**English-in-Education Policy and Social Divide: Voices from Bangladeshi Universities**

**Abstract**

This research examines the aftermaths of English-in-education policy in Bangladesh and its impact on the social disparities present within the higher education framework. It utilises an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design representing the perceptions held by students relating to factors such as educational access, privilege, language proficiency, and perceived inequalities. Data were collected through both quantitative and qualitative modes and the findings portray the complex socio-academic ramifications of English in Bangladesh. Through a comparative analysis, the study finds that students from Bangla-medium backgrounds face discrimination in terms of linguistic insecurity, occupational concern, and academic anxiety. While the existing policies aspire to sustain an equal access to English through various directives, the social divide is deepened through institutional hierarchies and the complexities of exposure.

**Keywords: English-in-education policy, social divide, higher education, language inequality in Bangladesh, mixed-methods research**

**1. Introduction**

The existence and function of English in Bangladesh has long been an interesting and complex domain of investigation. While it welcomes multidimensional layers of scrutiny, the juncture between language and power gets a remarkable amount of attention like the mechanism of actionable forces relating to imperialism and colonisation. Studies suggest that the intensively marketed demand for English competence among the middle class, tagged with the emergence of private English medium schools (EMS) in the 1990s, firmly established English as a medium of instruction (MoI) along with Bangla (Hamid & Erling, 2015). Eventually, EMSs emerged as emblems of socio-economic privilege, educational opportunities, and social advancement that started the disruption in the local knowledge system and started becoming a threat towards the propagation of mother tongue-based education in Bangladesh (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Alam (2021) believes that these schools are distinctively catered for the urban elites and serve as the heralds for founding, permeating, and repurposing the age-old morals and ideologies rooted in colonial beliefs and notions of domination. Through interrupting the local knowledge flow and cultural artefacts, these schools give birth to another problematic aspect of learning management relating to the disparity between English-medium and Bangla-medium students where the former enjoys access to international educational and career prospects and the latter struggles with minimal support from the authorities (Hamid, 2009). In terms of tertiary education, Sultana (2014) upholds that English entered the system through the institutionalisation of private universities in the 1990s that strategically designated English as the MoI to attract international students and conform to academic standards. Such an imbalanced status of English furthers the social disparity between the rural and city schools that entangles the learners in the process leading to the creation of glossophobia and foreign language anxiety. Despite the government's efforts to rectify these discrepancies via policy measures, including the implementation of English as a compulsory subject from the primary level in 1992 and various English-in-education directives, these inconsistent outcomes affirm that resilient steps are yet to be materialised in this regard. Hamid and Honan (2012) believe that the system itself contributes to the transmission of this discrimination as it fails to maintain the quality of English instruction across all levels and domains. The national education policy (NEP 2010) aimed to enhance English competence throughout society to boost the economy and the status of higher education. Questionably, English has become significant for Bangladesh considering several factors. e.g., global economy, information technology, trade, and employment, though it has a detrimental impact on Bangla (Alam, 2018). Along with NEP 2010, international coercion has resulted in additional regulations advocating for an increased focus on English at all levels, discursively reducing the significance of Bangla in primary and secondary education (Ali & Hamid, 2022). These directives portray the persistent conflict between the necessity to maintain Bangla as a symbolic entity of national identity and the internalisation of English as a global language of opportunity, access, and mobility (Chowdhury & Sarkar, 2018). These gaps are aggravated by the emergence of private tutoring, expensive learning centres, and coaching facilities that serve as an alternative education system for individuals who can afford supplementary English instruction beyond the school environment (Alam, 2023). Under these pressing conditions, there have been continuous demands for more extensive teacher training programs and curricular revisions to enhance the quality of English language instruction in Bangla-medium schools (BMS), particularly targeted towards the rural underprivileged ones (Hamid, 2020; Imam, 2005). However, the intensified inclination towards English as the MoI in higher education has faced criticism pertaining to linguistic human rights, imperialism, and consumerism. This study posits that it has sidelined the students from Bangla-medium backgrounds, who frequently find it challenging to meet the requirements an English-medium environment. Even after learning English as a mandatory subject for 12 years, the system fails to equip the Bangla-medium students with the necessary skills to survive at the tertiary levels (Akteruzzaman & Sattar, 2020; Rahman & Pandian, 2018). This has prompted discussions regarding the inevitability of translingual and mother tongue-based pedagogical models that enable students to pursue higher education in a more comprehensive manner diminishing their linguistic obstacles to academic achievement and skill development (Akteruzzaman & Anwar, 2021).

Hence, the existing discrepancies between English-medium and Bangla-medium education, primarily relating to access to resources, mentorship, and opportunities, present significant challenges concerning equity, social justice, and inclusion within the education system. As Bangladesh confronts the intimidating aspects of globalisation and mercantile economy, the implication of English in education will always remain a critical issue, integrating socio-economic mobility, national identity, and global economy. The linguistic marketplace of Bangladesh is deeply influenced by the ongoing prevalence of English in the education system, despite the official language being Bangla. With approximately 98% of the Bangla-speaking population making it a monolingual nation, English remains a symbol of elitism, uplifted social status, and access to global opportunities owing to the proliferation of neoliberal ideologies (Ali & Hamid, 2022). English is considered a key determinant of success in academic and professional fields, where studies indicate that English proficiency can significantly impact students’ career prospects (Mahmud & Kenayathulla, 2017). However, the divide between EMSs and BMSs remains profound considering the significant gaps in access to quality education. Students in EMSs, which often cater to more affluent families, have access to better educational resources, including English as the MoI from an early age, while those in BMSs face greater challenges in acquiring the language necessary for success in globalised environments and tertiary-level institutions that demand a certain level of English expertise. This divide perpetuates educational and social inequality leading to a degraded form of language attitude and determination owing to the fact that English-medium students are equipped with the skills and exposure essential for competing in the international job market and participating in global economy. Bangla-medium students face linguistic insecurity as a result of their perceived deficiencies in English that eventually emanates educational anxiety and career concerns. This research claims that these inconsistencies do not arise from the learners’ comprehensive capacities or intellectual abilities, rather a decisive method of systematic devaluation is in action that entraps the learners from within. The public schools in Bangladesh face several pressing issues, e.g., overcrowded classrooms, shortage of teachers, and poor administration, that pave the way for a sullied notion of English. In the process, the language meant to empower the learners becomes a burden for them and it takes a more alarming shape in the tertiary levels where English enjoys an omnipotent status. Such a condition becomes a form of social divide where access to English acts like a definitive factor and this study explores the above-mentioned junctures through the following research questions using a mixed-methods framework.

1. To what extent do tertiary-level students with a Bangla-medium background experience linguistic insecurity compared to their counterparts from EMSs?

2. How does this perceived linguistic insecurity influence their observations and confidence regarding career prospects and future professional opportunities in Bangladesh?

3. In what ways might this linguistic disparity contribute to educational anxiety among Bangla-medium students at the tertiary level?

Under the mixed methods approach, these questions are explored using the convergent parallel mixed methods (CPMM) design following an explanatory sequential framework (ESF). The fundamental idea of CPMM is to integrate and compare findings throughout the interpretation phase, during which researchers can identify convergence, divergence, or interconnectedness between insights obtained from each data source. This integration can offer a more systematic, diverse, and subtle comprehension of the sophisticated phenomena commonly seen in educational research (Johnson et al., 2007). Creswell and Creswell (2018) claim that ESF is highly efficient in diagnosing a specific situation as it helps in studying “… the data at a more detailed level by using qualitative follow-up data collection to help explain quantitative results, such as a survey” (p. 209). Albert (2023) locates CPMM, also known as concurrent triangulation, as a reliable technique in educational research that can help investigators unveil the potential variables, take the findings to a more resilient level, and clarify various connected elements, e.g. attitude, social components, and affective factors. CPMM works efficiently in educational settings since such domains are complicated in nature and necessitate detailed interactions among instructors, learners, and broader issues relating to learning (Symbaluk, 2019). While this philosophy guided the design level of this study, each phase was accomplished following pertinent approaches and individual frameworks were incorporated as the researcher saw fit. Data collection and analysis were completed following the explanatory unidirectional approach (EUA), which is constructive in gathering more insights related to a notion or response, as different types of data can mutually aid in building the greater picture of any context. Fetters et al. (2013) assert that EUA is an exploratory approach but can take the findings further in the successive phase, making it explanatory. This helps overcome one of the major limitations of exploratory research, which sometimes discovers the problem without going deeper into the context. The follow-up qualitative sessions can also illustrate various elements and contextual factors that could have been overlooked in the quantitative findings or had an impact on the responses (Subedi, 2016). Therefore, EUA can benefit studies exclusively directed towards educational phenomena, enhancing the overall design and showcasing a sensitive investigation for performing Mixed-methods research (MMR) based investigations.

**2. Methodology**

This study adapted the framework from Henderson and Green (2014), which involves five stages, as illustrated in Table 1. This design is sequential in nature where each step is conducted separately, and the findings are integrated at the final phase, giving a holistic appreciation of events. Each stage was supplemented with separate procedures and outcomes. The successive sections detail the entire research design with appropriate justification for the validity and reliability of each measure.

|  |
| --- |
| **Stage 1: Quantitative data collection** |
| Procedure | Outcome |
| a. Locating the variables and hypotheses formationb. Development of instrumentc. Planning for sampling and peer consultationd. Distribution of questionnaires | a. Numeric datab. Demographic observationc. Validity of designd. Enhancement of the instrument  |
| **Stage 2: Quantitative data analysis** |
| Procedure | Outcome |
| a. SPSS data analysis (Descriptive) i. Demographic data  ii. Frequency of responsesb. SPSS data analysis (Inferential) i. Nonparametric One-Sample Chi-Square test  ii. Probability of occurrence test iii. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality iv. One-Sample t test with computed variables v. Reliability test with Cronbach's alpha | a. Descriptive result of responsesb. Hypothesis testing resultsc. Reliability analysis outcomed. Discovery of statistically significant p-value indicating positive correlation  |
| **Stage 3: Qualitative data collection** |
| Procedure | Outcome |
| a. Redesigning the instrument b. Development of interview and FGD protocolsc. Documentation of responses | a. 172 participants interested in follow-up interviews and FGDsb. 12 interviews with one random participant from each universityc. Two FGDs with six participants in each session from different universitiesd. Interview and FGD notes |
| **Stage 4: Qualitative data analysis** |
| Procedure | Outcome |
| a. Coding of variablesb. Thematic content analysisc. Cross-checking the variablesd. Exploring additional variablese. Cross-matching quantitative and qualitative findings | a. Emergence of numerous micro factorsb. Confirmation of factors explored and observed during the quantitative stage |
| **Stage 5: Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings** |
| Procedure | Outcome |
| a. Triangulation of findingsb. Integration of both findings c. Explanation of confirmed factors | a. Discussion of integrated findings b. Recommendations c. Future direction |

Table 1: Research framework following the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Adapted from Henderson & Green, 2014, p. 426)

**Stage 1: Quantitative data collection**

Three hypotheses were formed responding to each research question, as detailed below, along with variables. Each hypothesis was tested to evaluate a specific aspect of English in the study context, which are linguistic insecurity (H1), occupational concern (H2), and educational anxiety (H3). All the coded factors assessed the correlation between these three and English in the context of tertiary education in Bangladesh.

**Hypothesis 1:**

**Null Hypothesis (H0):** No significant difference will be observed in the realisation of insecurities relating to the dominance of English at the university level between the two groups, Bangla-medium and English-medium students.

**Alternative Hypothesis (H1):** Students with a Bangla-medium background will report a statistically significant higher level of linguistic insecurity than students with an English-medium background.

Due to the prevalence of English and socioeconomic coercion towards Bangla, the teaching system itself could create a sense of subtractive attitude in the learners’ minds. In a university setting where English is the dominant language for classroom lectures, textbooks, and in-class activities, students with a better grip on English might nurture a perception of confidence and proficiency. This could lead to the internalisation of linguistic incompetence by the students coming from Bangla-medium backgrounds. H1 was designed to evaluate the learners’ sense of linguistic insecurity arising from their access to English at the secondary level. Their schooling type was taken as the independent variable, and the coded factors, e.g. thinking English to be more rewarding in learning, getting embarrassed about L1 effects, and thinking Bangla to be less complex, were considered dependent variables.

**Hypothesis 2:**

**H0:** No significant association exists between the student’s belief in English proficiency and the possibility of securing a career.

**H2:** Students taught in Bangla-medium schools are more likely to report that English proficiency is indispensable for a decent job.

As discussed in the introduction, students from the national schools taught with Bangla are prone to experiencing societal and regressive pressure to master English. They might take English as the only opportunity to access career goals and incentives, which affects their attitude towards the importance of Bangla. H2 tested the connection the participants established between their level of English and the possibility of a better career, creating a perception of occupational anxiety. Their medium of instruction was taken as the independent variable, and responses relating to the essentiality of English for a career, e.g. existing beliefs, familial practices, and social pressure, remained the dependent variables.

**Hypothesis 3:**

**H0:** There is no significant correlation between students' self-perception of English proficiency and their interest towards more university courses to be offered in Bangla.

**H3:** Students who think their English proficiency is lower compared to their peers from English-medium schools will express a stronger desire for more university courses to be offered in Bangla.

Students might take a defensive attitude because they struggled with English over a sustained period, taking it as a barrier to academic achievements. There is a possibility that they would expect a shift towards Bangla or mixing Bangla with English in terms of in-class instruction, T-S interaction, and materials to increase their academic performance and establish educational equity. The realisation of their own English proficiency was recorded as the independent variable, and the factors influencing their desire for the inclusion of Bangla in the learning process, e.g. access to knowledge, gaining theoretical understanding, and increased collaboration with their peers academically, were the dependent variables.

A Likert-scale questionnaire was developed for quantitative data collection where each hypothesis was coded into 10 AMTB-type (Attitude/Motivation Test Battery) statements (Gardner, 2010). The instrument had 30 items in total, each containing 5 Likert-type points. Two anonymous experts were consulted to review the issues relating to the validity of the instrument, cross-check for any unclear wording or dubious phrases, estimate completion times, and refine the instruments if needed. Three new items and two new subcategories were added, and two items deemed to be ambiguous were rephrased following their suggestions. The instrument had five sections where the first one stated the thesis title, a brief overview of the study, the researcher’s details, the purpose of the survey, the expected time to finish answering the questions, filtering questions based on consensual responses indicating the respondent’s interest in filling up the form and attending follow-up interviews and discussions, and a note of undertaking. Demographic and background information was collected in the next segment about the participants’ study discipline, level of study, educational institute, gender, secondary schooling background, medium of instruction in the secondary school, medium of instruction in the current institution, career plan, self-rated English proficiency, and self-rated financial status. 10 items addressing the variables of H1 appeared in the third page designed to measure participants’ attitude towards English from educational, social, and cultural perspectives. The interactive acculturation model of lived languages (Bourhis et al., 2007) was intensively consulted before developing items for this section. Factors contributing to the assessment of English as an essential element in their future career were presented on the fourth page. The last part included the items that evaluated their interest towards changing the medium of instruction to Bangla or mixing Bangla with English with possible justifications.

This study was conducted in Chattogram, the second-largest city in Bangladesh. UGC lists 15 universities in this city classifying four as public (University of Chittagong - CU, Chittagong University of Engineering & Technology - CUET, Chittagong Veterinary & Animal Sciences University - CVASU, and Chittagong Medical University - CMU), 10 as private (University of Science & Technology Chittagong - USTC, International Islamic University Chittagong - IIUC, BGC Trust University Bangladesh - BGCTUB, Premier University - PUC, East Delta University - EDU, Port City International University - PCIU, Chittagong Independent University - CIU, University of Creative Technology Chittagong - UCTC, Southern University Bangladesh - SUB, and Chattogram BGMEA University of Fashion & Technology - CBUFT), and one as international (Asian University for Women - AUW). Data collection was operated in 12 universities except CUET, CVASU, and CMU. These are specialised institutions that had the possibility of a low coverage rate with less potential for representativeness and were not included in the process. Students from the remaining 12 universities were selected from various departments across diversified categories regarding gender, study programme, socioeconomic background, and secondary school type. Printed questionnaires were distributed among the participants. The researcher visited 04 locations in person and took help from colleagues working in other universities to collect data from the rest. Informed consent was obtained before the commencement of each survey and the participants’ anonymity and confidentiality of identity were ensured. 360 copies of questionnaires, 30 for each university, were printed and distributed, of which 284 surveys were returned. Still, 236 reports were finally considered and analysed as the remaining ones were either incomplete or the respondents chose not to answer the questionnaire.

**Stage 2: Quantitative data analysis**

These accounts were tabulated and analysed using IBM SPSS 27 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics were used to identify and discuss the frequency of responses by presenting individual values along with mean, median, mode, and standard deviation. Inferential statistics were applied to investigate each hypothesis to look for statistically significant differences (p-value) in results using nonparametric one-sample tests, and the asymptotic significance values derived from Chi-square tests were observed to examine the relationship between variables and further the discussion relating to the respective hypothesis (Beatty, 2018). Since Likert-scale responses are non-continuous and ordinal, nonparametric tests help study internal relationships between variables and thus prove effective in small-scale studies (Ross & Willson, 2018). However, such approaches always risk incorporating type-I errors in the interpretation of findings provided that an acceptable p-value does not necessarily mean a conclusive decision. These measures could only compare the means leading to the differentiation in responses and produce output to check whether the differences in responses are statistically significant to consider as aligned with H0. Weinberg and Abramowitz (2008) believe that running tests to check for normal distribution and significance strengthens the decision-making process and reinforces the conclusions instead of assuming the relationship between variables as decisive. In MMR, these exploratory factors can be confirmed using interviews and pilot stages, yielding a more reliable outcome and providing a more resilient understanding of the issue under investigation (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006). For reliability, Christmann and Aelst (2006) emphasise the test of Cronbach's alpha value that can assist researchers in evaluating the homogeneity and dispersion of data. In this study, the independence of observations was implemented by including separated samples spread across Chattogram. The researcher ensured the validity by consulting two specialists working in other universities, and Cronbach's alpha value was calculated to confirm data reliability.

**Stage 3: Qualitative data collection**

A modified version of the same questionnaire was used to gather follow-up data through semi-structured interviews and FGDs. To use the questionnaire for this phase, the researcher transformed all the statements into descriptive ones, reduced the number of questions to 10, leaving more space for descriptive answers, and added more details to each point. This also helped set the stage for interviews and FGDs in a more fitting style. 172 participants checked the box that asked about their interest in follow-up interviews and FGDs. 12 interviews were conducted, taking one participant from each university based on availability, and two FGD sessions were organised, each containing six participants selected from different universities. Thus, two individual respondents were chosen from each university, one for an interview and one for the FGD, confirming the data heterogeneity. Before the commencement of each interview and FGD meeting, the researcher read the questions to the interviewee/audience and asked about their answers during the quantitative phase. This served as a preparatory stage, helping the participants elicit their notions related to the questions. Each question was explained with relevant details for semi-structured interviews without indicating any preferred type or trait to choose from. All respondents were instructed to be as detailed as needed (Galletta, 2013). For the FGDs, every member was allowed to express their opinion individually. The researcher only intervened if any member moved out of the context or started addressing an issue beyond the scope of this study (Hennink, 2014). Each interview took around 30 minutes, and the FGDs lasted approximately 50 minutes. Interviews were conducted at respondents' respective institutions, whereas the FGDs were held at the researcher’s office.

**Stage 4: Qualitative data analysis**

The findings of these two phases were examined using a thematic content analysis framework designed by Braun and Clarke (2021), as illustrated in Figure 1. For any sequential data, like this study, such analysis offers a further illustration of events and helps discover any latent issue or variable that might have been overlooked earlier (Hair et al., 2015). The researcher minutely studied each document of these sessions, and the interviewees/discussants’ statements were analysed critically, paying attention to each minor detail, including attitudinal and linguistic components.



Figure 1: Braun and Clarke's Six-step process of thematic analysis (2021, p. 58)

**Stage 5: Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings**

The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through a triangulation lens developed by Alassafi et al. (2017), as presented in Figure 2. The triangulated findings are detailed in the analysis part of this essay, along with research-informed recommendations, implications, and future directions. Thus, the quantitative results provide an overview of relationships between variables, whereas the qualitative sessions explore the quantitative findings in detail under the research design. The findings of both stages of data collection were integrated with the discussion section following the mentioned framework. Connections and implications were drawn with reference to the initial arguments positioned in the literature review segment. Later, a broader correlation was established with the findings from data collection, leading to a holistic understanding of the issues in context, where the analytical elements were diagnosed and addressed during the data collection phases.

Figure 2: Mixed methods triangulation framework (Alassafi et al., 2017, p. 9)

**3. Results**

 Table 2 displays the disciplines or faculties under which the participants were pursuing different programmes at the time of instrumentation. To streamline the data collection and presentation process, broader categories of these study domains were listed from which the respondents had to choose. They recorded the study level/year in the subsequent section. They were presented with five options, namely Freshman (Undergraduate - 1st Year), Sophomore (Undergraduate - 2nd Year), Junior (Undergraduate - 3rd Year), Senior (Undergraduate - 4th Year or above), and Graduate. Table 3 exhibits the details in figures. The next segment collected data on the participants’ alma mater, in which the lowest number of respondents originated from CBUFT as it is a relatively new university and does not have a generously proportioned student body, whereas EDU generated the highest responses. The ratio is displayed in Table 4. Table 5 presents the gender profile of respondents, and Table 6 shows their secondary school background. Tables 7 and 8, respectively, log the medium of instruction in their secondary schools and current institutions. Their career choices, self-rated English proficiency, and self-realised financial status are projected in Tables 9, 10, and 11.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Arts / Humanities / Social Sciences / Law | 63 | 26.7 |
| Business | 49 | 20.7 |
| Science and Engineering | 53 | 22.5 |
| Education | 24 | 10.2 |
| Medicine and Medical Science | 17 | 7.2 |
| Public Health | 12 | 5.1 |
| Textiles / Apparel Manufacturing / Merchandising | 18 | 7.6 |
| **Total (N)** | **236** | **100** |

Table 2: Study disciplines of participants

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Freshman | 68 | 28.8 |
| Sophomore | 32 | 13.6 |
| Junior | 56 | 23.7 |
| Senior | 38 | 16.1 |
| Graduate | 42 | 17.8 |
| **Total (N)** | **236** | **100** |

Table 3: Participants’ level of study

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
| CU | 22 | 9.3 |
| AUW | 16 | 6.8 |
| PUC | 23 | 9.7 |
| USTC | 31 | 13.1 |
| EDU | 41 | 17.4 |
| IIUC | 21 | 8.9 |
| BGCTUB | 18 | 7.6 |
| UCTC | 12 | 5.1 |
| PCIU | 11 | 4.7 |
| CIU | 19 | 8.1 |
| SUB | 16 | 6.8 |
| CBUFT | 6 | 2.5 |
| **Total (N)** | **236** | **100** |

Table 4: Participants’ educational institutes

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Female | 102 | 43.2 |
| Male | 130 | 55.1 |
| Transgender | 1 | 0.4 |
| Non-Binary | 1 | 0.4 |
| Prefer Not to Disclose | 2 | 0.8 |
| **Total (N)** | **236** | **100** |

Table 5: Participants’ gender profile

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
| NCTB (Bangla Medium) | 117 | 49.6 |
| NCTB (English Version) | 9 | 3.8 |
| Madrasah | 12 | 5.1 |
| English Medium | 86 | 36.4 |
| Technical/Vocational | 8 | 3.4 |
| Others | 4 | 1.7 |
| **Total (N)** | **236** | **100** |

Table 6: Secondary schooling background of participants

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Bangla | 114 | 48.3 |
| English | 98 | 41.5 |
| Mixed | 21 | 8.9 |
| Others | 3 | 1.3 |
| **Total (N)** | **236** | **100** |

Table 7: Medium of instruction in secondary school

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Bangla | 17 | 7.2 |
| English | 198 | 83.9 |
| Mixed | 18 | 7.6 |
| Others | 3 | 1.3 |
| **Total (N)** | **236** | **100** |

Table 8: Medium of instruction in current institution

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Public Service | 82 | 34.7 |
| Private Service | 110 | 46.6 |
| Business | 41 | 17.4 |
| Others | 3 | 1.3 |
| **Total (N)** | **236** | **100** |

Table 9: Intended career plan

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Beginner | 89 | 37.7 |
| Lower-Intermediate | 54 | 22.9 |
| Intermediate | 43 | 18.2 |
| Upper-Intermediate | 18 | 7.6 |
| Advanced | 32 | 13.6 |
| **Total (N)** | **236** | **100** |

Table 10: Self-rated English proficiency

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Frequency** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Lower Class | 49 | 20.8 |
| Lower-Middle Class | 72 | 30.5 |
| Middle Class | 57 | 24.2 |
| Upper-Middle Class | 34 | 14.4 |
| Upper Class | 24 | 10.2 |
| **Total (N)** | **236** | **100** |

Table 11: Self-rated financial status

 The following items (I1 to I10) appeared in the questionnaire coded under H1. Each statement had 5 points: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). These items were aggregated into three broader categories for a comprehensive understanding and a simplified decision-making process (Vaus, 2001). Following Nunan and Bailey (2009), SA and A were graded under the common criterion titled Agree (Ag), Neutral (N) as Undecided (U), and D and SD as Disagree (Di). The same applies to qualitative data analysis, where the type and tone of responses are measured as the scale indicators for broader categorisation. The upcoming section produces and discusses each item individually, followed by the presentation of the frequency of occurrence and the compilation of results.

I1. Proficiency in English is a must for academic success.

I2. English should be the medium of instruction in all universities.

I3. I struggled with my English skills to obtain university admissions and scholarships.

I4. I am often pressurised to use English even when Bangla could have been used.

I5. English is the language of educated and intellectual people.

I6. I am less likely to participate in class activities that are conducted in English.

I7. I can express complex ideas in English confidently.

I8. I sound more intelligent when I speak English compared to Bangla.

I9. The emphasis on English in education neglects the importance of Bangla.

I10. I am concerned that my English skills will hold me back academically.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **I1** | **I2** | **I3** | **I4** | **I5** | **I6** | **I7** | **I8** | **I9** | **I10** |
| **Responses (In percentile) \*** |
| **SD** | **Di** | 5.1 | 30.5 | 22.5 | 23.7 | 17.4 | 21.6 | 41.9 | 34.3 | 17.8 | 16.1 |
| **D** | 12.3 | 19.5 | 14.8 | 16.1 | 14.0 | 11.4 | 17.8 | 22.5 | 16.1 | 24.6 |
| **N** | **U** | 14.0 | 9.3 | 8.9 | 3.8 | 8.9 | 2.5 | 0.4 | 6.4 | 11.9 | 3.4 |
| **A** | **Ag** | 27.5 | 13.1 | 28.8 | 33.5 | 35.2 | 45.3 | 20.8 | 22.9 | 31.4 | 23.7 |
| **SA** | 41.1 | 27.5 | 25.0 | 22.9 | 24.6 | 19.1 | 19.1 | 14.0 | 22.9 | 32.2 |
| **Statistical Figures \*\*** |
| **Mn** | 3.87 | 2.88 | 3.19 | 3.16 | 3.36 | 3.29 | 2.57 | 2.60 | 3.25 | 3.31 |
| **Md** | 4.14 | 2.68 | 3.44 | 3.44 | 3.64 | 3.65 | 1.97 | 2.31 | 3.47 | 3.56 |
| **Mo** | 5 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| **SD** | 1.22 | 1.62 | 1.51 | 1.53 | 1.43 | 1.45 | 1.62 | 1.49 | 1.43 | 1.52 |
| \* SD = 1, D = 2, N = 3, A = 4, SA = 5\*\* Di = Aggregated SD and D, U = Undecided, Ag = Aggregated A and SA\*\*\* Mn = Mean, Md = Median, Mo = Mode, SD = Standard Deviation |

Table 12: Frequency of responses (H1: Sense of linguistic insecurity)

 The next 10 items (I11 to I20) collected data addressing the participants’ perception of occupational concerns associated with English (H2).

I11. English offers more job opportunities compared to Bangla.

I12. I am forced to improve my competency in English to compete in the job market.

I13. Without English, I will not be able to connect with the global community.

I14. People with poor English skills are often overlooked in job sectors.

I15. My school prepared me with the necessary level of English for higher education and career.

I16. I feel anxious that proficiency in English might hinder my career and limit opportunities to grow.

I17. I avoid using English in formal settings as I feel insecure.

I18. English is important for building professional networks.

I19. Students from the Bangla-medium background struggle more in the job market.

I20. People with an advanced level of English expertise earn more.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **I11** | **I12** | **I13** | **I14** | **I15** | **I16** | **I17** | **I18** | **I19** | **I20** |
| **Responses (In percentile) \*** |
| **SD** | **Di** | 13.6 | 19.9 | 20.3 | 14.0 | 37.3 | 21.6 | 19.9 | 26.3 | 9.3 | 16.5 |
| **D** | 18.6 | 16.5 | 10.2 | 8.9 | 20.8 | 13.1 | 23.3 | 17.4 | 16.1 | 11.0 |
| **N** | **U** | 8.9 | 12.3 | 6.8 | 11.4 | 5.1 | 9.3 | 2.5 | 2.1 | 3.8 | 8.1 |
| **A** | **Ag** | 36.0 | 17.8 | 22.9 | 38.6 | 21.6 | 36.4 | 35.2 | 31.8 | 43.2 | 34.3 |
| **SA** | 22.9 | 33.5 | 39.8 | 27.1 | 24.6 | 19.5 | 19.1 | 22.5 | 27.5 | 30.1 |
| **Statistical Figures \*\*** |
| **Mn** | 3.36 | 3.28 | 3.52 | 3.56 | 2.57 | 3.19 | 3.10 | 3.07 | 3.64 | 3.50 |
| **Md** | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 2.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 |
| **Mo** | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| **SD** | 1.37 | 1.55 | 1.57 | 1.34 | 1.53 | 1.45 | 1.46 | 1.56 | 1.29 | 1.44 |
| \* SD = 1, D = 2, N = 3, A = 4, SA = 5\*\* Di = Aggregated SD and D, U = Undecided, Ag = Aggregated A and SA\*\*\* Mn = Mean, Md = Median, Mo = Mode, SD = Standard Deviation |

Table 13: Frequency of responses (H2: Perception of occupational concern)

 The following items (I21 to I30) were used to test learners’ potential level of educational anxiety (H3) regarding the use of English.

I21. My current level of English proficiency is adequate for success at the university.

I22. My English competence limits my learning.

I23. I sometimes worry that my English skills will negatively impact the grades.

I24. I have difficulty expressing complex ideas or asking questions in English.

I25. I struggle to understand course materials and lectures presented entirely in English.

I26. It would be better if my courses were taught in Bangla entirely.

I27. It would be better if my courses were taught in English followed by an explanation in Bangla.

I28. Using more Bangla in the classroom would make learning more enjoyable for me.

I29. My educational experience would improve if I had more opportunities to learn in Bangla.

I30. Too much emphasis on English in universities is problematic for students who are less fluent.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **I21** | **I22** | **I23** | **I24** | **I25** | **I26** | **I27** | **I28** | **I29** | **I30** |
| **Responses (In percentile) \*** |
| **SD** | **Di** | 36.0 | 8.9 | 16.5 | 23.7 | 18.2 | 40.7 | 16.1 | 19.1 | 12.3 | 20.8 |
| **D** | 27.1 | 28.0 | 20.8 | 13.6 | 8.9 | 32.6 | 12.3 | 17.4 | 24.6 | 16.5 |
| **N** | **U** | 2.5 | 5.5 | 4.7 | 2.5 | 8.1 | 4.7 | 2.1 | 5.1 | 3.8 | 6.8 |
| **A** | **Ag** | 14.0 | 36.9 | 34.3 | 27.1 | 28.0 | 15.7 | 28.0 | 33.5 | 25.0 | 24.6 |
| **SA** | 20.3 | 20.8 | 23.7 | 33.1 | 36.9 | 6.4 | 41.5 | 25.0 | 34.3 | 31.4 |
| **Statistical Figures \*\*** |
| **Mn** | 2.56 | 3.33 | 3.28 | 3.32 | 3.56 | 2.14 | 3.67 | 3.28 | 3.44 | 3.29 |
| **Md** | 2.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 2.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 |
| **Mo** | 1 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| **SD** | 1.57 | 1.31 | 1.44 | 1.60 | 1.50 | 1.28 | 1.50 | 1.48 | 1.47 | 1.55 |
| \* SD = 1, D = 2, N = 3, A = 4, SA = 5\*\* Di = Aggregated SD and D, U = Undecided, Ag = Aggregated A and SA\*\*\* Mn = Mean, Md = Median, Mo = Mode, SD = Standard Deviation |

Table 14: Frequency of responses (H3: Educational anxiety)

 The reliability analysis procedure yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.83. The value was deemed satisfactory, considering the smaller number of items and sample size (Bourne et al., 2021). The following tables provide the hypothesis testing results based on individual items.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Test Statistic a** | **Degree of Freedom** | **Significance b.c.d.** | **Decision** |
| **I1** | 96.797 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I2** | 38.788 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I3** | 30.525 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I4** | 56.754 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I5** | 49.254 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I6** | 120.780 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I7** | 102.814 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I8** | 52.136 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I9** | 26.373 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I10** | 56.034 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I11** | 50.907 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I12** | 30.441 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I13** | 79.424 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I14** | 74.085 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I15** | 64.551 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I16** | 51.246 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I17** | 64.508 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I18** | 60.271 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I19** | 116.500 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I20** | 64.000 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I21** | 76.500 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I22** | 80.441 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I23** | 55.102 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I24** | 68.576 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I25** | 72.814 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I26** | 121.203 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I27** | 108.703 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I28** | 51.542 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I29** | 67.559 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **I30** | 39.805 | 4 | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| a. There are 0 cells (0%) with expected values less than 5. The minimum expected value is 47.200.b. The significance level is .050.c. Asymptotic significance is displayed.d. Results are gathered from 2-sided tests. |

Table 15: Individual test results (Nonparametric one-sample Chi-Square test, N = 236)

As illustrated above, all items produce a statistically significant p-value and reject the null hypothesis individually. This reveals a correlation between the variables and the hypothesis where the learners’ decisions are varied, and the output relies heavily on observed data. However, as discussed earlier, a significant p-value does not necessarily mean that the alternative hypothesis is to be accepted as it is. Moye (2013) suggests checking for data normality and looking for any discernible pattern that might inform in-depth decisions. To ease the process, all variables were computed into a single output categorised as H1, H2, and H3, respectively, and tests were run to check the probability of occurrence, normal distribution, and one sample t test based on mean values. The results are presented below.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Null Hypothesis** | **Significance** | **Decision** |
| **1** | The categories of H1 occur with equal probabilities. | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **2** | The categories of H2 occur with equal probabilities. | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **3** | The categories of H3 occur with equal probabilities. | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |

Table 16: Probability of occurrence test results (Chi-Square test of computed variables)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Null Hypothesis** | **Significance** | **Decision** |
| **1** | The distribution of H1 is normal with mean 31.48 and standard deviation 5.01270. | <.001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **2** | The distribution of H2 is normal with mean 32.79 and standard deviation 4.79956. | .015 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| **3** | The distribution of H3 is normal with mean 31.87 and standard deviation 4.44933. | .007 | Reject the null hypothesis. |

Table 17: One-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results for normality (Computed variables)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Test Value = 3** |
| **t** | **df** | **Significance** | **Mean Difference** | **95% Confidence Interval of the Difference** |
| **One-Sided p** | **Two-Sided p** | **Lower** | **Upper** |
| **H1** | 87.278 | 235 | <.001 | <.001 | 28.47881 | 27.8360 | 29.1217 |
| **H2** | 95.345 | 235 | <.001 | <.001 | 29.78814 | 29.1726 | 30.4036 |
| **H3** | 99.690 | 235 | <.001 | <.001 | 28.87288 | 28.3023 | 29.4435 |

Table 18: One-sample t test results (Computed variables)

 Initial codes or keywords were developed prior to arranging follow-up qualitative phases and collection of data for thematic content analysis. The researcher sought help from two colleagues who monitored the qualitative data collection stages and provided suggestions for improvement. The questions below were used during these phases, and the following section discusses the findings with representational anonymous comments. It is to be noted that necessary grammatical corrections have been made as applicable, keeping the information unaltered.

1. Do you remember any situation or time when your choice of language (English or Bangla) influenced the way others treated or accepted you? If yes, please describe the experience in brief. You can also add a secondary narrative (e.g., any incident shared by your family members or friends) if you personally have not encountered anything like this.

2. To what extent, do you believe that English is a prerequisite for social mobility in Bangladesh (e.g. securing a better career, gaining access to education, applying for foreign a degree, and ensuring global connectivity)? Try to explore the correlation between English and your future in terms of these aspects of life and share your thoughts.

3. How important it is for Bangladeshi students to prioritise learning English over Bangla? Do you think that the widespread application of English increases the inequality between the English-speaking community and the rest in your university?

4. What role does English play in your classrooms? How beneficial do you think English language proficiency is for a decent career in Bangladesh?

5. Should English proficiency be a benchmark for job placement or just taken as an additional quality? Can you relate your own experience or observation to this?

6. Share your experience of learning English throughout your educational life. Has this changed after joining the university? Are there situations where you feel particularly confident or compelled to use English? What about the situations where you feel less confident?

7. How does your comfort level in speaking English compare to your cosiness while speaking Bangla? Have you ever felt that the level of English skills is holding you back in studies? If so, can you give an example?

8. Do you believe that there are differences in how students from Bangla-medium and English-medium schools are perceived at the university? In what ways do you think your schooling (Bangla or English-medium) has shaped your attitude towards English?

9. If you could change one thing about how English is used in your university, what would it be? How can code-switching or code-mixing be beneficial or detrimental for you in this regard?

10. Have you ever encountered a situation where your lack of English skills created a barrier? How can your experience be related to the power relations between English and Bangla?

**4. Analysis**

 The obtained results demonstrate that students predominantly acknowledge the significance of English in achieving academic success as well as a recurring factor in the formation of occupational concern and educational anxiety. While recognising its importance, students demonstrate considerable opposition to the use of English as the primary language of instruction. The narratives relating to their struggle in university admission tests and standardised English tests resulting from the unwarranted implementation of English align with the observations made by Mirza et al. (2012), who contend that the application of English in Bangladeshi higher education is marked by inconsistency, revealing considerable deficiencies in policy execution. Akteruzzaman and Islam (2017) and Ara (2020) highlight that English holds a complex position within the Bangladeshi education system due to ineffectively implemented policies. While NEP 2010 allows for the optional incorporation of English in tertiary-level classrooms, the 2005 directive from the ministry requiring all private universities to conduct classes in English (Hasan, 2022) has led to a disjointed and uneven implementation of English across various academic institutions. The dissonance between policy and practice is evident in the responses as well since students express a preference for employing Bangla in contexts deemed more suitable, rather than adhering to the impulsive imposition of English. Consequently, the learners become aliens within their own learning contexts and develop an apprehensive attitude towards English even though they have been taught English for 12 years. This disconnection contributes to the creation of “ordhobhashee” or “semi-lingual” generation (Hamid & Sultana, 2024, p. 359). They employ this term to incorporate the faulty promises of the policies and English-in-education guidelines set by the government that deepens the social divide further and compartmentalises the learners linguistically. In terms of policy objectives, English as the MoI was expected to improve the tertiary education in Bangladesh and cultivate bilingual graduates capable of joining the global workforce and strengthening the national economy. Surprisingly, erratic policy executions have worsened the situation that has made English the most significant factor of employment and quality education. The participants’ notion of taking English to be substantial for employment higher education also mirrors a broader societal and educational patterns. They acknowledge it as an external force that stops them from interacting with English as a language of communication and exchange of ideas. Students from EMSs hold an opposite view where they do not find it difficult to use English in tertiary levels. The formative years of secondary education and teaching practices of BMSs play decisive roles in this regard. Thus, English enjoys a specious presence in Bangladeshi education system overshadowing the learners and the stakeholders’ needs. The sociopolitical aspects become more prominent through the faulty imposition of policies and the learners of BMSs are intrinsically motivated to compromise with their local artefacts and heritage, e.g., linguistic and cultural norms, leading to an unhealthy struggle of adjusting with English. Zhang et al. (2014) believe that only setting policy guidelines is not enough for rectifying such conditions. They urge for remedial steps that do not only inform the top-down implementation of directives, and the policymakers must be able to diagnose the aftermaths of new policy formulations. In the same connection, Skrla and Scheurich (2004) claim that the cultural dimensions of foreign language learning should address the psychological outcomes of educational practices. Alam and Kabir (2023) find that Bangla is systematically devalued for these inconsistent policy management exercises since the existing narratives promote English in an exhaustive manner leaving no space for the national language. The nationwide promotion and integration of English have been the most crucial elements under these circumstances and significantly contributed to the creation this divide (Hamid & Jahan, 2021). Thus, this prevalence transcends the confines of a classroom and signifies a broader language-power dynamic encompassing culture and the native language.

 Participants in the interviews and FGD session also conveyed experiences that exemplify how proficiency in English acts as a factor of this divide. An engineering student from IIUC remarked, "When I use English in communication, others perceive me as possessing greater knowledge and expertise." A business student from EDU articulated a similar sentiment, stating, "Proficiency in English has positively influenced my academic journey, particularly during internship interviews and project presentations." These perspectives underscore the cultural significance linked to English and the inherent prestige it holds within academic and professional contexts, resonating with the critiques regarding the unquestioned supremacy of English in Bangladesh (Hossain & Tollefson, 2017). This presumption further results in biased treatment and preferential access for those who speak English, thereby reinforcing inequitable stereotypes and sustaining social disparities. A literature student from the UCTC stated, "I utilise English in the classroom only. I talk with my friends and family members using Bangla language”. Hymes (2003) warns against the forceful imposition of English, indicating that its prevalence could undermine the autonomy of speakers, rendering them devoid of control over their linguistic choices. The presence of linguistic hierarchy becomes clearly observable in the experiences of students hailing from less privileged backgrounds. Many of the respondents have expressed apprehensions regarding the linguistic insecurity they encounter within educational environments, particularly when English serves as the only MoI. This transition has intensified students' experiences of linguistic insecurity at the tertiary levels. In terms of academic achievement and professional advancement, a graduate-level student from USTC remarked, "My elder brother, employed at a multinational corporation, consistently encourages me to enhance my English skills, as they are quite beneficial in his professional domain." As discussed earlier, the disparity in access to high-quality English education exacerbates these challenges as students from BMSs do not get equal opportunities in this regard. A law student from the PUC expressed, "My challenges with English considerably hinder my capacity to engage in class discussions and grasp the lecture material." English, thus, works as an active agent that deepens the social discrimination marginalising learners by alienating them from their own educational system. To address these challenges, Garcia and Wei (2017) advocate for a translingual approach that prompts students to utilise their streamlined linguistic resources to improve comprehension and communication. Ballinger (2015) posits that multilingual education has the potential to enhance literacy and confront the enduring impact of linguistic hierarchies other than forcing students to learn a language. Nevertheless, it is essential for policies to explore the establishment of tailored language programs and remedial courses designed to promote the incorporation of Bangla within English-centric academic settings, rather than advocating for a complete abandonment of English (Sultana & Roshid, 2020). Institutions of higher learning, as catalysts for transformation, should prioritise the cultivation of an educational environment that nurtures multilingualism, enabling students to thrive in English, Bangla, or various regional dialects (Akter & Iyengar, 2024). It is imperative for policymakers to prioritise the reform of the educational system in order to gain the true benefits of bilingualism, thereby equipping students with practical experience in both languages.

**5. Conclusion**

 This research explores the intricate interplay among English proficiency, social mobility, ELT practices, and the self-perception of university students in Chattogram, Bangladesh. The research findings present a thorough understanding of the essential function of English in facilitating both academic and professional progress. In the process, it elucidates the dual nature of English, functioning as both an instrument of empowerment for those who master it and a catalyst for inequality, especially affecting students from Bangla-medium backgrounds. This disparity is intensified by overarching socio-political and economic dynamics, relating to neoliberal ideologies, multiculturalism, and globalisation. The existing societal beliefs nurture an environment where students facing challenges with English experience feelings of inadequacy and social alienation. In order to address the linguistic insecurities faced by students from BMSs, the study advocates for a restructuring of existing pedagogical approaches and the adoption of policies that promote multilingualism, rather than depending exclusively on English as the medium of instruction. These policies would not only tackle the entrenched disparities evident in the existing educational framework but would also offer a more equitable representation of linguistic diversity within academic and professional contexts empowering both the languages.

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