

# Exploring tertiary EFL learners' and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of EFL writing course syllabi: Pedagogical implications

Md. N. Patwary\*

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, World University of Bangladesh, Bangladesh*

Md. M. Reza

*Professor, Department of English, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Bangladesh*

Sadia A. Tithi

*Lecturer, Department of English, World University of Bangladesh, Bangladesh*

## Correspondence

**Email:** nurullahpatwarybsd@gmail.com

## Abstract

Given the importance of effective and standard syllabi in developing tertiary students' EFL writing skills, this study aimed to analyze the perceptions of Bangladeshi tertiary EFL learners and teachers towards the effectiveness of English writing course syllabi in developing writing proficiency. The study involved 392 students and 14 EFL teachers from seven Bangladeshi universities in a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire survey using a purposive sampling procedure. The results show that both students and teachers had a negative perception of the effectiveness of most of the components of the syllabus, namely, objectives of the syllabus, content and skill coverage, instructional time, suitability, and effectivity of the instructional materials covered in the syllabus. However, students had a positive perception of the effectiveness of the writing content, while teachers had a low perception of this aspect of the writing syllabus. Recommendations call for policymakers and syllabus designers to ensure that EFL writing course syllabi include essential subject components and skills, adhere to global standards, and provide ample classroom practice time for students. The study also highlights the need for devising better syllabi to meet the needs of tertiary EFL learners' academic and professional needs and guide EFL teachers to meet the expectations of Bangladeshi tertiary EFL education.

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## Introduction

Modernizing the tertiary EFL education places a strong emphasis on the development of students' academic writing skills (Fatima & Hameed, 2016; Ismagulova et al., 2016; Piskunov & Roman, 2021). Academic writing is especially important for university EFL

students, as it allows them to showcase their critical thinking and persuasive skills (Alodwan & Ibnian, 2014; Mohammad Tarmizi & Aziz Hussin, 2021; Wingate, 2012). Tertiary EFL writing courses prepare students for academic courses, competitive worlds, and future professional needs. However, because academic writing requires precision and mental exertion, university students frequently struggle with it (Bacha, 2002; Husna, 2017; Klimova, 2015; Olivas & Li, 2006). Proper knowledge of writing components significantly influences learners' writing proficiency levels (Soleimani et al., 2015).

A well-balanced and detailed syllabus helps learners have a positive impression of the course and the course teacher (Buskist et al., 2002; Henklain et al., 2020), while less detailed ones may indicate a lack of interest or approachability (Buskist et al., 2002; Mamun, 2019a). However, how detailed a tertiary EFL course should be is a topic of debate among experts (Appleby, 2014; Davis, 1993). A detailed syllabus can enhance students' perceptions of teaching effectiveness. Proper design and implementation of a syllabus can help teachers identify strengths and weaknesses, enrich them with relevant knowledge, and improve teaching and learning qualities (Grunert, 1997). Unbalanced writing courses with poorly structured curriculum lead to deviation from expected teaching processes and hinder students from achieving required English language proficiencies (Haque, 2006; Mamun, 2019; Tasnim, 2001).

The general South Asian trend in tertiary EFL syllabus design is that syllabus designers often duplicate curricula without consulting specialists and focus on grammar rather than writing skills, resulting in syllabi lacking the necessary focus (Sundari et al., 2018; Ezza & Al-Mudibri, 2014; Hyytinen et al., 2019; Rashid & Rana, 2021). In Bangladesh, tertiary students face difficulties in understanding writing processes due to outdated EFL syllabi, poor course objectives, and inadequate documentation, affecting their writing, communication, and critical thinking skills (Patwary & Sajib, 2018; Wali, 2018).

Beliefs and perceptions significantly influence the learning process and effects in second language education, as they are shared by both teachers and learners (Borg, 2011). Aligning students' and teachers' beliefs can facilitate teaching and learning, but differences are likely to negatively affect classroom performances, students' happiness, teaching practices, and academic accomplishments (Bell, 2016; Ha and Nguyen, 2021; Levine, 2003). Research on the effectiveness of tertiary EFL writing syllabi in Bangladeshi universities is limited, highlighting a significant research gap (Rashid & Rana, 2021). Previous research has mainly focused on discourse analysis, development of curriculum, and needs analysis of learners (Bui, 2022). Thus, by investigating how Bangladeshi tertiary students and instructors perceive the efficacy of the curricula in teaching academic writing, this study seeks to fill this gap. In addition, the learning and teaching of writing in EFL (English as a foreign language) and its reliance on effective writing course syllabi have drawn significant research attention (e.g., Kitamura, 2023; Sundari et al., 2018; Teng et al., 2022; Tuononen et

al., 2022). This study investigates how Bangladeshi tertiary students and teachers perceive the effectiveness of the tertiary EFL writing course syllabus in teaching writing, providing insights for EFL teaching practices in the classroom and curriculum design. The results can be applied to enhance teaching as students must be able to write well in English for both academic and professional contexts.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### ***Teaching and Learning of Writing and Effective EFL Writing Course Syllabus***

Good writing requires mastery of letter formation, spelling, punctuation, grammatical structure, and audience-appropriate style (Nunan, 2003). In the tertiary writing classroom, EFL teachers focus on enhancing students' specialized skills, including logical organization, discourse markers, and grammar (Brown, 2015). Important writing subskills, according to Weigle (2002), include vocabulary, syntax, mechanics, organization, coherence, register, and content. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers worldwide are constantly updating their teaching methods (Zhao & Zhang, 2022) and often provide students with a syllabus with crucial course information, course objectives, course contents, skills to be learned, teaching and learning methods, assessment policies, and intended study materials and instruction times. A well-structured language syllabus includes situations, topics, activities, learners' notions, forms, and skill level, presented in a graded manner (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2014; Van Ek, 1975). In addition, Sundari et al. (2018) suggest four principles for tertiary EFL writing syllabi: clearly defined goals, graded writing subskills, skill-based writing content, and adaptable materials, getting pupils ready for writing both within and outside of the classroom.

Broadly speaking, a standard syllabus of an EFL writing course is very strongly correlated with the development of EFL students' writing proficiency (Widdowson, 2001), as it serves as a guide for the learning process (Mamun, 2015) and outlines the knowledge and skills a course will cover (Stern, 1984). However, tertiary EFL writing courses often deviate from expected teaching processes due to limited resources and poorly structured curriculum (Mamun, 2019; Sundari et al., 2018). As the proper design and implementation of a syllabus significantly facilitate the teaching-learning process (Grunert, 1997), the present research situates its research question here about the effectiveness of the writing course syllabi and collects data from tertiary EFL learners in Bangladesh to answer the research question.

#### ***Previous studies***

There is a lack of consensus in the research about tertiary EFL students' and teachers' views and perceptions of EFL writing course curricula and syllabuses. While some studies look at the development of ELT curricula, others examine the efficacy of ELT in English-language schools and institutes. Few studies examine the effectiveness of tertiary EFL writing course syllabi from the perspectives of learners and teachers. The

following paragraphs provide examples from studies on EFL learners' attitudes and perceptions of the efficacy of the course syllabus and objectives of EFL writing courses.

In an investigation, Hadjiconstantinou and Papadima-Sophocleous (2024) evaluated English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) programs at a government university in Cyprus. The study used quantitative methods to explore students' opinions on the course curricula. The study surveyed 304 first-year students using a descriptive research design and questionnaire. The findings revealed that students highly appreciated the ESAP courses, believing they covered important needs and improved language skills, including writing. They also appreciated the use of materials like textbooks, handouts, and online resources, and stressed how crucial classroom activities and educational strategies are.

In another study in the Iranian context, Alizadeh (2018) conducted a study at a language institute in Iran to assess the effectiveness of an English as a Foreign Language (ELT) program, focusing on its curriculum, teaching materials and methods, and assessment. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. The study involved 250 male students aged 14 to 45. The findings revealed that the EFL program had adequate materials for listening, reading, vocabulary, writing, and grammar but needed more for speaking. The institute's teaching methods were prescribed, but communicative skills were not adequately taught. The study suggests that the curriculum should focus on a communicative approach and that teaching resources should be organically changed to meet the new approach's demands.

In another study in the Iranian context, Sadeghi and Jabbarnejad (2012) sought to evaluate the suitability and relevance of the goals set forth for tertiary English Language and Literature (ELL) courses by Iran's Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology. 178 students from Urmia University participated in the study, which included quantitative and qualitative techniques. The findings demonstrated that the goals currently set for ELL instruction are intolerable and out of step with real progress. The report makes the recommendation that the curriculum be drastically changed in order to better satisfy the needs of students and society.

In Pakistani tertiary EFL context, Khattak et al. (2011) conducted a study on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses in Pakistan. The study involved 76 students from three different English language institutes in Mardan, Pakistan, who, through a questionnaire survey, were questioned about how they felt about the course material, in-class activities, and instructional strategies. The study found that they were low in effectiveness due to teachers' incompetence, poorly designed curricula, and lack of resources for effective language practices. A few students expressed satisfaction with their enhanced pronunciation and accent, but most experienced severe language anxiety in the classroom, affecting their writing and reading skills. Classroom activities were uninteresting and did not significantly improve language skills. The research

recommends that Mardan language schools redesign their curricula and include time-appropriate EFL course content, subskills, and practices to assist students in meeting their language objectives.

In addition, Ismail and Chuzaimah's (2020) study looked at how Indonesian EFL students perceived the learning activities in the classroom. The three issues the study sought to address are (1) how important students think learning activities are, (2) what advantages they think these activities provide, and (3) which activities they think are most helpful. Twenty-one EFL students from Makassar State University participated in the study, and questionnaire surveys and open-ended questions were used to collect required data. The findings indicated that while written papers, articles, book reviews, individual presentations, and quizzes were all equally relevant, conversation activities were deemed more significant. It was discovered that interactive and communicative activities were the best at helping pupils learn.

Bui's (2022) study examined students' and teachers' perceptions of effective English as a Foreign Language (ESP) teaching in Vietnam. The study, which involved 248 participants and 20 interviews, found significant discrepancies in their perceptions of task-based language teaching, corrective feedback, discipline specifications, and culture integration. However, alignment was found in language use, technology application, and grammar teaching.

To investigate Bangladeshi engineering EFL learners' attitudes about studying English, Bristi (2015) studied tertiary EFL students in Bangladesh. The study involved 67 students from two universities in Dhaka, one public and one private, who were majoring in computer science and engineering. A 34-item questionnaire with an attitude test was used to gather data. The results show that engineering EFL students at public and private institutions have very favorable behavioral attitudes toward studying English, along with relatively good emotional and cognitive views. The study also reveals that students at public universities are less capable, more focused on exams, and more demoralized by poor performance. Additionally, they are more enthusiastic than students at private universities to complete their English lessons.

Khan's (2019) perception study on Bangladeshi tertiary English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses revealed that both students and teachers acknowledged the lack of development of basic English skills, including vocabulary and writing. The courses also lacked standard syllabuses, failing to achieve process and product goals. The syllabuses were also deficient in critical thinking and analytical writing skills, affecting learners' expectations of meeting their academic and professional needs. The study suggests that tertiary education should redesign EAP courses to incorporate essential and interesting content, course materials, and activities to make them more effective.

Mustaque's (2021) study on Bangladeshi tertiary EFL teachers found that traditional teaching methods, focusing on language and format, do not adequately enhance learners' writing competence. The research used a mixed-methods strategy, with interviews and surveys conducted with five instructors from different private institutions and ten full-time teachers from a prestigious university in Chattogram, Bangladesh. The study recommends a student-oriented, practical approach, including strategy-based processes, seminars, workshops, and writing centers, to foster a supportive environment and proficient writing skills.

Another study, conducted by Rashid and Rana (2021) in Bangladesh, evaluated the effectiveness of tertiary General English Language (GEL) courses' syllabuses. The questionnaire survey study, involving 50 students from Khulna University, found that the current syllabuses, primarily grammatical, do not meet the goals of undergraduate students in Bangladesh. They focus on grammar rules rather than fluency of expression and exclude social and cultural contexts. The majority of students believed these syllabuses were ineffective for developing language skills among tertiary EFL students.

From the studies mentioned above, it was found that studies on tertiary EFL courses have mostly focused on the evaluation of general EFL courses, covering all basic language skills. However, only three studies have examined the curriculum evaluation from learners' perspectives. Nine significant Iranian universities' MA programs' Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) curricula were assessed by Foruzandeh, Riazi, and Sadighi in 2007. The main objective of Bui's 2022 study was how instructors and students felt about the general efficacy of ESP instruction in a Vietnamese setting. Mustaque (2021) evaluated the efficacy of EFL writing course syllabuses in Bangladesh, but only focused on teachers' perceptions and covered one district. Khan's (2019) study was also conducted in only one city in Bangladesh and examined basically the EAP courses. Rashid and Rana (2021) aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of tertiary General English Language (GEL) courses' syllabuses from students' perspectives, but involved only 50 randomly selected students from one university in Bangladesh. As a result, it is clear that there is a substantial research gap regarding the perceptions of tertiary EFL teachers and students on the efficacy of tertiary writing curricula. With the goal of assisting practitioners and syllabus designers in enhancing writing pedagogy and resources, this study attempts to discover the efficacy of EFL writing syllabi in Bangladeshi institutions.

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

Drawing from the literature review in the preceding section and the defined research gap highlighted in the introduction section, this study established its research objectives and questions. This study was undertaken to investigate tertiary EFL learners' and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the syllabi of the EFL writing courses. This study specifically focused on the objectives of the syllabus, suitability of the syllabus, content and skill coverage, instructional time, suitability, and effectivity

of the instructional materials covered in the syllabus. To address this objective, the study outlined the following research questions:

**RQ<sub>1</sub>:** What are Bangladeshi tertiary EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of tertiary English writing course syllabi?

**RQ<sub>2</sub>:** What are Bangladeshi tertiary EFL teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of tertiary English writing course syllabi?

### **Research Design**

The study utilized a cross-sectional questionnaire survey approach to evaluate the efficacy of tertiary EFL writing course syllabi in teaching English writing skills (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The survey involved teachers and students who answered questions on a five-point Likert scale. They were instructed to select one of five answers (a Likert scale of 5 [strongly agree] to 1 [not sure]) on the questionnaires: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and not sure. Following the data collection, data analysis and interpretation were done in order to draw conclusions.

### **Population and Sampling**

The participant pool for the study involved 406 participants, including 392 undergraduate students and 14 teachers from seven Bangladeshi universities. The universities were dispersed over its northern, middle, and southern areas of the country, with four of them being private and the remaining three being public. From an epistemological perspective, it is seen that when working with a large population, applied linguistics researchers employ representational and purposeful sampling (Zoltan Dörnyei, 2007). Purposive sampling was employed to determine the sample size for this study due to its broad population size. Three hundred and ninety-two male (145) and female (247) tertiary EFL students majoring in law, English, linguistics, mechatronics, CSE, BBA, and agriculture at seven Bangladeshi universities participated in the study. However, all these students took English writing courses or writing-focused English courses at their respective universities as part of their curricular obligations.

This study involved 14 Bangladeshi EFL teachers, with 10 males and 4 females, who had at least 13 years of English as a foreign language instruction. Writing proficiency varied among students, with some showing high, medium, and low levels. Teachers in three career stages participated in the selection process: early career (less than five years), mid-career (five to fifteen years), and late career (more than fifteen years). Out of the 14 teachers, 4 were early-career, 5 were mid-career, and 5 were late-career. All participants expressed their willingness to participate in the study, and a questionnaire was administered to them.

The study followed ethical principles of respect, confidentiality, and informed consent, with participants informed about the study's purpose, nature, and procedures. The individuals were granted the right to withdraw at any time, and confidentiality was prioritized due to the sharing of sensitive information. Participants' identities were

anonymized in reports and presentations, and their names and identifying details were replaced with pseudonyms.

### ***Instrumentation***

The study used questionnaire survey method to collect the data. Two similar survey questionnaires, one for the learners and the other for the teachers. Each of the questionnaires included two sections: a first portion with some basic questions about the demographic concerns of the participants, and a second section with 10 statements. A Likert scale with five alternatives was used to get the participants' thoughts. The five-point Likert scale questionnaire displayed the following degree of agreement: 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4=strongly disagree, and 1=not sure. Both questionnaires included ten statements about objectives, appropriateness, content and skill coverage, instructional time, and effectiveness of the instructional materials in the syllabus.

### ***Validity and reliability of the questionnaires***

Based on their expertise in curriculum development, the researchers developed the survey questionnaire for tertiary EFL learners. With a few minor adjustments for validity and reliability, the questionnaires were designed using a process akin to Bolliger and Fethi (2012) and White and Mills (2014). The questionnaires' contents underwent many phases of preparation and were thoroughly thought out. According to Allen (1995), using both researcher intuition and the literature can help one make sense of the questionnaire's contents. This was mostly done by using knowledge from earlier research and insights on many topics pertaining to students' and teachers' opinions about the efficacy of the EFL writing course syllabi (e.g., Ezza & Al-Mudibri, 2014; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Hyytinen et al., 2019; Mamun, 2019; Sundari et al., 2018; Van Ek, 1975; Widdowson, 1978; and Zhao & Zhang, 2022).

Prior to devising the questionnaires, the principal researcher surveyed four Bangladeshi tertiary EFL students and two EFL teachers about challenges and opinions of the writing course syllabus, based on Griffie's (1997) suggestion that questionnaires should be asked to similar students and teachers. A 3-member panel of specialists in Bangladeshi tertiary EFL education rated the clarity and validity of the questions. Then a pilot study was conducted with 40 university EFL students to confirm the clarity, validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The students provided positive comments regarding the clarity of the items. The reliability of the responses was also analyzed using SPSS version 27. Hayes (2005) suggests Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with a good range of 0.6 to 0.95, determines reliability in questionnaires, with unreliable cases falling outside this range. The results showed a reliability of .621, which met the standard range, indicating that the Likert scale-based questionnaire could avoid repetition and ensure students and teachers understood the questions of the questionnaire and made informed decisions.

### Data Collection Method

The purpose of the study was to ascertain how Bangladeshi university EFL students and instructors perceived the value of the curricula for EFL writing courses. Questionnaires and in-person visits to specific universities were used to gather data. The goal, dangers, and confidentiality policies of the study were explained to the participants, who also had the choice to discontinue participation at any moment. Students and teachers were given a printed 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, and the researcher examined the responses.

### Data Analysis Method

In order to examine participant opinions on the efficacy of the tertiary EFL writing course syllabi, the study employed descriptive statistics including means, mode, and standard deviation. The quantitative data was analyzed using version 27 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The study used a data interpretation model developed by Thedpitak and Somphong (2021) to analyze mean scores from questionnaire statements to determine degrees of agreement in perception measurement. The data interpretation model shows various levels of agreement, with the highest level being 4.21-5.00, followed by high level 3.41-4.20, low level 2.61-3.40, and the lowest level 1.81-2.60. The neutral level is 1.00-1.80, indicating undecidedness.

## Findings

### *Description of the Participants*

A total of 392 tertiary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students (247 females and 145 males) from seven universities and 14 EFL teachers (10 males and 4 females) from the same universities volunteered to participate in the survey. The survey was based on a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. To reduce the possibility of identifying the institutions or participants, pseudonyms were chosen even though these materials are publicly accessible. A summary of the demographic characteristics of the sample is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1**

### *Demographic Characteristics of Student Participants*

University No.	Total Participants	Percentage	Male Participants	Female Participants
U 1	57	14.5	22	35
U 2	83	21.2	40	43
U 3	31	7.9	5	26
U 4	61	15.6	13	48
U 5	49	12.5	23	26
U 6	52	13.3	28	24
U 7	59	15.1	14	45
Total	392	100%	145	247

**Table 2**  
*Demographic Characteristics Teacher Participants*

University No.	Teacher No.	Gender of Participants	Education	Teaching Experience (years)	ELT Certification
U 1	T1	Male	BA Hons. in English and MA in ELT	10	Yes
	T2	Male	BA Hons. in English and MA in ELT	6	Yes
U 2	T3	Male	BA Hons. in English and MA in ELT	10	Yes
	T4	Female	BA Hons. and MA in English	3	No
U 3	T5	Male	BA Hons. in English and MA in ELT	17	Yes
	T5	Male	BA Hons. in English and MA in ELT	16	Yes
U 4	T7	Male	BA Hons. in English and MA in ELT	16	Yes
	T8	Female	BA Hons. in English and MA in ELT	12	Yes
U 5	T9	Male	BA Hons. in English and MA in ELT	20	Yes
	T10	Male	BA Hons. and MA in English	6	No
U 6	T11	Male	BA Hons. in English and MA in ELT	3	Yes
	T12	Female	BA Hons. and MA in English	2	No
U 7	T13	Male	BA Hons. in English and MA in ELT	16	Yes
	T14	Male	BA Hons. in English and MA in ELT	4	Yes
Total	14	10 Male Teachers, 4 Female Teachers			

***Students' Perceptions towards the Effectiveness of the Tertiary English Writing Course Syllabi***

Regarding students' perception of their familiarity with the objectives of the writing course syllabi, the results displayed in Table 3 [Statement 1 in the questionnaire] show that the tertiary EFL learners had a high level of agreement ( $M = 3.51$  out of 5, meaning a high level of agreement) in this regard. The results show that the majority of students were well-versed in the objectives of the writing course syllabus.

With regard to students' perception of the volume of the content of the writing course syllabi, the results displayed in Table 2 [Statement 2 in the questionnaire] show that tertiary EFL learners had a low level of agreement ( $M = 3.32$  out of 5) in this regard, indicating that the majority of students disagreed that the content was adequate for developing their writing skills.

Regarding students' perception of the suitability and usefulness of the contents and subskills of the writing syllabus, the survey discovered that tertiary EFL students had a high degree of agreement ( $M = 4.11$  out of 5). Based on their assessments of the syllabus's content and subskills for their academic life, the majority of students appeared to have rather positive opinions. Regarding students' perception towards their English teachers' utilizing most of their instruction time to teach learners writing skills as per the syllabus, the results displayed in Table 2 [Statement 4] show that the tertiary EFL learners had a positive perception ( $M = 3.90$  out of 5, meaning a high level of agreement) in this regard. However, regarding students' perceptions towards a similar statement asking if the time allocated for the weekly English writing classes is enough to develop their writing ability, the results [Statement 5] show that the tertiary EFL learners had a negative perception ( $M = 3.01$  out of 5, meaning a low level of agreement) in this regard. This means that most students believed their English teacher used most instruction time for writing skills, but the weekly time allocated for writing was insufficient for enhancing their expected level.

In terms of students' perceptions of the effectiveness of writing textbooks and study materials, the learners had a varied perception. With regard to the coverage of required writing content and skills in the books and study materials suggested in the syllabi of the English language courses covering all important areas, the results displayed in Table 2 [Statement 6] show that the tertiary EFL learners had a low agreement ( $M = 3.16$  out of 5, meaning a low level of agreement) in this regard. Regarding a similar question asking if the textbooks and study materials suggested in the syllabi are well-suited for developing tertiary students' writing skills, the results displayed in Table 2 [Statement 7] show that the tertiary EFL learners had a positive agreement ( $M = 3.66$  out of 5, meaning a low level of agreement) in this regard. The results indicate that tertiary students believed the English writing course textbooks and study materials were effective for developing their writing skills, but the required content volume was insufficient.

On the focus of the text books and study materials suggested in the writing syllabus [Statement 8], the results displayed in Table 2 show that the tertiary EFL learners had a high level of positive perception ( $M = 4.15$  out of 5, meaning a high level of agreement) in this regard. This indicates that most of the students believed that the main focus of the writing text books and study materials suggested in the syllabi was basically doing well in the class tests and exams, neglecting their real development of writing.

With respect to students' perception of the amount of the writing activity or assignment suggested in the syllabus in developing their writing, the results displayed in Table 2 [Statement 9] show that the tertiary EFL learners had a significantly negative perception ( $M = 2.42$  out of 5, meaning a very low level of agreement) in this regard. This means that most students believed the syllabus's suggested writing activity or assignment is significantly inadequate for developing students' writing competence.

Finally, the study found that tertiary EFL learners had a low level of agreement with the writing course syllabus, with a mean of 2.28 out of 5. This suggests that the syllabus did not adequately cater to their writing needs, indicating a need for more suitable writing materials and strategies in the syllabi.

### ***Teachers' Perceptions towards the Effectiveness of the Tertiary English Writing Course Syllabi***

Regarding teachers' perception of their familiarity with the objectives of the writing course syllabi, the results displayed in Table 4 [Statement 1 in the questionnaire] show that the tertiary EFL teachers had a high level of agreement ( $M = 4.29$  out of 5, meaning the highest level of agreement) in this regard. This indicates that most of the teachers had a very high level of familiarity with the objectives of the writing course syllabus. With respect to teachers' perception of the volume of the content of the writing course syllabi, the results displayed in Table 4 [Statement 2 in the questionnaire] show that tertiary EFL teachers had a low level of agreement ( $M = 3.07$  out of 5) in this regard, indicating that most teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of writing content in the syllabus for enhancing their writing skills. Regarding the suitability and usefulness of the contents and subskills of the writing syllabus, the survey discovered that [Table 4, Statement 3] tertiary EFL teachers had a high degree of agreement ( $M = 3.57$  out of 5). Based on their assessments of the syllabus's content and subskills for their academic lives, the majority of teachers appeared to have rather positive opinions.

**Table 3**

### ***Learners' Perceptions towards the Effectiveness of the Tertiary EFL Writing Course Syllabus***

Statements regarding Syllabus and Curriculum	N/Valid	Missing	Mean	Mode	SD
I am familiar with the objectives of the syllabus of tertiary English writing course.	392	0	3.51	4	1.177
There is enough content in the English writing course syllabus.	392	0	3.32	4	1.012
The subskills and content of the writing syllabus seem very useful to students' academic life.	392	0	4.11	5	1.019
The English teacher utilizes most of the instruction time to teach the writing skills covered in the syllabus.	392	0	3.90	4	.999

The time allocated for the weekly English writing classes is enough to develop students' writing ability.	392	0	3.01	3	.926
I think the textbooks and the study materials suggested in the syllabus of the English language courses cover all important writing contents and skills.	392	0	3.16	3	.972
The textbooks and study materials suggested in the syllabi are well-suited for developing tertiary students' writing skills.	392	0	3.66	4	.986
The textbooks and study materials suggested in the syllabi mostly focus on doing well in the class tests and exams.	392	0	4.15	5	1.002
The amount of writing activity/assignment suggested in the syllabus is enough to make students competent in writing.	392	0	2.42	2	1.013
The syllabus of the writing course meets all the writing needs of the tertiary learners.	392	0	2.28	2	.823

Regarding the perception towards utilizing the instruction time, the study reveals that [Table 4, Statement 4] tertiary EFL teachers had a positive perception ( $M = 3.57$  out of 5, meaning a high level of agreement) of using most of their instruction time to teach learners writing skills. However, the study also reveals that [Table 4, Statement 5] they had a negative perception ( $M = 3.00$  out of 5, meaning a low level of agreement) of the weekly time allocated for English writing classes, with a low level of agreement. This indicates that most teachers believed that the time allocated in the curriculum for writing was insufficient to develop students' writing to their expected level. Regarding the effectiveness of writing textbooks and study materials, the teachers had a low level perception. With respect to the coverage of required writing content and skills in the books and study materials suggested in the syllabi of the English language courses covering all important areas, the results displayed in Table 4 [Statement 6] show that the tertiary EFL teachers had a low agreement ( $M = 3.07$  out of 5, meaning a low level of agreement) in this regard. Regarding a similar question asking if the textbooks and study materials suggested in the syllabi are well-suited for developing tertiary students' writing skills, the results displayed in Table 4 [Statement 7] show that the tertiary EFL teachers had a similar negative agreement ( $M = 3.29$  out of 5, meaning a low level of agreement) in this regard. The results indicate that tertiary teachers believed the English writing course textbooks and study materials were effective for developing their writing skills, but the required content volume was insufficient.

With regard to the teachers' perceptions of the coverage of required writing content and skills in the books and study materials suggested in the syllabi, the study reveals that [Table 4, Statement 6] tertiary English language (EFL) teachers have a low level of agreement ( $M = 3.07$  out of 5). The results also show that [Table 4, Statement 7] they also have a low level of agreement ( $M = 3.29$  out of 5) regarding the suitability of the textbooks and study materials for developing tertiary students' writing skills. The study indicates that the EFL teachers believe the textbooks and study materials suggested in the syllabi are inadequate in content volume and do not meet the

standard benchmark for enhancing tertiary students' writing skills. Regarding the emphasis of the books and study materials recommended in the tertiary English writing syllabuses [Table 4; Statement 8], the findings indicate that tertiary EFL teachers agreed ( $M = 4.07$  out of 5, which is a high degree of agreement) that the primary goal of the suggested writing books and study materials was essentially achieving success on exams and class tests rather than emphasizing the development of writing skills. Concerning tertiary EFL teachers' perception of the amount of the writing activity or assignment suggested in the syllabus in developing their writing, the results displayed in Table 4 [Statement 9] show that the tertiary EFL teachers had a negative perception ( $M = 3.00$  out of 5, meaning a low level of agreement) in this regard. This means that most teachers believed the volume of the writing activity or assignment suggested in the syllabi was inadequate for developing students' writing competence. Finally, the study found that tertiary EFL teachers have a low level of agreement with the syllabus's ability to meet all the writing needs of tertiary learners, with a mean score of 2.79 out of 5 (see Statement 10 of Table 4). This means that the tertiary teachers believed that the course's syllabi did not adequately cater to all their writing needs.

**Table 4**  
*Teachers' Perceptions towards the Effectiveness of the Tertiary EFL Writing Course Syllabus*

Statements regarding Syllabus and Curriculum	N/ Valid	Missing	Mean	Mode	SD
I am aware of the objectives of the Tertiary English writing syllabus and curriculum.	14	0	4.29	4	.469
There is enough content in the English writing course syllabus.	14	0	3.07	3	.829
The subskills and content of the writing syllabus seem very useful to students' academic life.	14	0	3.57	4	.514
We can utilize most of the instruction time to teach the writing skills covered in the syllabus	14	0	3.57	4	.938
The time allocated for the weekly English writing classes is enough to develop students' writing ability.	14	0	3.00	3	.555
I think the textbooks and the study materials suggested in the syllabus of the English language courses cover all important writing contents and skills.	14	0	3.07	3	.829
The textbooks and study materials suggested in the syllabi are well-suited for developing tertiary students' writing skills.	14	0	3.29	3	.469
The textbooks and study materials suggested in the syllabi mostly focus on doing well in the class tests and exams.	14	0	4.07	4	.475
The amount of writing activity/assignment suggested in the syllabus is enough to make students competent in writing.	14	0	3.00	3	.555
The syllabus of the writing course meets all the writing needs of the tertiary learners.	14	0	2.79	3	.893

## Discussion

The study aimed to explore the perceptions of tertiary EFL learners and teachers about the effectiveness of the syllabi of the tertiary English writing courses. It assessed the syllabus's core, content volume, and developmental strength, as well as the intersectionality between writing pedagogy and the syllabus. Despite being limited to the Bangladeshi context, the results have implications for higher education EFL pedagogy in other L2 contexts too, especially in the global south. The findings indicated that tertiary EFL students' and teachers' perceptions were largely, though not entirely, negative, towards the fittingness and effectiveness of the EFL writing course syllabi. The results also showed that while students' and teachers' perceptions were generally in agreement, there were instances where they were not. The noteworthy findings of the study are discussed below.

According to the study's first important findings, the content coverage of the writing course curriculum is perceived negatively by both teachers and students, who feel it falls short. This finding partially contrasts that of Alizadeh (2018), in which the learners believed that the curriculum of the EFL program in Iranian universities contained adequate content, including writing content. However, the results align with the research conducted by Khattak et al. (2011), which looked at the efficacy of postsecondary EFL courses in the Pakistani setting. The findings also correspond to those of Rashid and Rana (2021) and Khan (2019), which investigated the effectiveness of tertiary EFL courses in the Bangladeshi context. By investigating tertiary EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the tertiary EFL courses offered in the Pakistani context, Khattak et al. (2011) noted that Pakistani EFL courses were not time-befitting and lacked standard curricula, time-appropriate EFL course materials, activities, and subskills that led to poor achievement of their language goals. The study by Rashid and Rana (2021) reveals that tertiary EFL learners in Bangladesh find the existing GEL syllabuses ineffective in developing tertiary learners' language skills, including writing, due to inadequate writing content and a communicative teaching approach. Khan's (2019) study revealed that both tertiary EFL learners and teachers believed Bangladeshi tertiary EAP courses were inadequate for developing basic English skills, including vocabulary and writing. The courses lack standard syllabuses, fail to achieve process and product goals, and lack critical thinking and analytical writing skills.

The study's third key finding highlights the developmental strength of the tertiary writing course syllabus. Regarding this, the assessments of the writing course syllabus by tertiary students and teachers indicate that the content and related skills represented by the writing course syllabus would be helpful in meeting students' academic and professional needs. The results support the findings of Hadjiconstantinou and Papadima-Sophocleous' (2024) research, as students at Cyprus University of Technology's language center expressed high appreciation for the ESAP courses' curriculum, particularly for organizing activities and using various materials like handouts, textbooks, and internet resources to enhance writing

proficiency. However, the findings contradict those of Khattak et al. (2011) and Rashid and Rana (2021). Khattak et al.'s (2011) findings revealed that, in the Pakistani context, the classroom activities were inadequate and uninteresting, which led to severe language anxiety among students, affecting their writing and reading skills. Likewise, in the Bangladeshi context, Rashid and Rana (2021) found that the current GEL course syllabi in Bangladesh were deemed ineffective for developing language skills among tertiary EFL students as they primarily focused on grammatical efficiency and largely neglected communicative competence and social contexts.

Fourth, the study examined the perceptions of tertiary EFL learners and teachers regarding the intersectionality of the writing syllabus and writing pedagogy. Both students and teachers appreciated the use of classroom instruction time but felt that the weekly time was insufficient to help students develop their writing abilities to their expected level. This contradicts the findings of Hadjiconstantinou and Papadima-Sophocleous (2024), who found that Cypriot students appreciated the curricula, content, materials, and teachers' giving enough instruction time to help them develop their EFL skills, especially writing skills. Serrano and Munoz (2007) found a correlation between the long, intensive classroom instruction time and the development of students' writing skills. Intensive programs with extended weekly instruction times are more effective for intermediate-level proficiency EFL students, resulting in the most significant language gains (*ibid.*). In another crucial finding, the study reveals that tertiary EFL learners have varying perceptions of the suggested books and study materials used in their English language courses. Students generally viewed these materials as suitable for developing writing skills, but the content volume is inadequate. Teachers' perceptions differ from students', with teachers having low perceptions of the suitability of study materials. However, both learners and teachers expressed negative opinions on the content coverage and adequacy of the suggested study materials. The findings are partly consistent with the previous study by Hadjiconstantinou and Papadima-Sophocleous (2024), which found that students in European contexts appreciated EFL curricula and textbooks, handouts, and online resources. In South Asian contexts, the findings are consistent with those of Khattak et al. (2011), who found that tertiary EFL courses in Pakistan had low effectiveness due to poorly designed curricula and inadequate study materials and resources.

Another important finding highlights the coverage of writing activities or assignments in the writing course syllabus. The study indicates that both tertiary EFL learners and teachers have negative perceptions about the number of writing activities or assignments in the writing course syllabus. They believed that the coverage of the suggested amount of writing activity was inadequate for writing practice in the classroom, hence developing writing competence. This aligns with Khattak et al.'s (2011) and Khan's (2019) studies. Khattak et al.'s (2011) study revealed Pakistan's tertiary EFL courses were ineffective due to poorly designed curricula, resource scarcity, and ineffective language activities, causing severe language anxiety among students. In the Bangladesh context, Khan's (2019) study found that tertiary EFL

courses lacked standard syllabuses containing essential and interesting content and course materials and activities. For a language course to be effective, Ismail and Chuzaimah (2020) stress that the tertiary EFL curriculum must include engaging and practical materials like sample texts, essays, articles, book reviews, and activities like quizzes, presentations, and other interactive and communicative activities.

The current study also reveals that the primary focus of the writing syllabus is helping students achieve good grades in class tests and exams, neglecting the development of writing skills, which is a widely held belief among tertiary EFL learners and teachers. This result somewhat agrees with Bristy's (2015) findings. She discovered that engineering students at public and private universities had positive views toward studying English, with public university students being more focused on performing well on English tests. Her study focused on tertiary EFL students in Bangladesh. The present study further reveals that both Bangladeshi tertiary learners and teachers had significantly negative perceptions towards the writing course syllabus's fit for fulfilling their writing needs. The study contradicts Hadjiconstantinou and Papadima-Sophocleous' (2024) findings, which showed that students appreciated the English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) courses in the Cypriot context, believing they addressed EFL learners' needs and improved language skills, including writing. However, the findings of the study corroborate those of Sadeghi and Jabbarnejad's (2012) and Rashid and Rana's (2021) findings in the Iranian and Bangladeshi contexts, respectively. The studies found that the general EFL course syllabus failed to meet the needs of undergraduate students, prioritizing grammatical efficiency over communicative competence and neglecting social and cultural contexts. In order to improve learning experiences, teachers can better understand students' wants and preferences by conducting needs analyses as this helps teachers find successful teaching strategies (Nunan, 1988; Sulistyani, 2018). This process, facilitated through questionnaires, interviews, documentation, observation, or self-assessment, meets global demands (ibid.). A detailed and organized syllabus enhances learning by mirroring future learning and fostering a strong connection between the learner and the course. Teachers who provide detailed syllabus versions are perceived as approachable, caring, knowledgeable, and capable, leading to a practical and supportive environment for effective teaching (Buskist et al., 2002; Henklain et al., 2020). However, this study reveals tertiary EFL students and teachers had positive perceptions of some aspects of the syllabi but negative perceptions of tasks and activities, content coverage, weekly instruction time, and addressing writing needs. This highlights the need for overhauling the tertiary EFL writing course syllabus, incorporating adequate writing materials and strategies, and improving teaching methods and materials.

## **Conclusion**

The current study put forward a step in uncovering students' and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the tertiary EFL writing course syllabi in an EFL context in South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh. The study reveals that the tertiary EFL writing course

syllabi in Bangladesh, are deficient of required content and skills. The study also found that though their teachers utilize most of the classroom instruction time in teaching writing, the weekly instruction time for writing skills is insufficient, and the content volume in textbooks and study materials is also insufficient. The study also revealed that the primary objective of syllabi is to aid students in excelling in English writing exams, rather than enhancing their writing skills. The syllabus is also deficient in meeting the academic and professional needs of students. The study concludes that the above-mentioned findings have the following five implications to consider:

- i.** The tertiary EFL syllabus designers should redesign EFL writing syllabi to standardize them, addressing incoherencies, and ensuring all necessary elements, such as writing content and subskills, align with course objectives.
- ii.** Writing teachers should be involved in the bottom-up review and updating of syllabuses, alongside syllabus designers, in the development of curriculum documents and the implementation of the curriculum on the ground.
- iii.** Tertiary curriculum authorities should allocate sufficient instruction time for teachers to assist students in achieving the curricular goals of the writing course, thereby enhancing their writing abilities to an expected level.
- iv.** The policymakers and syllabus designers should regularly revise and update writing course syllabi to cater to the needs of tertiary EFL students, thereby enhancing the quality of teaching by balancing learner needs and global standards.
- v.** Finally, syllabus designers are required to regularly receive training in syllabus-specific topics, especially in EFL syllabus design.

The current study exposed four main limitations. First, it primarily reflected Bangladeshi tertiary EFL learners' and teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of tertiary EFL writing course syllabi. Further research can investigate students' and teachers' beliefs in other contexts too. Second, the sample covered only students and teachers at universities. Future investigations can include students and teachers from tertiary institutions in other streams, like madrasas and post graduate colleges, to increase the generalizability of the results. Third, the study is in essence a quantitative one that exploits only questionnaire survey data as the sole data collected from three public and three private universities covering only three regions of Bangladesh. Therefore, the findings of the study can be generalized, with only the university contexts having corresponding characteristics. Finally, the study used only one data collection instrument, survey questionnaires. Data collected through interviews and focus group discussions could provide more insights in to the area under investigation. The findings require further research to enhance their richness and depth by overcoming the limitations mentioned.

#### **ORCID**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7485-164X>

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2003-6292>

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1141-9407>

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