaching Methods

Table-2: Usually Practiced Teaching Methods

Statements	Responses			
	Students		Teachers	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Writing English is practiced in the classroom in an interesting way.	3.8500	.35797	3.1500	.36635
The teachers try to overcome students' fear in writing English in the classroom.	3.6000	.49113	3.2000	.50262
The students like the way the teacher teaches writing in the classes.	3.6000	.58456	3.2000	.59824
The teachers discourage the students to memorize paragraphs.	4.4000	.49113	4.2000	.50262
The teachers emphasize writing activities in English class.	4.6000	.49113	4.2000	.50262
The teacher has taken training on English language teaching.	3.0000	.89667	3.0000	.91766
The teacher is friendly with the students.	4.1500	.35797	4.3500	.36635
The teacher discusses the techniques of writing paragraph or essay.	3.5000	.67250	3.4000	.68825
The teacher explains the differences between spoken and written English in the class.	3.3000	.90226	3.2000	.92338
The teacher tries to remove students' fear in writing giving an opportunity to write on everyday activities.	3.6000	.73669	3.2000	.75394
The teacher considers the mixed-abilities of the students while conducting the writing classes.	3.8500	.65548	3.3500	.67082
The teacher elaborately describes the common mistakes using some model sentences.	4.3950	.58368	4.1000	.59824
The teacher suggests the students to write small and simple sentences first and then the large and complex ones.	3.8050	.50820	3.9000	.52315
The teacher permits the students to ask questions while writing English.	4.0000	.63404	4.1000	.64889



The present contextualized testing system of grammar skill is helpful in developing writing skill.	4.1500	.79414	4.0500	.81273
The teacher conducts writing activity often in the class following the curriculum assigned items.	3.4550	.67099	3.4500	.68633
The teacher engages the students in free hand writing.	3.6950	.55995	3.4000	.57124
The students get feedback on their mistakes in classroom writing.	3.7000	.45941	3.5000	.47016
The teacher helps the students doing the writing tasks.	3.7000	.55817	3.2000	.57124
The teacher encourages the students for practicing free hand writing.	3.9450	.50323	3.4500	.51042
The teacher encourages the students to practice situational writing.	3.9900	.71586	4.1000	.72548
The teacher tries to make the students understand that the public examination system in Bangladesh is conducted by written examination; so the students should emphasize writing skill.	3.6500	.47817	3.7500	.48936
The students like to be rewarded for a successful writing.	3.9550	.58711	3.8500	.60481
Average Mean Score	3.6620	-	3.4708	-

The above table shows that the mentioned methods are frequently used in teaching English writing skill. From the following findings we see a different idea about the teaching method.

#### 4.2.2. Findings and Discussion on the Rarely Practiced Teaching Methods

We can see the findings on the rarely practiced teaching methods through the following table.

Table-3: Rarely Practiced Teaching Methods

Statements	Responses			
	Student		Teacher	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
The teacher provides correction of students' mistakes individually.	3.1400	.67280	3.2500	.67082
The teacher discusses the topic in the class before telling the students to write.	2.4000	.73669	2.1000	.75394
Practice of writing skill is conducted in pairs/ groups.	2.5200	.74321	2.3000	.76089
The teacher analyzes the sentence structures/patterns in the text/paragraph to make the students aware about the writing mechanics followed.	2.2950	.55635	2.1000	.57124

The teacher shows some model paragraphs in the class to create students' awareness and to increase their confidence.	2.4500	.67063	2.1500	.68633
The teacher tries to create students' awareness about the use of grammatical structures in writing while teaching each item of the English curriculum.	2.4000	.73669	2.1000	.75394
The teacher presents some paragraphs and asks the students to discover the patterns of sentences used in the paragraphs.	2.4950	.74346	2.1000	.76089
The teacher creates an environment in the class to correct students' grammatical mistakes by their classmates.	2.2950	.56531	2.1000	.57124
The teacher divides the students in writing classes considering different abilities in English.	2.4500	.67063	2.5500	.68633
The teacher provides paragraph in Bangla and then tells the students to translate into English for developing writing skill.	2.6000	1.16049	2.6000	1.18766
The teacher frequently asks the students to choose the topic from their own for writing English.	2.3500	1.35524	2.3500	1.38697
The teacher promotes competition among students in writing.	2.7000	1.00751	2.8000	1.03110
Reading interesting novels or short stories in English helps the students learn new vocabulary.	2.4000	1.39633	2.3000	1.42902
Average Mean Score	2.3334	-	2.5307	-

The average mean scores of the above table indicate that the mentioned methods are rarely used in teaching English writing skill.

The third research question "What is the environment of learning-teaching English writing skill at the pertinent level?" has been designed to evaluate the environment of teaching English writing skill.

#### ***4.3. Findings and Discussion on the Environment in Teaching English Writing Skill***

The following table shows the findings on the environment of teaching English writing skill.

Table-4: Environment in Teaching English Writing Skill

Statements	Responses			
	Student		Teacher	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
The students are afraid of getting zero marks in writing tasks.	3.1000	1.09361	3.2000	1.11921
The students feel ashamed of obtaining very poor marks.	4.5500	.86675	3.3500	.88704
Practice of writing skill is hampered when the students are irregular in the class.	4.6000	1.11635	4.4000	1.14248
Duration of class is not enough for practicing writing skill.	3.6000	1.02236	4.5000	1.04630
Classroom environment is not suitable for properly practicing writing skill.	3.7000	1.19041	4.9000	1.21828
The teacher does not get enough time to explain grammatical rules and their applications in writing English.	4.1500	.35797	4.2500	.36635
There is a large number of students in the class which hampers develop writing skill.	4.0000	.63404	4.0000	.64889
The classroom arrangement is not well enough to practice writing skill.	3.9000	.70176	3.8000	.71818
The students have taken admission into college with much weakness in English.	4.4000	.49113	4.2000	.50262
The present examination system is not helpful enough for improving writing skill.	4.6000	.49113	4.1000	.50262
The visual aids are hardly found in the classroom.	3.2000	.87397	3.4000	.89443
The students are busy with mobile phone technology which hampers their deep attention into developing writing skill.	4.1500	.35797	4.0500	.36635
The students depend on memorizing to pass the examination.	3.9500	.38502	3.7500	.39403
Average Mean Scores	3.9923	-	3.9923	-

The above table proves that the mentioned difficulties and mismanagements are frequently faced by the students and teachers in learning-teaching English writing skill.

The fourth research question “How effective are the curriculum provided items for developing English writing skill at the relevant?” serves the purpose of giving a feedback on the role of the

curriculum assigned items in teaching-learning English writing skill at the HSC level in Bangladesh.

#### 4.4. Findings and Discussion on the Curriculum Assigned Items

The following table contains the findings on the role of the curriculum assigned items for teaching English writing skill.

Table-5: Curriculum Assigned Items for Developing Writing Skill

The following items are helpful in teaching English writing skill.	Responses			
	Student		Teacher	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
The items in the English curriculum	3.9000	.53987	3.8000	.55251
Completing sentence	4.0000	.31702	4.1000	.32444
Use of article	4.1000	.43698	4.0000	.44721
Use of preposition	4.4000	.58456	4.1000	.59824
Synonyms and antonyms	4.0500	.21849	4.1500	.22361
Pronoun reference	3.8500	.35797	3.6500	.36635
Transformation of sentences	3.6000	.49113	3.9000	.50262
Gap filling with or without clues	3.6300	.57860	3.8000	.59824
Gap filling with right form of verbs	4.4000	.49113	4.1000	.50262
Changing narrative styles	4.6000	.49113	4.1000	.50262
Modifiers	3.7500	.62406	3.8500	.63867
Sentence connectors	4.1450	.35298	4.0500	.36635
Capitalization and punctuation	3.9000	.62607	3.8000	.64072
Use of gerund and participles	4.1000	.43698	4.0000	.44721
Writing summary	4.3000	.45941	4.1000	.47016
Completing incomplete story	4.2500	.61595	4.0500	.63867
Describing theme of poem or short story	4.4900	.50115	4.1000	.51299
Describing graph or chart	4.1000	.43698	4.2000	.44721
Writing and composition parts in paper one and two	4.3950	.49008	4.2000	.50262
Average Mean Scores	4.1031	-	4.0026	-

The table shows that the curriculum provided items always help to improve English writing skill at the HSC level in Bangladesh.

#### 4.5. Summary of the Findings

The findings of the above five tables have been presented through the following chart in summarized form.

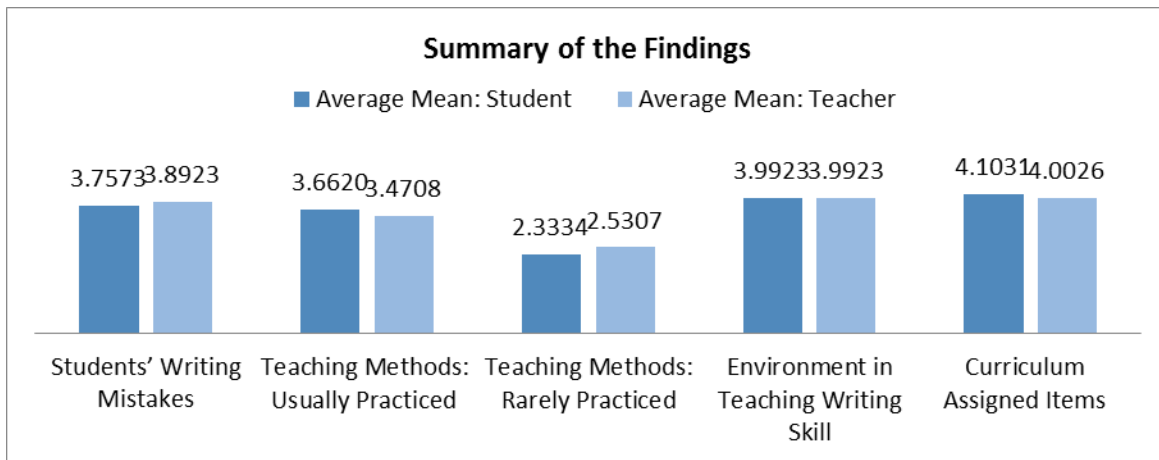


Chart-1 Summary of Findings

The chart shows that the rarely practiced teaching methods in the classroom have the least mean scores which indicate that the mentioned methods are used rarely in teaching English writing skill. Similarly, the environment in teaching writing skill should be ensured as the average mean scores in this regard indicate that frequently the students and teachers have to face the issues mentioned in the statements. We can see the average mean scores of the responses from the students and teachers through the following chart with a more vivid picture of the findings.

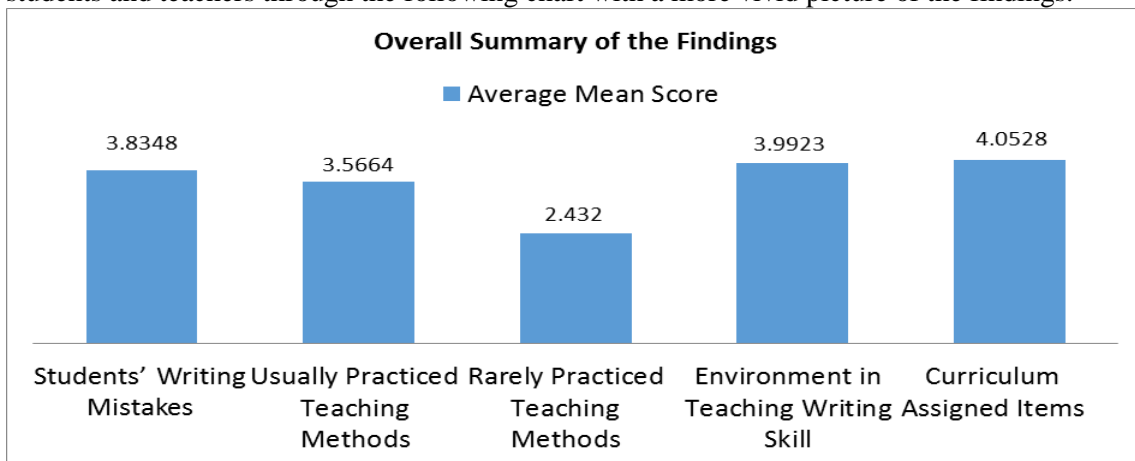


Chart-2 Overall Summary of Findings

The above chart-2 shows that the HSC level students in Bangladesh frequently make mistakes in the use of grammar while writing in English when the teachers often use some traditional English writing teaching methods as the average mean score of the finding is 3.5664. The mostly noteworthy finding is that some of the methods of teaching English writing skill are rarely used in teaching English writing in the classroom. The chart also indicates that the average mean score of the role of curriculum assigned items in teaching English writing skill is highest which proves that the curriculum provided items are satisfactorily helpful in teaching writing skill and the classroom environment in teaching English writing skill is disappointing because here the mean score is quite 4.00.

## 5. Recommendation

Recommendations have been for teachers' training specially on the method of teaching English writing skill and for providing enjoyable classroom environment. The researcher has conducted the study with his limitation of designing the sample and data collection with not more than two instruments; so, further studies in this area have also been recommended.

## 6. Conclusion

There is no pleasant environment and congenial method of teaching writing skill in the classroom. The teachers lack the efficiency to teach English writing with the necessary techniques. It is because of the lack of training. Our institutions are still following the traditional ways of teaching and are habituated with the conventional environment for teaching writing skill.

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