The paper reports on a study that explored the issue of repetition of writing topics in the SSC examination in Bangladesh and students’ dependence of memorisation. In order to investigate to what extent writing topics are repeated in the SSC examination and what the students’ attitudes are towards memorisation of the writing items, the present quantitative study sampled 116 students through a questionnaire. Moreover, English question papers of seven years’ SSC examination were analysed through quantitative content analysis. The study found out that the same or similar writing topics were repeated frequently in the SSC examination, and as a washback effect of this, most of the students made a short list of the probable writing topics and memorised them from guidebooks. As a result, the writing items cannot test the ‘construct’ of the writing test which is the students’ writing ability; rather it tests the students’ ability to remember and reproduce. This discrepancy between the curriculum and the actual test testifies the lack of validity of the English writing tests in the SSC examination, since according to Lado (1961), a test is valid only if it measures what it is supposed to measure.

Keywords: Washback effect, memorisation, validity, writing

Introduction

In the National Education Policy 2010, several aims and objectives of education have been mentioned which basically emphasise on fostering creative and thinking faculties among the students. The policy also sets a
particular goal which is to “ensure the marginal competencies of learners at each level so that they are discouraged from rote learning, rather use their own thoughtfulness, imagination and urge for creativity” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 1). In the light of this policy, apparently a shift from the traditional memorisation based system took place in the education system of Bangladesh. Besides, skill based assessment which is popularly known as the Srijonshil Poddhoti, i.e. creative method, was introduced as a new form of assessment.

However, English language testing format especially that of the writing items, did not undergo much significant changes. In the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination, which is an achievement test for those who complete their secondary education, students need to answer different writing items which carry 90 to 100 marks out of 200 in two papers of English. In 2010, the major writing items in the SSC examination included paragraph, short composition, dialogue, report, formal and informal letters, story writing etc. Till 2018, several modifications have added email writing, describing graphs, and CV/resume writing in the list of the writing items. Therefore, it is found that paragraph, formal letter, story, dialogue, short composition etc. are still important parts of the writing test.

Nevertheless, the review of literature reveals gap between the curriculum and the actual assessment. Das et al. (2014) claimed that there is mismatch between what is intended to be taught and what is measured in the English language tests in Bangladesh. Sultana (2018) described this gap as lack of construct validity of the SSC examination. Sultana’s (2018) review of the SSC examination also pointed out that the SSC examination lacks content validity because some of the items in this exam demand memorisation or knowledge of forms over communicative skills. She also claimed that the fluctuations of the SSC results every year are the evidence of its lack of reliability.

Although the studies mentioned above point on the major shortcomings of the SSC examination, hardly any study deals with the issue of memorisation from the students’ perspective. More importantly, the root of the problem of memorisation is the repetition of the writing topics. Khan (1999) while discussing about the questions of the HSC examination had mentioned about the tradition of repeating examination questions every alternate year. However, hardly any recent study has demonstrated the frequency of this repetition in the SSC examination based on the analysis of
secondary data. To fill these gaps in literature, the current study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent are the same or similar writing topics repeated in the SSC examination?
2. How do the students master the writing topics for the SSC examination?

**Previous studies in Bangladeshi context**

A number of studies have been conducted in the Bangladeshi context on the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination and on its impact on the English language pedagogy. Khan (2010) conducted a small scale study on 34 teachers and examiners which aimed to explore their views regarding the status of assessment at the secondary and higher secondary level. She pointed out ample evidence of washback effect because both teachers and students were “hooked” to the practice of test tasks rather than developing academic language proficiency. Besides, Al Amin and Greenwood’s (2018) quantitative survey of the attitudes and perceptions of 216 secondary school English teachers from different regions of Bangladesh revealed that 30% of the teachers acknowledged that they did not teach portions of textbook that they considered less important for examination. The teachers also opined that if there were no exam, their teaching style would have been different.

Another significant washback effect of the SSC examination is the students’ orientation into memorisation and dependence on guidebooks. Rahman et al. (2006, p.33) felt a great need to recognise the factor that “although assessment is professed to be skills-based, SSC tests still remain related to content and amenable to memorisation.” In this vein, Hossain (2009) pointed out that one of the outcomes of the prevailing SSC examination system was dependency on rote learning. Again, all the participants in Khan’s (2010) study opined that teachers used to predict a list of topics and students memorised paragraphs and compositions for the SSC examination. Similarly, Al Amin and Greenwood (2018) presented the story of Priya, a sixteen year old student in a village school, who was found to be following her English Language Learning Guide (Saha, 2013) and a collection of photocopied papers containing paragraphs, emails, formal and informal letters to prepare for the SSC examination.
Apart from Bangladesh, in other Asian contexts such as China, Pakistan, Nepal, Iran, Thailand, Indonesia, different high stakes examinations have caused negative washback effects. The teaching and learning environment is variously affected by the examinations in China for example. Suen and Yu’s (2006) study highlighted the chronic consequences of high-stakes testing on test-takers. They listed four major consequences of high-stakes tests which included: (i) a lack of creativity in favor of memorising and reproducing a model performance, (ii) a focus on test taking skills and tricks instead of learning a course’s content, (iii) cheating, and (iv) a variety of psychological effects. Their study also revealed that these tests created different kinds of anxiety among the students. Likewise, Kennedy and Lui’s (2013) study concluded that both the students and the teachers perceived that a major role of the final year English class was to prepare the students for the Beijing Matriculation English Test (BMET); students’ improvement of English skills is of lesser importance. It was also found that the nature of the BMET might strongly influence teaching activities in final-year secondary school English classrooms. Sit (2013) also critiqued the examination-oriented learning of the Chinese students and argued that in China learning for exams is still dependent on memorisation.

Similarly, students’ selective studies and dependence on memorisation were the major washback effects found in Pakistan. Christie and Afzaal (as cited in Khattak, 2012) and Shah and Afzaal (as cited in Khattak, 2012) pointed out an increase in the incidence of the recurrence of questions. They also found that selected material is frequently tested in public examinations of Pakistan. As a result, students got orientated towards selective studies. In the same way, Khan (2011) collected data from the questionnaire and focus group interview with University of Education postgraduate student and concluded that the Board Examination influenced the classroom assessment, and the Matriculation Level students memorised the essays and stories from their textbooks and reproduced them. Siddiqui (2007) also pointed out that students in Pakistan did not practice creative writing in the classroom because the teachers focused more on stereotypical questions set in the board examination. He argued that readymade answers to short stories, essays, plays etc. were memorised by the students because the examination required memorisation and reproduction. Similarly, Rehmani (2003) identified that teachers teach for testing, rather than for learning. The assessment system of examinations reinforced approaches to teaching that reward memorisation. The more the reproduction the better and higher were the scores or marks.
awarded by the examiners. In fact, memorisation was measured extensively that made the assessment system deficient of fostering rote-learning. Furthermore, Jilani (2019), based on her experience as a teacher of English in a representative high school in Pakistan reflected on the impact of high school public exam and held this exam responsible for the production of guide books. Overall, Khattak (2012) explained that a review of 29 separate government and non-governmental reports and policy papers declared the public examination and assessment system as devoid of validity, reliability and credibility”.

Similar situation was evident in Iran, Nepal, Thailand and Indonesia. Hemmati and Soltanpour (2014) collected both the quantitative and qualitative data from 522 students. They pointed out that the study methods of the majority of the participants were influenced by the final exams. Bhandari (2017) argued that the Nepalese examination plays a role in encouraging the memorisation and repetition of students rather than fostering their creativity in learning. The contents of the textbooks were memorised by the students. Students did not get ample time for preparing for the examination and thus were threatened to memorise the whole lessons taught in the classroom. This also created anxiety in learning. Next, Sundayana et al. (2018) investigated the perceptions of 200 ninth grade Thai and Indonesian students regarding the washback effects of the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) and Ujian Nasional (UN) examinations in their multi-case study by using triangulation design. The results revealed that in both cases, the focus of the participants were to learn on contents and skills that were likely to appear in the national exams. Performing well in the tests was of greater priority for them than improving their English ability. Moreover, the students had high anxiety during the test preparations.

**Theoretical framework**

The findings of the current study are interpreted based on the Washback Hypothesis and the concept of validity. Shohamy (as cited in Iyer, 2005) defines washback effect as the impact that tests have on teaching and learning. According to Bailey (as cited in Iyer, 2005, p.88-91) washback is “The influence of testing on teaching and learning”. By washback Biggs (as cited in Iyer, 2005, p.88-91) intends to mean that “testing controls not only the curriculum but also teaching methods and students’ learning strategies”. The most frequently quoted definition of washback is given by Anderson and Wall (1993): “the Washback Hypothesis seems to assume that teachers and
learners do things they would not necessarily otherwise do because of the test‖ (p.241). Moreover, according to Chapman and Sybder Jr (2000), tests that have important consequences will have washback. In other words, the test that is used to compare and rank individuals or institutions is likely to have washback effects. To sum up the way the whole teaching and learning environment is influenced by a test is washback effect. The Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination always has a number of important consequences. For example, a student’s entrance in the higher secondary level, a school’s performance as an institution etc. depend on this exam. Therefore, undoubtedly the SSC examination is a high stakes exam and the Washback framework is rationally applicable to this study. However, a test is said to be valid if it measures accurately what it is intended to measure (Lado, 1961). Hughes (2003, p. 26) states that in recent years the term construct validity has been increasingly used to refer to the general, overarching notion of validity because language tests are created in order to measure such essentially theoretical constructs, for example, ‘reading ability’, ‘fluency in speaking’, ‘control of grammar’, and so on.

Methodology of research

The present study is a quantitative research. For data collection a total number of 116 students were sampled. Among these students, 9.5% (N=11) had passed their SSC in 2016, 36.2% (N=42) in 2015, 34.5% (N=40) in 2014, 12.1% (N=14) in 2013, 2.6% (N=3) in 2012, 3.4% (N=4) in 2011 and 1.7% (N=2) of the participants had passed their SSC in 2010. The participants were selected by probability sampling, i.e. by selecting individuals from the population who are representative of that population. According to Cresswell (2012, p.142), “this is the most rigorous form of sampling in quantitative research because the investigator can claim that the sample is representative of the population and, as such, can make generalizations to the population”. Moreover, seven years’(2010-2012 and 2015-2018) English board questions of the SSC examination were collected as sample for analysis in order to find out if the same or similar writing topics have been repeated or not.

As research instrument a questionnaire (Appendix-1) was used. The questionnaire was divided in two sections. The first section contained some demographic questions including gender, age, the year they had passed the SSC examination. The second section contained nine items to measure the students’ attitudes towards memorisation of the writing items for the SSC examination. Five items were designed on a five-point Likert scale ranging
from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The responses were rated as strongly agree=5, agree=4, neutral=3, disagree=2, strongly disagree=1.

One item was also designed by using the five-point Likert scale ranging from always to never given after each statement. The responses were rated as always=5, usually=4, sometimes=3, often=2, and never=1. Among the rest of the items two were designed on two point scale and one item was designed on three point scale. Since this questionnaire was not adopted or adapted, rather was developed by the researchers, the reliability of the questionnaire was determined by Cronbach’s alpha using SPSS. The Cronbach’s alpha of the items was initially 0.638. To raise the estimate, one item with poor item-total correlation was deleted. Reliability was again calculated and this time Cronbach’s alpha score was 0.692 which is very close to 0.70. However, Rattray and Jones (2007, p. 237) opine that one must keep the original research questions in mind when finalizing a questionnaire and “retain items” that are thought to reflect the underlying theoretical domains of the questionnaire despite poor psychometric analysis. On the basis of this opinion, the one deleted item was retained because it was central to the research questions of the current study. The quantitative data generated from the questionnaire survey were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations) were calculated for responses of each variable.

The secondary data were analysed by using quantitative content analysis. Each writing topic was coded. For example, the paragraph topic that came in Dhaka Board in 2017 was coded 1. Accordingly, that of the 2016 was coded 2. If the paragraph topic of Dhaka Board 2015 was similar to that of Dhaka Board 2017, it was again coded 1. Thus, the frequency of the writing topics were calculated.

Results

**Frequency of the repetition of the same or similar writing topics in the SSC examination**

In order to find out to what extent, according to the students, the same or similar topics are repeated in the SSC examination, descriptive statistics were employed on item-1 of the questionnaire. The results are presented below.
The descriptive statistics results as in Figure-1 showed the students’ responses about the frequency of the repetition of the writing topics in the SSC examination. The results showed that 8.60% participants opined that the writing topics in the SSC examination are always repeated and 42.20% of the participants thought that the topics were repeated often. On the other hand, only 2.60% students thought that the topics were never repeated.

In order to investigate whether the students’ perceptions are reliable or not, seven years’ (2010-2012 and 2015-2016) English questions of the SSC examination were analysed. The results of the analysis are presented below.

**Table 1.** Five most frequently repeated short composition writing topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. of times appeared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A journey you have made</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Plan of Life</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Hobby</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duties of a student</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The season you like most</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-1 shows the five short composition writing topics which have been repeated most frequently in the SSC examination. Here, the topic “A journey you have made” has come in the SSC exam for eleven times. “Your future
plan of life” has appeared ten times, “Your hobby” seven times, “Duties of a student” six times and “The season you like most” has appeared five times in the SSC examination within seven years.

**Table 2.** Five most frequently repeated paragraph writing topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. of times appeared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Load Shedding</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Magazine</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life of a farmer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to a book fair</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic jam</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-2 shows the five paragraph writing topics which have been repeated most frequently in the SSC examination. Here, the topic “Load shedding” has appeared in the SSC exam for seven times. “A school magazine” has appeared seven times, “Life of a farmer” six times, “Visit to a book fair” five times and “Traffic jam” has appeared five times.

**Table 3.** Five most frequently repeated application writing topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. of times appeared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting up a canteen</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permission for study tour</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing common room facilities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimonial</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full free studentship/ help from the poor fund</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-3 shows the five application writing topics which have been repeated most frequently in the SSC examination. Here, the topic “setting up a canteen” has appeared in the SSC exam for nine times. “Permission for study tour” has appeared eight times, “increasing common room facilities” five times, “testimonial” five times and “full free studentship” has appeared four times.

**Table 4: Five most frequently repeated story writing topics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No. of times appeared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thirsty Crow</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer and his sons</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayezid Bostami</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 shows the five story writing topics which have been repeated most frequently in the SSC examination. Here, the story of the thirsty crow has appeared in the SSC exam for seven times. Accordingly, the story of the farmer and his sons has appeared five times, the story of the dedication of Bayzid Bostami has appeared four times, the story of the two friends and the bear has appeared four times and the story of the liar cowboy has appeared three times within seven years’ examination. Therefore, it is found that the students have firm belief that writing topics are frequently repeated in the SSC examination, and the English question papers of different years also reflect the same.

**Students’ approaches to mastering the writing topics for the SSC examination**

In order to find out the students’ approaches to mastering the writing topics for the SSC examination, descriptive statistics were employed on each item of the questionnaire. The results are presented below:

**Figure 2:** Students’ preparation for answering the writing items

The descriptive statistics results as in Figure-2 showed the students’ responses about their preparation for answering the writing items. The results
showed that 69% (F=80) of the participants prepared for the writing items by memorisation. On the contrary, only 31% (F=36) of the participants prepared on their own.

![Figure 3. Sources for memorising](image)

The descriptive statistics results as in Figure-3 showed the students’ responses about the sources from which they memorised different writing topics. The results showed that 81.25% (F=65) of the participants who memorised writing items, memorised them from guide books. 8.75% (F=7) of them memorised from materials derived from the Internet. Finally, 10% (F=8) of them memorised from other sources except the aforementioned two sources.

**Table 5**: The students’ major approaches to mastering the writing topics for the SSC examination (responses are shown in percentages and Means in descending order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>For SSC examination, I had prepared or got a list/ suggestion of probable writing topics.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>For school</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Repetition of Writing Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>examinations, I had a fixed syllabus in which writing topics for exam were given.</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Writing topics in SSC were predictable.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Before the SSC exam, I was tensed whether I would get paragraphs etc. common or not.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I had a tendency that I would get paragraph, letter etc. common in the SSC exam.</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5= strongly agree, 4= agree, 3= neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree, M=mean, SD= standard deviation

The results in Table-5 show that item-5 ‘preparing/ getting a ‘suggestion’ of probable writing topics’ had the highest mean (M=3.93) where 77.6 % (aggregated results of strongly agree and agree) of the participants agreed that before the SSC examination they had prepared/ got a list of probable writing topics. Item-4 ‘having fixed writing topics on school syllabus’ had the second highest mean (M=3.87) where more than seventy five percent participants agreed that they had a syllabus in school in which fixed writings topics for examination were given., Although item-9 ‘tendency of getting writing topics common’ had the lowest mean (M=3.55), more than fifty percent students agreed that they had a tendency of getting writing items common in the SSC examination.
Figure 4. Actuality of getting writing topics common

The descriptive statistics results as in Figure-4 showed the students’ responses about the actuality of getting writing topics common in the SSC examination. The results showed that 84.5% (F=98) of the respondents actually got writing topic ‘common’ in the SSC exam whereas only 15.5% (F=18) of the respondents remarked that writing topics in the SSC examination were not common for them.

Discussion

The study indicated that most of the participant students who had passed the SSC examination after 2010 believed that the writing items of the SSC examination were predictable, and accordingly they either made or got a list of probable writing topics before the examination. Then they used to prepare themselves for answering the writing items through memorisation, especially from guide books and sometimes from the internet or other sources. Only a small percentage of the students prepared it on their own. The students also had an expectation that they would get the writing topics “common” from their list, which later on happened to be the case as more than eighty percent of the students actually got the topics common. Thus the students considered that the writing topics in the examination are repeated frequently.

The secondary data, seven years’ English question papers of the SSC examination, also confirmed the students’ assumption about the repetition of
the writing topics. It was found that one short composition writing topic had been repeated for eleven times in different boards. Similarly, a paragraph writing topic had been repeated for seven times, an application writing topic had been repeated for nine times and finally, a story writing topic had been repeated for seven times. Based on the findings above, it can be deduced that there is a connection between the repetition of the writing topics and the students’ orientation to memorisation of the writing items from guidebooks.

The findings further suggest that the repetition of writing topics influenced the school syllabus and classroom teaching, because most of the students opined that their school syllabus contained limited number of writing topics. This argument is supported by Khan (2010), Kennedy (2013), Khattak (2012), Siddiqui (2007) and Rehmani (2013) who in their respective studies in Bangladeshi, Chinese and Pakistani contexts came up with similar findings that teaching strategies were influenced by the examinations. In other words, most of them found that teachers actually taught to test.

The consequence of washback effect is that it made the students oriented to guidebooks. Since the students knew that preparing only a limited number of paragraphs, essays, etc. could bring them a good score, they prepared a short list of topics to study from different sources. This finding goes with the same study by Khan (2010) who confirmed this trend of making list of topics. Al Amin and Greenwood (2018) and Jilani (2011) also had similar findings that the students highly depended on guidebooks and notes.

Linked with the former finding, it was also discovered that the repetition of the writing topics was responsible for creating an anxiety amongst the learners. The students did not study anything beyond their suggestion and thus remained in anxiety whether they would get the writing topics common or not. The studies by Kennedy (2013) and Sundayana et al. (2018) also testify that the students of Pakistan, Thailand and Indonesia suffered from similar anxiety due to the public examinations.

Finally and most importantly, the students’ learning strategy or the method of study was found to be influenced negatively because of the repetition. As the students were conscious that only a number of writing topics could appear in the SSC examination, they became reluctant about writing on their own. For example, the most frequently repeated story writing topic was the story of a thirsty crow, which is a popular story and everyone knows what the ending should be. Moreover, due to its frequent repetition, this story is available in the guidebooks. As a result, the students memorise
this story well from the guidebooks so that they can get good marks rather than writing on their own. Khan (1999) critiqued this trend of memorisation of writing items arguing that memorisation neither develops writing skills nor writing abilities. According to her, encouragement of memorisation as a strategy to cope with writing is “unfair, misleading and demotivating, as it can never help students to learn the art of composing” (p.221). This finding is also in line with a number of studies. Sultana (2018) and Rahman et al. (2006) pointed out that SSC tests still remain amenable to memorisation and Hossain (2009) claimed that one of the outcomes of the SSC examination is the students’ dependency on rote learning. Similarly, Suen and Yu (2006) and Wa Sit (2013) found that the major consequences of high-stakes tests in China made students dependent on memorisation. Likewise, Khan’s (2011) Pakistan based study revealed that the Matriculation Level students memorise the essays and stories from their textbooks and reproduce them. Bhandari (2017) also claimed that the Nepalese examination had a role in promoting the memorisation.

As regards the question of validity, it is already clear from the above discussion that the students memorised certain writing topics for the SSC examination. Since more than eighty percent students got the writing topics common and since most of the students did not prepare for the examination on their own, it can be claimed that the possibility of scoring high in the writing part does not depend on how skilfully the student can write. Rather, it depends on how many topics the student studied. The one who would study or memorise the maximum number of topics, the chances of his/her getting the topic common will be maximum for them. Therefore, the students’ ability to write is not assessed in the SSC examination, rather it tests the students’ ability to memorise and reproduce. Khan (1999) argued that the purpose of writing test is not to test the ability to copy and reproduce. In addition, according to the National Curriculum 2012, a writing test in the secondary level should assess “students’ ability to write correct English of appropriate level for expressing ideas, thoughts, feelings, emotions” (National Textbook and Curriculum Board, 2012, p. 81). This proves that there is a discrepancy between the curriculum and the test. Thus there is a lack of construct validity in the SSC examination (Lado, 1961).

Conclusion

The current study investigated to what extent writing topics are repeated in the SSC examination and if the students can predict and memorise the
writing items. Analysis of seven years’ board questions of English proved that the same or similar writing topics are repeated frequently in the SSC examination. As a result, students as well as teachers could predict the writing topics for the terminal examination. Before the SSC examination as well the students studied selected some topics, prepared a suggestion, and memorised paragraphs, short compositions, stories etc. on those writing topics from different sources, especially from guide books. Notably, most of the students got the writing items common. This scenario is having adverse backwash effect on the whole English language pedagogy and even on the students’ learning strategies. Students get intensely inclined to memorisation. Their writing ability does not improve at all; and this situation is making the validity of the SSC examination questionable. However, the results of the current study have important implications in this regard. Firstly, it will inform the test designers about the negative washback effects of the SSC examination. Secondly, teachers will be informed regarding how students are oriented to memorisation. Finally, the government and policy makers will be informed about the ground level reality regarding the implementation of the education policy and national curriculum.

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**Appendix**

**Research Questionnaire**

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Dear participant,

This questionnaire is to find out to what extent the writing topics in the SSC examination are repeated and what are the students’ attitudes towards memorisation of the writing items for the SSC examination. Your information will be kept confidential. Please give your honest opinion.

Your age:

Your gender: □ Male □ Female


**Please read the following statements/questions carefully and tick(✓) the appropriate choices that reflect your response.**

1. How frequently do you think writing topics are repeated in the SSC examination?
   □ Always □ Often □ Usually □ Rarely □ Never

2. While in school, how did you study paragraphs, letters and other writing items?
   □ Prepared on my own □ Memorised

3. If you had memorised, from what sources did you memorise?
   □ Guide books □ Internet □ Others
4. For school examinations, I had a fixed syllabus in which writing topics for exam were given.  
☐ Strongly Agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Neutral  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly Disagree

5. For SSC examination, I had prepared or got a list/suggestion of probable writing topics.  
☐ Strongly Agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Neutral  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly Disagree

6. Writing topics in SSC were predictable.  
☐ Strongly Agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Neutral  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly Disagree

7. I had a tendency that I would get paragraph, letter etc. common in the SSC exam.  
☐ Strongly Agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Neutral  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly Disagree

8. Before the SSC exam, I was tensed whether I would get write topics common or not.  
☐ Strongly Agree  ☐ Agree  ☐ Neutral  ☐ Disagree  ☐ Strongly Disagree

9. Did you actually get some writing items common in your SSC exam?  
   Yes  ☐ No