

## Original Paper

# Assessing the Higher Secondary Level Text Book through Reading and Writing Skills: An Empirical Investigation

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### **Abstract**

*The article aims to look at evaluating English for Today for Class XI-XII of the HSC Textbook in the light of reading and writing skills which has been prescribed by the NCTB (National Curriculum Textbook Board) of Bangladesh from the current academic session. Based on the questionnaire approach with the five HSC level English teachers and ten students from Scholars College, Tongi thana, Gazipur district, this study focuses on the reading and writing pedagogies to critically evaluate the effectiveness of the materials, and identifies the difficulties that teachers and students encounter. The findings of the study revealed a disparity between students' needs and what the HSC reading and writing syllabus contains, and its actual implementation in the classroom. The teachers adopted an approach to reading and writing skills which was overridingly form-focused and product-oriented. They performed roles which were traditional, i.e., the teacher as a purveyor of knowledge and evaluator. Teachers have lack training in areas specific to the development of reading and writing skills and are unaware of recent developments in teaching and learning policy. This study contributed to the documentation of curriculum evaluation studies in the context of Bangladesh education system as well as frameworks for the assessment of reading and writing skills. Awareness has been raised about the hindering and helpful factors in bringing about a new change. General caution is suggested in the making of foreign methodologies appropriate to the HSC level textbook. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations are also made in relation to curriculum development and pedagogy of English for Today for Class XI-XII.*

### **Keywords**

*English for Today, HSC text book, higher secondary level students, reading and writing skills*

## 1. Introduction

Even after studying English for a long time, a significant number of students still is weak in the expected level of proficiency. The main reason is that the only exposure of the language maximum number of students gets from the classroom. A textbook designed for an English language classroom is one of the major components which acquaint students with the target language. The contents, activities and exercises should be designed in a way that can meet the needs of the learners, make them communicatively competent. Through rigorous practice, mastering the grammatical components of the language yet being unable to communicate in it, which properly does not fit the sole purpose of learning English. Communicative approach being the underlying method, the textbook *English for Today* for class XI-XII “to provide ample opportunities for students to use English for a variety of purposes in interesting situations” (Billah et al., 2017, p. iii). Bearing in mind the claims made by the textbook, this study evaluates the textbook *English for Today* for class XI-XII in the light of current reading and writing skills.

## 2. Literature Review

Communicative approach being the underlying method, the textbook *English for Today* for class XI-XII and Alim claims “to provide ample opportunities for students to use English for a variety of purposes in interesting situations” (Billah et al., 2017, p. iii). Keeping in mind the claims made by the textbook, this study will evaluate the textbook *English for Today* for class XI-XII and Alim from a communicative perspective.

In Bangladesh, English 1<sup>st</sup> Paper is a compulsory subject for students from class XI-XII. And, the textbook used for this subject is *English for Today*. The aim of the English curriculum is to make the learners competent in using English; and thus, the book is claimed to be designed based on communicative approach to language learning (Billah et al., 2014). However, even after studying English for 12 consecutive years, most of the learners still face a hard time communicating in English. They face problems following the discourse of the natives, or while speaking in English, however, that is purely not the case with other two skills-reading and writing. If the four skills were equally distributed in the book and given equal importance as claimed by the book, then every learner would be competent in using English. The researcher addressed these problems and decided to evaluate the textbook of class XI-XII from CLT perspective.

Textbook is an irreplaceable element while teaching any subject; language teaching and learning falls under this as well; other components are learners, teachers, contexts, teaching methods and evaluation (Billah, 2014). In order to achieve the ultimate goal, a harmony has to be established among these factors. A textbook works as a map which helps to keep a track of how things work better with the students and what triggers their interests or demotivates those (Richards, 2001, p. 2). The impact of a textbook is so powerful that, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) mentions it as an “almost universal

element” for language classroom (p. 315). The more the textbook, and its contents and tasks are communicative, real-life based, the more an effective teaching and learning situation can be assured; Sheldon (1988) sees textbooks as the “heart of any ELT program” (p. 237).

A textbook is a great medium for the teachers and learners to enrich their knowledge and also, associate other resources with it. It is something that the teachers and students can rely upon to know what is in store for them (Ur, 1999, p. 79). Thus, it is important to choose a textbook wisely. However, choosing a textbook that is suitable for most of the people is a hard task (Chambers, 1997, p. 29). Garinger’s (2002) article includes the factors that should be kept in mind while selecting a textbook for an ESL classroom. They are as follows:

- ❖ To match the textbook to the program and the course;
- ❖ To review the skills presented in the textbook;
- ❖ To review exercises and activities in the Textbook;
- ❖ To weigh practical concerns.

According to Edge (1993), materials (textbooks in this context) are there to help the whole teaching and learning situation. There are some benefits of having a textbook for an ESL classroom; attractive reliable because the information provided here are correct and dependable, and also, user-friendly because there are at least some guidelines which teachers and students can depend on for classwork (pp. 43-44). It creates a common ground for the parties involved. Although, it does not fulfill every need of every learner, it works as a strong supporting instrument (O’Neill, 1982, pp. 105-106).

A textbook helps a learner prepare him/herself for the future lessons. Classroom environment plays an important role in language acquisition. Language classrooms are diversified because learners are always introduced to different language items in the process of learning the language. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), the classroom setting is always very unpredictable and threatening for the learners which is more the reason of using a textbook (p. 83).

However, a textbook or materials published for the classroom cannot always fulfill the needs of all the learners or do not always provide the elements that a teacher is seeking for his/her particular class (Block, 1991, p. 211) because, language learning process “is far too complex to be satisfactorily catered for by a pre-packaged set of decisions embodied in teaching materials” (Allwright, 1981, p. 9). On the other hand, simply just following the textbook without considering the learners’ demands can back fire the learning process and it can, as Richards and Renandya (2002) mentions, “deskill” the teachers as well (p. 67). If they always rely on the textbook while giving the instructions, it reduces their function as the teacher. A teacher has to make the decision of what and how to continue the class with tasks and activities, as he/she knows better what is best suited for the learners; not others who write the textbook. Thus, depending on what others have written without considering the context is not a good option.

A material might be resourceful for one context; however, it might be polar opposite for the other because every teaching-learning situation is unique on its own. Richards (2001) points out that a

textbook that matches the needs of a certain situation perfectly, might not be enough challenging in a different situation (p. 2). And also, the scenarios presented in tasks might not be a useful or authentic one for the learners to learn something from it. According to Vygotsky, learners learn better when they are provided with authentic situation and get enough exposure of the language associated with the situation, which he refers to as the “Zone of Proximal Development”. This enables them to learn the language better (Kozulin, 2003, p. 41).

The selection of a material requires some compromises between what the materials creators want in it due to different financial reasons and what should actually be there. Sheldon (1988) regards this situation as “poor compromises” between factors that are “educationally desirable” and “financially viable” (p. 237).

Nation and Macalister (2010) point out about some factors when a teacher might face issues regarding materials such as, the materials are not appropriate for the context, they do not fit comfortably into the time frame allocated for the course, lack of authentic content in the materials, the contents of the materials are not suitable for the learners’ proficiency level, reading materials contain too many unknown words which learners might see as an obstacle while reading and vice versa, less variety in activities, activities included in the materials are not challenging enough for the learners to brainstorm and generate ideas, language items that learners’ need are missing, the four skills of the language are not properly incorporated and divided in the materials, etc. (p. 161).

### **3. Research Methodology and Data Collection**

The research-work is based upon qualitative, quantitative method and questionnaire process. The important sources have been taken from the library, like books, journals, thesis, and other necessary sources. It is a field survey that presents objectives, options, and arguments concerning the reading and writing skills that are applied to develop the students’ capability of the HSC text book *English for Today* (1<sup>st</sup> Paper) in the light of Bangladesh education system.

The study was carried out to highlight the background of English language reading and writing skills with particular accent on methods which was applied for teaching the HSC level students with learning complexities.

To write this paper, the researcher followed APA (6<sup>th</sup> edition) style very strictly.

The aim of the current researcher was to evaluate the HSC text book in the light of reading and writing skills so that the students could develop reading and writing approaches and they could overcome the current situations of the skills.

The work presented practical conclusions about the issue as well as useful and applicable materials for the teachers who teach the higher secondary students how reading and writing skills can be developed in the classroom and beyond. So, the study unveils findings and recommendations with a view to improving the techniques of learning a foreign language, like English for the students of the HSC level at Scholars

College situated at Tongi under Gazipur district in Bangladesh.

In this qualitative method, data on teaching English as a foreign language to students with the complexities of reading and writing skills as designed in the HSC text book were collected from different types of male and female students as well as teachers of the HSC level. In this field survey, 10 students did take an active part at Scholars College. 10 worksheets of multiple choices were provided to the hands of the participants. 5 teachers were requested to participate in the test. They were given 30 minutes to tick the appropriate answers from the alternatives. The sample for the teachers was a convenience sample as some of them were willing to express their attitudes towards English language learning complexities of the reading and writing skills face to face while the test was being taken. The participants were asked to answer the multiple choice questions. Through the field survey form, the evaluation of the HSC text book in the light of reading and writing skills was connected to the task done among the HSC level students at Scholars College, their assigned teachers and other important information about reading and writing skills were investigated. Further clarifications were done through the test with other students and teachers. The students were asked to fill the survey form relating to the assessment of the HSC text book in the light of reading and writing skills, how teachers helps the students of the HSC level understand English reading comprehension, composition, application, paragraph, letter, story writing, and script evaluation. The researcher had to spend 7 days to collect data so that he could enable to show a faithful picture of reading and writing skills as impacted on *English for Today* for class XI-XII. Also, the researcher proposed the topics for discussion during the testing, but she asked them few specific questions.

During each of the questionnaire survey, the researcher discussed with the participants very clearly regarding the reading and writing skills and prompted the participants to express what they thought. The format of the different types of questionnaire survey process was open, some participants responded with more details, while others simply agreed with what had been said. Students' and teachers' text lasted for approximately 2 hours, respectively. After the field survey was completed, the researcher took the hand sheets from the participants by noting complete thoughts and helpful information.

#### **4. Data Analysis & Findings**

The content of the participants' responses in different types of interviews was investigated and coded. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), "Coding is the process of grouping interviewees' responses into categories that bring together the similar ideas, concepts, or themes you have discovered" (p. 238). In coding the interview data, the researcher marked the answer in the form of a, b, c, d option that caught his attention and that had potential to serve as a category. This procedure enabled the researcher to gather new information into categories or central themes, including giving those marks through tick mark system. Participants of the HSC level did express different views about the evaluation of the HSC

text book in the light of reading and writing skills. Responses from the participants were easy for the researcher to evaluate English First Paper of HSC level learners from the data.

Syllabus design of reading and writing skills as prescribed in the *English for Today* for class XI & XII wasn't conducive to the HSC level. As a result, after completing the higher secondary level, many learners are failing to cut a good figure in English language test, especially university admission test. It is a matter of sorrow that their writing skill was not satisfactory. Teachers weren't properly trained in teaching reading and writing skills in the classroom activities.

**Table 1. Multiple Questions on Students' Reading Skill**

Number of Students	a	b	c	d
1	1	3	1	3
2	1	3	4	1
3	0	7	1	1
4	2	5	1	2
5	1	5	2	2
6	0	2	4	4
7	1	6	3	1
8	1	2	3	4
9	1	2	3	6
10	1	4	3	2
Total	3	39	25	26

From this Table it is seen that there were 10 male and female participants in the test. Question set was provided to the students in the classroom activities at Scholars College. There were four options in the question pattern. 10 sets of question were given to each student in the class. It took 30 minutes to answer the questions. Then the questions were taken from them. While the researcher scrutinized their questions very careful, it was found that most of the students gave the tick mark on "b" option whose total summation was 39. Then they chose "d" option which was 26, and "c" was the third choice and "a" was the least choice option. The survey showed that "b" option was the highest choice of the students and "a" option was their lowest choice which was only 3. In this way the researcher investigated the assessment process of the HSC text book based on reading skill, like seen reading comprehension through questionnaire system.

**Table 2. Multiple Questions on Teachers' Reading Skill**

Number of Teachers	a	b	c
1	0	6	2
2	0	7	3
3	1	4	3
4	0	6	3
5	0	2	2
Total	1	25	14

From this Table it is seen that there were 5 teachers of intermediate level who did participate in the test. The teachers expressed different opinions of reading skill. "B" was their highest choice which was 25 and their second choice was "c" was 14 and "a" was their least option.

**Table 3. Multiple Choice on Students' Writing Skill**

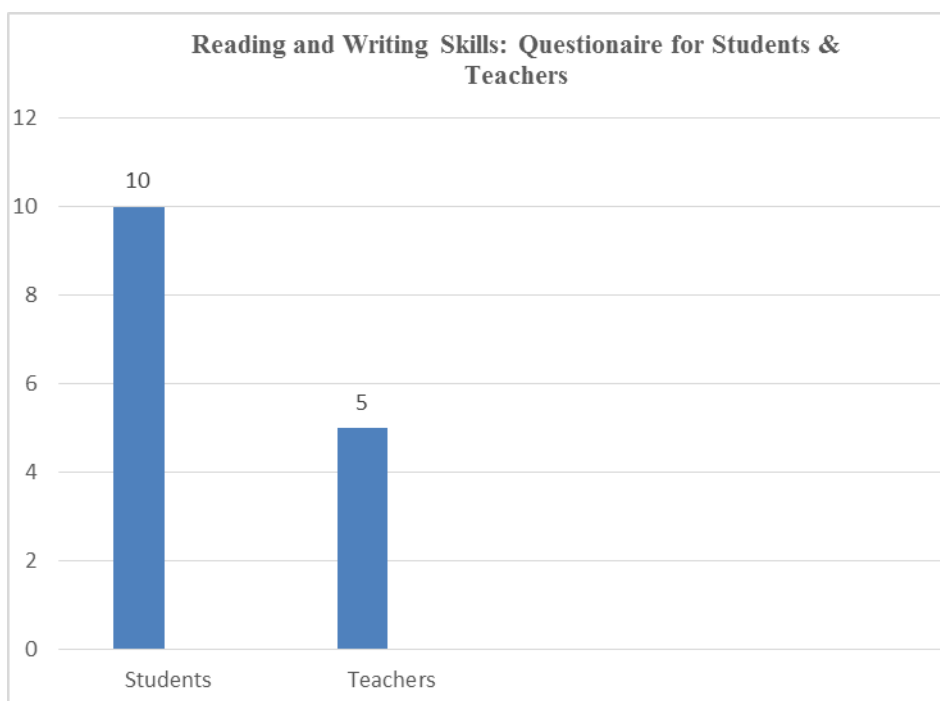
Number of Students	a	b	c	d
1	3	4	2	1
2	0	2	3	5
3	3	3	3	1
4	3	3	2	2
5	2	2	2	4
6	1	3	4	2
7	1	3	2	4
8	1	3	5	1
9	1	3	1	5
10	0	3	4	3
Total	15	27	28	28

From this Table it is seen that multiple choice questions were given to the students in the classroom at Scholars College. They spent 30 minutes to answer the questions. Most of the students gave the tick mark on "c" and "d" option whose total summation was 28. Then they chose "b" option which was 27, and "a" was their last choice. The survey showed that both "d" & "d" option were the highest choice of the students whereas "a" option was their lowest choice which was 15. In this way the researcher investigated the assessment process of the HSC text book based on writing skill, like composition; letter, application, report writing, and dialogue through questionnaire system.

**Table 4. Multiple Questions on Teachers' Writing Skill**

Number of Teachers	a	b	c	d
1	2	0	5	3
2	3	1	4	2
3	4	1	5	0
4	3	1	5	1
5	2	2	2	4
Total	14	5	21	10

From this Table it is seen that there were 5 teachers of the HSC level who participated. The teachers ticked mark "c" which was their highest choice which was 21 and their second choice was "a" and it was 14 and "b" was their least option.

**Figure 1. Number of Teachers and Students**

In the Figure, it is seen that there were 15 participants who participated in the questionnaire system. They were as follows: 10 male & female students and 5 teachers. Teachers and students did their comments regarding the evaluation of the HSC text book in the light of reading and writing skills in different ways. Most of them responded that students were very weak in reading skill. Their speaking skill was not properly satisfactory. They have failed to develop reading skill due to expert English teachers. Their



pronunciation was very poor. They did not pronounce very clearly only except some students in the class. While taking the interview, it was found that some students did not understand the meaning of questions and a, b, c, d option very clearly since the question set was in English version. They expressed that they had vocabulary & grammatical problem in learning English Language. The survey showed that teachers were not good at reading skill as well especially pronunciation problem. They practiced traditional method instead of CELT in the classroom activities.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Reading and writing skills are not given priority at the higher secondary level while teaching *English for Today* for class XI-XII. Although reading and writing skills are tested in the HSC examination, there is no congenial atmosphere for the development of reading and writing skills in the classroom. Students have lack motivation and teachers fail to create inspirational skills among their students. On the other hand, some students want to learn how to write and how to read but teachers have lack the efficiency to teach reading and writing with the necessary techniques. It is because of the lack of training. Since there is no proper guidance for reading and writing skills, students feel reluctant to read and write. The ultimate result of this reluctance and negligence is the poor score in *English for Today* in the HSC examination. Although reading and writing skills are judged in the examination, the system is not conducive enough to help learners in developing their creative capability in reading and writing skills. The testing system indirectly compels learners to memorize.

Overall, the researcher thinks that the prevailing poor condition can be changed if necessary steps, i.e., providing training for teachers, increasing teachers' salary appointing skilled teachers, reforming the text book and testing system and motivating learners are taken by the concerned authorities. It is optimistic to see that consciousness is rising among both students and teachers regarding the development of reading and writing skills. It can be hoped that a positive change will take place in developing reading and writing skills of students at the HSC level.

However, the objectives of the article have been to examine students' problems in reading and writing skills, the present state of reading and writing pedagogies, strength and weaknesses of the reading and writing components of the existing syllabus and reading and writing materials of *English for Today* (English 1<sup>st</sup> Paper) being used at the HSC levels in Bangladesh. For field data on these areas, empirical investigations were conducted at a nearby area where the researcher would reside.

Based on the overall findings of the paper, the researcher would like to recommend some suggestions which will help improve their reading and writing skills in the current textbook. The recommendations are:

- a) Conducting needs analysis survey for the learners to find out what their actual needs are and what interests them, rather than assuming their needs and developing reading and writing materials based on *English for Today* for class XI-XII.

- b) Conducting an environmental analysis would bring a positive change in the text book. Considering the classroom setting and availability of the facilities will help develop the tasks and activities accordingly.
- c) The authorities of the institutions should think about using technical facilities in order to improve the reading and writing skills of the learners.
- d) Using multimedia projector while teaching students English language in the classroom.
- e) Motivating students to develop reading and writing skills daily.

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## **Appendix One**

### **Reading Skill: Questionnaire for Students**

1. **During reading a text do you think the meaning of unfamiliar words by using clues are difficult?**
  - a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Very often
  - d. Always
  
2. **Can you recall the relevant experience or associated knowledge while you are reading a text?**
  - a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Very often
  - d. Always
  
3. **Can you read closely to know details of a text?**
  - a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Very often
  - d. Always
  
4. **Can you read a large text fast to get an overall idea about it?**
  - a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Very often
  - d. Always
  
5. **Can you read and interpret graphics, charts, maps and tables?**
  - a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes

- c. Very often
  - d. Always
6. **Can you give title to a reading passage?**
- a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Very often
  - d. Always
7. **How long does it take for you to read a standard size page of English text?**
- a. About 25 minutes
  - b. About 20 minutes
  - c. About 15 minutes
  - d. About 10 minutes
8. **When you do not understand a long sentence, or part of a text, you–**
- a. Stop reading
  - b. Skip it
  - c. Seek help from your teacher
  - d. Read again
9. **What do you do when you find that the text you are reading is not interesting, or you are not getting what you want from the text?**
- a. Stop reading
  - b. Do nothing
  - c. Seek help from your teacher
  - d. Read again
10. **What difficulties do you face mainly in reading your English text?**
- a. Understanding word meaning
  - b. Understanding sentence meaning
  - c. Understanding organization
  - d. Understanding main idea

## Appendix Two

### Reading Skill: Questionnaire for Teachers

- 1. Can your students locate information by previewing the index or table of content of a book?**
  - a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Very often
  - d. Always
  
- 2. During reading a text can your students guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by using clues?**
  - a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Very often
  - d. Always
  
- 3. Can your students read closely to know details of a text?**
  - a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Very often
  - d. Always
  
- 4. Can your students read a large text fast to get an overall idea about it?**
  - a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Very often
  - d. Always
  
- 5. Can your students answer questions in English?**
  - a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Very often
  - d. Always
  
- 6. Can your students analyze long sentences?**
  - a. Never Rarely
  - b. Sometimes
  - c. Very often

d. Always

**7. Can your students give title to a reading passage?**

a. Never Rarely

b. Sometimes

c. Very often

d. Always

**8. Can your students find out the topic idea of a text?**

a. Never Rarely

b. Sometimes

c. Very often

d. Always

**9. Do you explain the background of the text before you start reading lesson?**

a. Never Rarely

b. Sometimes

c. Very often

d. Always

**10. Are you an active partner of the students in reading activities?**

a. Never Rarely

b. Sometimes

c. Very often

d. Always

**Appendix Three**

**Writing Skill: Questionnaire for Students**

**1. For how long do you practice writing in class?**

a. One whole class period.

b. Half a period.

c. Last ten minutes.

d. Not at all.

**2. Do you think the items in the writing component of the HSC English syllabus (e.g. paragraph, essay, letter, translation) are easy or difficult?**

a. Easy

- b. Difficult
- c. Very easy
- d. Very difficult

**3. Does your textbook help you in learning to write?**

- a. Always
- b. Not all
- c. Sometimes
- d. None of above

**4. In addition to your main text book do you use any other books to develop your writing skill?**

- a. Yes. I use
- b. No. I don't
- c. Sometimes I use
- d. None of above

**5. Do you do anything outside class to improve your written English?**

- a. Never Rarely
- b. Sometimes
- c. Very often
- d. Always

**6. What do you think about the teaching of English at your college?**

- a. Good
- b. Bad
- c. I am not satisfied
- d. I am satisfied.

**7. Do you think your English teacher is enough to develop your writing skill?**

- a. No. I don't think so
- b. Yes. I think so
- c. I need other teacher
- d. I think teacher needs practice for teaching English

**8. How can you develop your writing skill?**

- a. Dairy writing
- b. Scamming
- c. Article writing
- d. Grammar and Vocabulary helps me develop writing skill

**9. Does your English teacher practise writing skill in the classroom every day?**

- a. Never Rarely
- b. Sometimes
- c. Very often
- d. Always

**10. Do you know many students cannot secure a good score in the IELTS test lack of writing skill?**

- a. Yes. I think so
- b. No. I don't think so.
- c. They don't try to secure a good IELTS score.
- d. They try but fail.

**Appendix Four****Writing Skill: Questionnaire for Teachers****1. What do you think about the teaching of English at your college?**

- a. Teachers are expert in teaching English
- b. Teachers aren't expert in teaching English
- c. Teachers need training course to develop English writing skill
- d. None of above

**2. How important do you think it is for your students to learn to write in English?**

- a. Very important
- b. Less important
- c. Students need to write always
- d. Students need to write sometimes

**3. Why do you think it is important?**

- a. Students can't get a lucrative job without writing skill
- b. Students can get a lucrative job without writing skill



- c. Writing skill is a must for a real life situation
  - d. Writing is not important for non-native students
- 4. What do you perceive to be the main (English writing) needs of your students?**
- a. Students ought to practice writing always
  - b. Students oughtn't to practice writing
  - c. Students ought to practice listening always
  - d. Students ought to practice vocabulary
- 5. What do you think are some of the main problems your students face when they are asked to write in English?**
- a. Vocabulary
  - b. Grammar
  - c. Both a & b
  - d. English writing is very difficult
- 6. What are your views on the existing HSC English syllabus?**
- a. Good
  - b. Bad
  - c. Need to be modified and updated
  - d. Don't need to be modified and updated
- 7. Do you think the HSC English syllabus needs modification?**
- a. Yes. I think so
  - b. No. I don't think so
  - c. Old syllabus is better than new syllabus
  - d. New syllabus is better than old syllabus
- 8. What sort of difficulties do you think your teachers face in teaching English?**
- a. Vocabulary
  - b. Grammar
  - c. Writing skill
  - d. Speaking skill
- 9. What training support have you received to help the students with the teaching of English writing skills?**
- a. Yes. I have received ELT training course

- b. No. I haven't received ELT training course
- c. TOEFL training course
- d. IELTS training course

**10. Do you think instructions for writing skill in *English For Today* is appropriate for the students?**

- a. Yes. I think so
- b. No. I don't think so
- c. Instructions for writing skill in *English For Today* need to be modified
- d. Instructions for writing skill in *English For Today* don't need to be modified