

Journals in Teaching Composition: Follow up of a case study

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Abstract

This paper is a follow up of a case study carried out in 2000 by Ms Tasneem Siraj Mahboob and Abdus Selim on the students taking Beginner & Intermediate Composition courses (English 102 & 103) at North South University, a leading English medium university of Bangladesh. The study was followed by writing a paper titled Practicing Journal Writing in Teaching Composition: A Case Study, co-authored by them and presented in the Sri Lanka English Language Teachers' Association Conference in September 2000. One of the major issues addressed by the researchers was the existing debate regarding teachers' feedback on journals: one school of thoughts believing all composition tasks required accuracy and the other holding fluency first and accuracy next. The study helped bring some major changes in the journal writing practice but no follow up has been done until now. The present researchers (2011) have designed a study with the intention to write a paper on their findings and also propose to evaluate how learners benefit, if at all, after practicing journal keeping with a focus to accuracy at the beginner level (English 102) and its subsequent reflections while pursuing next higher course (English 103).

Keywords: *Journal writing, composition, fluency, accuracy, feedback*

1. Background

The origin of this paper is a legacy of a research that was collaboratively initiated in the year 2000 by Ms. Tasneem Siraj Mahboob, now Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh and Mr. Abdus Selim, Assistant Professor, Department of English, North South University (NSU), Dhaka, Bangladesh on the students of different disciplines who had to take “mandatory English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses of different levels depending on their proficiency in English” (Mahboob and Selim, 2000, p.61). The courses aimed at developing fluency first and in time accuracy in academic writing of different disciplines as the medium of instruction at NSU is English. Thus journal keeping was included as a mandatory task in English 102 and 103 courses. The other peripheral objective was to encourage the learners to create an idea bank with a view to helping them in coming up with a topic for a research paper when they went for their advanced level mandatory English course. Since initially journal writing was considered to be a practice in free writing to develop creativity as well as language fluency among the learners, comparatively less importance was given to language accuracy. But later this resulted in a controversy among the teachers, for one school held composition skill of any kind required accuracy while the other school believed fluency first followed by accuracy. This controversy triggered the 2000 case study to find out “an answer to the question—“Which is more important, accuracy or fluency?”” (Mahboob and Selim, 2000, p.61) The study brought in some major changes in the journal writing practice.

The present study of 2011 has aimed at investigating the actual standing of journal writing, a practice unanimously accepted to be effective in developing composition skill among language learners, at North South University (NSU), Bangladesh, where teachers have been experimenting on this particular aspect of language teaching for over two decades. The researchers feel and believe that this study can contribute to the further development in the domain of foreign language teaching especially because it is an action research.

Journal keeping: How it helps teaching composition

Journal writing is a “trick to make writing things down a habit” on what one observes, what interests one, and how one reacts about what one observes. Subsequently these can be put in an idea bank for future “musings” so that one can develop one or more of them into dissertations if and when required (Lambert, 1994, p.6). In other words what Lambert has suggested is journal keeping is essentially a free writing and we all know free writing practice has a crucial role to play in developing writing skill.

Hiemstra (2002) has observed, “Journal writing as an instructional or learning tool in adult education has gained cogency during the past three decades” (p. 1). He has identified a number of benefits of journal keeping among which we personally think two are of practical significance: overcoming writing blocks and nurturing reflection/critical thinking,

Most of the students at NSU lack accuracy in English and when teacher’s focus is accuracy in writing they feel extraordinarily insecure and shy to show their creativity and ingeniousness in thinking. Thus the primary aim should be to develop fluency and then go for accuracy. Burton (2001) has rightly said, “Journal writing is used for fluency-aimed writing” (p. 37).

A very recent study on journal keeping by Baxter (2009) has suggested learners can be even encouraged to use L1 or a mixture of target language and L1 in such situations. To quote Baxter verbatim:

The language of the journal could be English, but it could also be their first language (L1). Or it could be a mixture of both. For advanced students, it makes sense to have them use the target language. For beginners, a journal in their native language might be a place where they can express their feelings without having to worry about remembering difficult grammar and vocabulary (p. 23).

Nunan (2003) has cited Peter Elbow to suggest freewriting to be “a type of writing . . . in which students write on any topic they want for a specified period of time . . . , without concern for grammar, spelling, or punctuation” (p. 90).

In this connection we can refer to Harmer’s (2001) idea about journal keeping:

Journal writing can be entirely voluntary or the teachers can set aside time for writing (ten minutes at the end of every Friday). Students can be directed to either write about anything they want, to write about what they have learnt in their lessons (and how they feel about it) or to write entries using recently studied language (p. 339).

Langan (2005) argued:

Because writing is a skill, it makes sense that the more you practice writing, the better you will write. One excellent way to get practice in writing, even before you begin composing essays, is to keep a daily or almost daily journal. Writing in a journal will help you develop the habit of thinking on paper and will show you how ideas can be discovered in the process of writing. (p. 15)

So, journal keeping can be either a voluntary practice or a regularly assigned practice within a given time slot, the way a particular teacher feels it befitting for her/his learners. Harmer also has suggested, as for the choice of topic and content of writing the students should have the freedom though the teacher can guide or direct them in this exercise.

Summary of the findings of the case study 2000

Recognizing the benefits and positive roles played by journal keeping in teaching composition and also being alive to the weaknesses of tertiary level Bangladeshi students in writing, NSU included practice of journal writing in its English 102 and 103 courses. Mahboob and Selim (2000) said “Journal writing was an integral part of both of these courses, carrying 10 percent of the total mark” (p.61).

In order to collect the views of students and teachers about journal keeping and its benefits in developing composition skill Mahboob and Selim designed two sets of questionnaires, one for learners and the other for teachers, and distributed them among 70 students of English 102 and 103, and six teachers of English language. We would like to put together some of the key findings of the 2000 case study that subsequently led to bring in some changes in journal keeping practice in the courses.

2. Findings from the students

The study revealed that over 68% of the total student respondents had earlier exposure to journal writing when they did English 102, though all but one of them agreed that the practice improved their writing skill. A summary of the reasons are given below:

- Helped practicing writing
- Improved writing
- Increased confidence
- Gave opportunity for adequate practice
- Helped learning new vocabulary
- Helped to learn effectively

As for choosing their topics 90% students answered they were free to choose their own topic though 44.3% of them used to feel discouraged when they discovered all their mistakes were corrected by their teachers (55% teachers did that) focusing more on their accuracy than fluency. It is a clear violation of the theoretical principles of keeping journal but perhaps because of the traditional concept of the teachers' role prevalent in Bangladesh most students were happy with the teacher-centered learning process which impelled 85% students to say they wanted their teachers to correct every mistake they made. Students who preferred corrections by their teachers believed, if every mistake was corrected they would be able to identify and correct their mistakes; their habits of making mistakes would phase out in time; they would be able to recognize their problems and write better next time. The students who went in favor of just checking reasoned they felt discouraged if so many mistakes were corrected; they could find out and correct their spelling/grammar mistakes by themselves in time; they needed to learn from their own mistakes and they preferred to correct their own mistakes. As for grading the journals, a little more than 68% students liked it especially because they felt that only grading system can ensure their teachers' thorough examination of the journals and thereby acknowledgement of their hard labor.

3. Findings from the teachers

All six teachers teaching 102 and 103 said journal writing was an integral part of their courses that carried 10% of the total marks. "All the teachers unanimously thought that journal writing helped the students to improve their writing", Mahboob and Selim (2000) reported (p. 67). The reasons identified by the teachers were:

- Journal writing gave a good practice of writing and practice is the keyword to improve writing.
- Journal writing helped remove writing blocks which most beginners suffered from.
- It helped them to think independently, organize and be focused.
- Students' fluency developed and that aided them with extra confidence.

As for giving freedom to choose their journal topics five out of six teachers gave full liberty to their students to decide about their topics for writing, and their justifications were:

- Learners felt comfortable to write.
- Freedom lured them to engage in writing.
- Learners became happy thinking they had active participation in deciding about writing.

All five teachers out of six preferred *just checking* instead of *checking and grading* on the grounds that grading discouraged weaker learners; grade consciousness might impede fluency and thus journals should be checked only to see the content. The lone teacher who justified the second option felt the students should be made aware of their quality of writing to be able to judge their own standing.

4. Summary of the findings from sample journals

The study recorded the following common language deficiencies among 12 randomly selected and checked journals:

- Wrong preposition use
- Wrong spelling
- Wrong words
- Ambiguous expressions
- Wrong subject verb agreement
- Hanging modifiers
- Run-on sentences
- Wrong narrative tenses

It was also noticed that students tried to plagiarize in the subsequent journals as they felt humiliated by getting low grades and their writing smeared with red ink corrections, especially by the teacher who believed in correcting all mistakes as well as grading. Some students, in spite of repeated corrections of the same mistakes took no cognizance of the fact and showed very little or no improvement in their subsequent writing. Feedback from teachers who believed in *just checking* had marginal effect on quite a good number of students mostly proving that traditional practice of *checking and grading* motivates students to learn.

One more significant finding of the study was because during this period of time journals were home assignments only most students rampantly plagiarized from note-books, commercially available essay books and even from essays written by their private teachers when they were students of 10th, 11th and 12th grades or private coaching centers. In fact this particular incident impelled the course designers to come up with two crucial decisions: a) not allowing students to select the topic for writing; b) asking them to write at least one journal as a class task. The study in its recommendations suggested:

- i) Teachers should not correct every mistake made by students. They can just underline the gross mistakes and Teaching Assistants can help them self-correct them.
- ii) Teachers should suggest the journal topics but they should commensurate with the classroom teaching of grammatical items as suggested by Harmer.
- iii) Journal keeping should be both home and class tasks and a minimum number of entries to be fixed per semester.
- iv) Journal keeping should not be treated a routine task to full fill just another course requirement.

Save for (ii) & (iii) two other recommendations were not accepted and followed.

5. Survey findings of 2011 study

The gap between the first study and the present one has resulted because one of the researchers of 2000 left North South University and took some time to organize the study in collaboration with another co-researcher. The rationale behind 2011 study has been mainly to find out if there has been any change in both teachers' and students' attitude towards journal writing, how things have changed as a result of the 2000 study and what is the present outcome.

6. Findings from the English 102 students

We interviewed a total of 47 English 102 (Introduction to Composition) students by means of a questionnaire (See Appendix 1) containing 20 questions most of which were similar to the ones used by the surveyors of the 2000 case study.

A little more than 85% of the respondents agreed journal writing was mandatory for them, while 12.77% disagreed. This perhaps happened either because they were not familiar with the word *mandatory* or had no clear idea about course description. Almost all of the respondents (93.62%) except for an insignificant percentage of 6.38% said journal writing was both home and class task for them. Of course we practicing teachers have the experience of getting some forgetful students in our classes always.

As for marks distribution there existed a wide range of speculations among the students, for 44.68% estimated it between 10% and 70% whereas 55.32% had no answer to enter. Out of 44.64% above respondents only two had to say the breakdown of marks was not fair against a total of 34.30% who believed it to be fair. This clearly shows how in the East students believed their teachers were always justified.

A little more than 72.34% students opined they wrote journals every week. Out of 27.66% students who answered otherwise, 6.38% said they wrote it twice a week and 21.28% wrote it after every two weeks.

Almost all students (93.62%) responded their teachers gave them word limit, out of which 82.98% were satisfied with the limit given. The remaining 14.89% (1 had no answer to give) felt it was not acceptable on the following grounds:

- exceeded word limit almost all the time;
- difficult to keep within the limit while writing narratives;
- word limit was unreasonable/unjust;
- some topics needed more words than others.

All the respondents (100%) held that journal writing helped them improve their writing in more than one ways and some of the significant comments were:

- teacher's feedback helped develop editing skill;
- practice helped a lot and made them perfect;
- improved grammar skill;
- got to learn from mistakes;
- helped organize thoughts;
- helped being systematic;
- increased fluency;
- made them self-confident;
- improved their vocabulary;
- made them aware of writing process;
- helped focused writing;
- taught logical writing;
- developed punctuation skill;
- compensated lack of practice of writing in English;
- helped subsequent higher English courses;
- made them think about a topic from different perspectives.

38.30% students said they had the option to choose their own topics while 55.32% said they had none. Although the normal practice after 2000 case study is all topics for writing journals are suggested by the teachers, it is not very clear why 38.30% (6.38% having no answers) had to say they had options in

selecting their topics. Perhaps the question prompted them to think about the contents of the topics rather than the topics themselves. Interestingly enough out of 38.30% respondents only 21.28% said they would prefer to choose their own topics while majority, that is, 34.04% opined negatively. That means these respondents had some misunderstanding about this particular question which needed to be clarified, and it can be treated as one of the limitations of this study.

One of the crucial matters about journal keeping practice was the controversy whether teachers concerned should correct all, some or only gross mistakes of the students, because this issue also happened to bring controversial opinions among the teachers surveyed in 2000 case study. In the present survey we see 87.23% students said their teachers corrected all the mistakes while 6.38% said only some mistakes were corrected. It must be mentioned also 6.38% had no answers, while none said their teachers corrected only gross mistakes. In this connection when asked if they felt discouraged/embarrassed for correcting every mistake they committed, 82.98% respondents answered negatively, and the most significant comments were: a. they liked it as it helped them locate their mistakes; b. felt rather encouraged, and c. mistakes were meant to be corrected by teachers. Only one student mentioned s/he felt embarrassed, while 14.89% did not give any answer at all. This also speaks for the traditional practice that is estimated with admiration when teachers in our country play their so called right role: correcting all mistakes of their students.

Almost all the respondents (91.49%) said in the situation where their mistakes were corrected they worked on them and became conscious not to make such mistakes in future while only a meager 8.51% had no answers to record. Since 95.74% agreed that their teachers identified and corrected their mistakes none answered the question that asked if they wanted their teachers to correct their mistakes. In line with this concept 95.74% learners preferred their teachers to both check and grade their journals, which does not commensurate with the practice of journal keeping theory.

Answer to the last question regarding allowing mixing Bangla language (mother tongue) in writing journals revealed conspicuously the traditional idea of the learners that in no circumstances these two languages should be mixed while learning L2. 78.72% was against such mixing, 19.15% preferred not to answer the question and only one respondent favored it. In fact we included this question, which was not in the 2000 case study questionnaire, because of Baxter's (2009) recent suggestion that the language of the journal could be a mixture of both English and the learner's first language. But the survey clearly showed students of Bangladesh are not very comfortable with this idea because of their traditional concept of pedagogy.

7. Findings from the English 103 students

A total of 37 students of English 103, which is an Intermediate Composition course, were interviewed by means of a questionnaire containing 23 questions. (See Appendix 2). It should be mentioned here that only two years back the practice was, after admission test, which happens to be also English placement test, new intakes were given either English 102 or 103 depending on their performance in the test. But English 102 was a non-credit course then and most of the students had very low motivation since their grades did not affect their cumulative grade point average. Thus all English courses including 102 have been made mandatory as well as credit courses for all the students of all disciplines, except for those students whose placement test results show that they can go for higher courses. In such situations these students are required to do an extra general education course to full fill their credit point requirements. As a result the students who come to do 103 course straight do not have any practice of keeping journals. Hence we included a question to know how many of the 103 students did 102 and were familiar with the concept of journal writing.

The survey showed a total of 76.32% respondents did English 102 and only 23.68% did not who directly qualified to join 103. Though all the students who did 102 had journal writing as a mandatory task,

86.84% of the rest who did not do the course stated they had no problem writing their journals because the teachers concerned made it easy for them.

All the students who did English 102 ticked the following in identifying the areas of benefit of writing journals (arranged in order of percentage):

- i) improved overall composition skill (50.00%)
- ii) helped free thinking & coming up with any topic that they could write on fluently without much bothering about spelling & grammar (47.37%)
- iii) developed their style of writing (39.47%)
- iv) developed their vocabulary power (13.16%)
- v) improved their grammar (10.53%)
- vi) Interestingly enough 23.68% students did not tick any of the above options.

94.74% respondents said journal writing was a mandatory task for them against an insignificant 5.26% negative answer. A little less than 90% (89.47) said journal writing was both class and home task whereas 10.53% was not very sure about it.

As for percentage of marks allocated for journal writing 103 students too had same confusion as 102 students had. 81.58% respondents said it was between 10% and 70% and the rest had no idea about it. 78.95% out of all respondents thought the breakdown was fair and 15.79% disagreed.

71.05% students wrote their journals every week whereas 28.95% said they did not, and out of the total students who did not said 5.26% wrote twice a week, while 23.68% wrote it once every after two weeks. In fact, this happened because students of 102 required a minimum of 9 and 103 required 8 journals to write during the whole semester. So, the teachers conveniently staggered the journal writing practice and some teachers even made the students do more than required minimum entries.

Almost all the respondents (97.37%) said their teachers gave them word limit for journals and 86.84% of them were satisfied with this limit. Only 10.53% answered in the negative. Interestingly enough nobody entered any reason for not being satisfied with the word limit.

94.74% respondents agreed journal writing helped improve their English composition skill, though 71.05% could not identify how it helped them perhaps because they failed to instantly think of any specific answer. But 28.95% agreed it helped them a lot and specifically mentioned the following:

- i) practice makes better;
- ii) practice, correction, editing, reading, writing, listening, speaking help to improve English composition;
- iii) it helps to think differently and logically;
- iv) it helps students to think about the topic & write what he/she can explain;
- v) it develops overall composition skills;
- vi) improves grammar & vocabulary skill;
- vii) it helps develop vocabulary, grammar, writing & communication skills.

44.74% respondents said they had no option to choose their topic while 55.26% said answered otherwise. This again happened exactly for the reason explained about the 102 students who believed that freedom to dwell upon the content of the topic was their freedom of choice for topic.

All the respondents agreed their teachers identified and corrected their mistakes out of which 73.68% said their teachers corrected all mistakes, 13.16% said their teachers corrected some mistakes and 5.26% said their teachers corrected only the gross mistakes. In answer to the question if they felt discouraged/embarrassed because of this 31.58% said they did not, 60.53% had no comment and 7.89% had following significant comments to make:

- mistakes once corrected if repeated & corrected again by teachers embarrassed them;
- felt discouraged but it was part of learning process.

76.32% respondents had to say they worked on the mistakes corrected by their teachers so that they became conscious not to make such mistakes next time. But 23.64% said they just looked at them and did nothing. 86.84% respondents preferred their teachers to check and grade their journals and a meager 7.89% opted for just checking. As mentioned earlier, this happened because of the pedagogical culture prevalent in Bangladesh.

In answer to the last question if the students would feel comfortable to mix English and Bangla in journal writing though 65.79% respondents were opposed to it and 18.42% were not sure, 15.79% favored the idea by entering the following significant comments:

- sometimes I cannot express my thoughts in English and think if I can express in Bangla;
- because by this we will be able to express our feelings better;
- sometimes I don't have the right vocabulary in English;
- its makes easy to express our ideas;
- it should be allowed because most of the students come from Bangla medium background;
- because I am not good in English.

8. Findings from the teachers

We interviewed a total of 7 teachers who taught both 102 and 103 by means of a questionnaire (See Appendix 3) that contained 23 questions.

All 7 seven teachers agreed that journal writing was an integral part of both English 102 and 103 courses. As for the allocation of marks we received varied answers: between 5% and 40%, and apparently it did not have any logical explanation. 5 teachers believed that the allocation was based on English Second Language (ESL) teaching rationale, 1 differed and 1 confessed she did not have any idea about ESL but felt the allocation to be fine. When asked to explain the teacher who mentioned the allocation to be 40% commented journal writing focused more on content and fluency and not grammar and thus there was the scope for being liberal. Out of 2 teachers who mentioned 20% one held that it needed to be increased to give students incentive as it had an important role to play in developing learners' grammar skill while the other believed journal writing was an important tool for reflective learning, thus the allocation was justified. The teacher who was not familiar with the ESL rationale and mentioned the allocation to be between 5% and 10% on the other hand said since journal writing improved overall writing skill it should be given more marks allocation.

In answer to the question of frequency of writing journals we received varied answers too. 4 teachers made their students write once a week, 1 twice a week, 1 once a week for 102 as class task and twice a week as home assignment for 103. The remaining 1 teacher said she gave her students to write two journals for grading and 4 journals for no-grading per week.

As for total number of journal entries per semester 1 teacher mentioned 24, 2 mentioned 9, 1 mentioned 8, 1 mentioned 10, 1 mentioned between 9 and 12, and 1 mentioned 9 for 102 and 12 for 103. This discrepancy resulted because of the fact that the course outline stipulated that for 102 a minimum of 9 and for 103 8 journals should be written per semester. Thus the teachers concerned made the students write as many journals as possible and convenient for both of them but never below the stipulated minimum number.

Choosing the topic was the discretion of 2 teachers, and 4 teachers said they sometimes let their students decide about it but not always. 1 teacher never allowed the students any freedom of choice. Out of 4

teachers who practiced giving freedom of choice sometimes 3 justified their actions by saying they occasionally asked students to propose a topic to generate classroom discussions followed by writing, and also sometimes gave them full liberty depending on the nature of the content. The teacher who never allowed her students to choose the topic justified her action saying it contradicted the course objectives. In answer to the question if the students enjoyed writing on the topic suggested by the teacher 4 said they did, 1 did not know if they did, 1 thought they did sometimes and 1 had no definite comment. While explaining the matter of enjoyment teachers had different observations, a summary of which is being furnished below:

- most of the time students did not like writing tasks no matter what the topic was
- they were forced to write and once in the practice they seemed to enjoy it
- with 40 students in a class there had to be some critics
- most of the topics were interesting so they enjoyed writing
- they enjoyed writing on interesting topics only
- since most of them wrote for good grades it was not easy to know if they enjoyed it.

Only 1 teacher agreed students would perform better if given the choice to select their own journal topics while 3 disagreed. Other 3 teachers were not very sure. The lone teacher explained her point saying given freedom of topic selection students feel highly motivated. The 3 teachers who differed had to say: a) the freedom would not help students learn new vocabulary; b) they might not be able to come up with good topics; c) English 102 students being fresher were not accustomed to this freedom. Out of 3 teachers who were not very sure about it 2 said: a) students already had a mixture of both freedom and control and they did not need any more; and b) it would not work for all students.

As for word limit 2 teachers said they fixed it at 350 words, 1 said she fixed at 150 for 102 and 350 for 103. 1 teacher fixed it at 150 and 1 between 150 and 200 words. Among 2 others one fixed it at 150 for 102 and 200 for 103, the other teacher preferred not to give any word limit but asked her students to write one page maximum.

Though 2 teachers had no comment on the point if they ever practiced journal writing when they were students of ELT/TESOL/ESL/EFL, 5 teachers said they wrote journals during their student life and thought the exercise:

- helped learning grammar
- helped to be reflective
- helped drafting methodically
- helped improving language and content of the writing.

All 7 teachers agreed that from their present experience they thought journal keeping helped their students' writing because their students could practice writing, get themselves out of writing blocks, and make them learn from their mistakes. Though all 7 teachers said they identified and corrected their students' mistakes, they differed in the way of correcting them. 4 teachers said they corrected only the gross mistakes, 2 said they corrected all mistakes and only 1 said she corrected some mistakes. The rationale behind correcting only gross mistakes had been: a) they did not want to demoralize their students; thus c) grammatical and spelling mistakes needed to be taken care of because those were gross mistakes; and d) correcting all mistakes could be time consuming and result negative effect. As for correcting all mistakes the 2 teachers believed that a teacher's duty should be to correct all mistakes. To justify the principle of correcting some mistakes the lone teacher who opted for it said too much correction could de-motivate the learners.

Two case studies juxtaposed

Juxtaposing Case study 2000 with 2011 the following significant findings crystallize:

- In both studies students agreed they benefitted from journal keeping, though percentage varied. For 2000 it was 68% while for 2011, 100%.
- In 2000 study it showed journal keeping was entirely a home work & students practically chose their own topics of writing. It was not allowed in 2011 because students chose only the topics they could plagiarize from different sources comfortably at home.
- In 2000 students had freedom of topic selection and they wrote all of them at home but choice of topic was teachers mandate in 2011 and journal entry was made both class & home task alternately. This change was brought in to stop plagiarism.
- Both studies showed teachers gave word limit which most of the students liked.
- Both studies showed students did not have any clear idea about distribution of marks although they had no complaints about it displaying a complete dependency on teachers' discretion.
- As for number of journal entry answers varied widely in 2011, reason for which was explained earlier. But 2000 study showed no such variation for, 92.85% students entered 2 journals a week.
- 2000 study showed 50% students said teachers corrected all mistakes against 87.23% in 2011. 2000 study showed 44.3% students felt embarrassed by that, though 82.98% in 2011 said they did not feel embarrassed on the ground *Mistakes were meant to be corrected by teachers*.
- 2000 study showed 68% preferred checking & grading journals while 95.74% preferred it in 2011.
- In answer to question of mixing languages in 2011 the majority felt it was not a good idea. This question was not included in 2000 study as Baxter's study came in 2002.
- Almost all findings from students in 2000 & 2011 were alike except for 103 students who were more specific about identifying their areas of development.
- In 2000 study teachers were found divided in their opinion about fluency & accuracy, which was not the main issue among the teachers of 2011. In fact this happened because of the changes brought in the policy of journal keeping after 2000 study.
- But yet both 2000 & 2011 study discreetly showed majority of the teachers expected & practiced developing accuracy among students.
- Unfortunately journal writing was still followed as a routine assignment by majority teachers.
- Overall, 2011 samples from 102 & 103 writing showed a slow but steady transition in writing process & that is a positive sign.

9. Conclusion

All practicing teachers would agree each teaching environment is unique in nature though exchange of experience among language teachers helps. Our situation at NSU is exclusive to the culture that is practiced in our pedagogical field but journal keeping is accepted as a genuine and standard means to develop learners' writing skill in L2. The studies of 2000 and 2011 showed, we teachers learn many professionalism through experience and it is not the theory that is always *the panacea*. There has to be a bottom up process where classroom practices can formulate new theories of language teaching. The theory of journal keeping, like any other pedagogical theories, is required and still needs to be customized by amendments and additions of practical ideas according to the teaching environment and learner's needs, one such suggestion being mixing L1 with L2 according to Baxter, and a language teacher has to be dynamic.

Since this study has been done through a process of action research, though in a staggered manner, the researchers feel it to be useful for practicing teachers of foreign language, and for the teachers of composition courses in particular.

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Appendix 2

Questionnaire for English 103 students

The following survey contains questions about Journal writing and its effectiveness in teaching composition. The findings will be incorporated into a research paper on the positive/zero effect, if any, of journal writing practice by the students. I'd appreciate your honest answers to the questions. Thank you for your time!

- | | | |
|--|------|----|
| 1. Did you do English 102? | Yes | No |
| 2. If <i>Yes</i> was journal writing mandatory for English 102? | Yes | No |
| 3. If <i>No</i> do you face problem in writing your journals? | | |
| 4. If done English 102 has it in any way helped you in the following areas: (<i>you can tick more than one</i>) | | |
| i) free thinking & coming up with any topic that you can write on fluently without much bothering about spelling & grammar | | |
| ii) develop your vocabulary power | | |
| iii) develop your style of writing | | |
| iv) improve your grammar | | |
| v) improve your overall composition skill | | |
| 5. Is journal writing a mandatory task in Eng 103? | Yes | No |
| 6. Is it a home or class task? | Yes | No |
| | Both | |
| 7. What percentage of total marks comprises journal writing? | | |
| 8. Do you think it is a fair breakdown of marks? | Yes | No |
| 9. Do you write your journal every week? | Yes | No |
| 10. If <i>No</i> how often do you write them? | | |
| 11. Does your teacher give any word limit? | Yes | No |
| 12. If <i>Yes</i> are you satisfied with the word limit? | Yes | No |
| 13. Answer to question 12 is <i>No</i> give reasons. | | |
| 14. Do you think it helps you improve your English composition? | Yes | No |
| 15. Please give reasons for your answer to question 14. | | |
| 16. Do you have any option to choose your own topic? | Yes | No |
| 17. If the answer to question 15 is <i>No</i> , would you prefer to choose your own topic? | Yes | No |
| 18. Does your teacher identify and correct your mistakes? | Yes | No |
| 19. If the answer to question 18 is <i>Yes</i> , which of the following does s/he do? | | |
| 20. If the answer to question 18 is <i>Yes</i> , do you like it or feel discouraged/embarrassed? In the situations where your mistakes are corrected, what do you do | | |
| 21. If the answer to question 18 is <i>No</i> , do you want your teacher to correct mistakes? Give reasons why. | | |
| 22. Which of the following methods of journal checking do you prefer? | | |
| 23. Would you feel comfortable if you are allowed sometimes to mix English & Bangla in writing your journals? If <i>Yes</i> why? | | |

Appendix 3

Questionnaire for teachers

The following survey contains questions about Journal writing and its effectiveness in teaching composition. The findings will be incorporated into a research paper on the positive/zero effect, if any, of journal writing practice by the students. I'd appreciate your honest answers to the questions. Thank you for your time!

1. Is journal writing an integral part of ENG 102/103? Yes No

2. What percentage of total points is allocated for journal writing?
3. Do you think this allocation is based on ESL teaching rationale? Yes No
4. Please explain your answer to question 3.
5. How often are your students supposed to write journals?
6. How many entries are they expected to submit during the semester?
7. Do you give your students the freedom to choose their own topic to write on? Yes No
Sometimes

8. If not why?
9. Do you think students enjoy writing on the topic given by you? Yes No
10. Please explain answer to the question 9.
11. Assuming that your students write journals on the topics suggested by you, do you think given the freedom to choose their own topics your students would perform better? Yes No
12. Please explain your answer to question 11.
13. Is there any word limit? If so how many words/pages are they asked to write? Yes No
14. Did you practice journal writing during your student life? Yes No

15. If you did or learnt about journal writing while taking your ELT/TESOL/ESL/EFL courses, which particular features of it convinced you about the effectiveness of this practice for learning L2?
16. From your present experience do you think it helps students writing? Yes No
17. Please explain your answer to question 16?
18. Do you identify and/or correct students' mistakes? Yes No
19. If the answer to question 18 is *Yes*, which of the following do you do?
20. Whatever is your answer to question 18, please explain your rationale.
21. Which of the following methods of journal checking do you prefer?
22. What is the rationale behind your answer to question 21.
23. Do you update your knowledge regarding keeping journal & its role in learning L2 by reading articles/books etc.? (Optional)