

From Language Movement to Language Policy: A Critical Examination of English in Bangladeshi Tertiary Education

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ABSTRACT: In the context of the global prevalence of the English language as a universal medium, the importance of English language education has gained considerable prominence in Bangladesh. This emphasis is driven by the dual goals of achieving economic progress and fostering a skilled workforce. The use of English as a medium of instruction at the higher education level has become a subject of contentious debate, particularly within public or government universities, where discussions on its continued application persist. This debate is further complicated by the emergence of private universities, which consistently adopt English as their primary language of instruction. In contrast, public universities grapple with a mixed-language approach, incorporating both Bangla and English during lectures. This paper conducts a comprehensive review, delving into crucial facets such as the historical trajectory of English in Bangladesh, its role both pre- and post-independence, and its categorization as either English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at the tertiary education level. The inquiry concludes by offering insightful recommendations for policymakers to enhance the standing of English in Bangladesh. These recommendations acknowledge the multifaceted implications of English proficiency for the nation's educational landscape and economic prospects.

Keywords: *English language proficiency; Tertiary education in Bangladesh; Language policy; Medium of instruction; Higher education language dynamics*

Introduction

Bangladesh's recent achievement of lower-middle-income status, spurred by a notable 7.2% rise in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (World Economics, 2022), underscores the imperative for a skilled workforce to further propel economic development. Central to the cultivation of such a workforce is the essential role of the English language, a requisite skill for professional advancement in an increasingly interconnected global landscape. The proficiency level of the English language within the Bangladeshi educational system has become a source of concern, as highlighted by scholars such as Hamid (2011) and Islam (2015). Recognizing the pivotal role of English in fostering economic growth, the Bangladeshi government has recently intensified its emphasis on English learning across all

educational levels. The significance of English proficiency extends beyond domestic boundaries, as Bangladesh relies on the language for conducting international business, trade, and maintaining diplomatic ties. This heightened emphasis is reflected in the scholarly works of Farooqui (2007), Erling et al. (2014), Roshid (2014), Kirkwood (2013), and Chowdhury & Kabir (2014), collectively underscoring the multifaceted importance of English in the global context. Notably, the competencies of the workforce in Bangladesh are increasingly measured by their proficiency in English, a prerequisite in economic, industrial, and governmental sectors where English has become indispensable for employment opportunities (Farooqui, 2007; Erling, 2017). Moreover, proficiency in English augments social opportunities, allowing learners to navigate the complexities of the professional world with greater ease (Erling, 2017).

Despite the prevalence of Bangla, spoken by 98% of the population and recognized as the country's official language (Imam, 2005; Hasan et al., 2019; The Business Post, 2023), English remains a vital language for specific sectors. A mere 3% of the population in Bangladesh considers English crucial for government, media, and educational purposes (Hossain & Tollefson, 2007). The linguistic landscape of Bangladeshi universities is characterized by fluctuations in English language usage, with private universities adopting English exclusively as the medium for teaching. In contrast, government universities opt for a bilingual approach, utilizing both Bengali and English in their classroom interactions. This divergence creates a dilemma for public universities, where students accustomed to instruction in both languages face challenges in securing employment compared to their counterparts from private institutions. The preference for English-medium instruction in private universities translates into more favorable job prospects for their graduates in both government and private sectors.

This study's primary objective is a thorough examination of the position of English instruction within Bangladeshi tertiary institutions, encompassing both public and private universities. By delving into the historical context of English in Bangladesh, analyzing its role before and after the country's independence, and scrutinizing its function as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) in Bangladesh, this paper aims to provide comprehensive insights. Additionally, the study aims to shed light on the challenges posed by the language dynamics in tertiary education and propose recommendations to address the complexities inherent in the current linguistic landscape.

Historical Outlook of English before the Liberation of Bangladesh

The historical trajectory of language in Bangladesh is intricately woven into the fabric of its cultural identity, with the emergence of the present linguistic reality shaped by a complex interplay of historical events. Bangladesh, a densely populated country where 98% of the population identifies as Bangalee (The Business Post, 2023), has witnessed the resilience of Bangla, or Bengali, as a pivotal element in the nation's identity, particularly during the pre- and post-independence eras. During the formation of Pakistan in 1947, the majority of the people in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, were Bangalees. However, the leadership of the newly formed country endeavored to establish Urdu as the exclusive language of Pakistan. This language imposition ignited immediate protests led by students and intellectuals from East Pakistan. The culmination of these protests occurred on February 21, 1952, when students at Dhaka University organized a massive demonstration, met with brutal police force, resulting in the tragic loss of several lives. This pivotal event, known as the Language Movement of

1952, not only marked a significant moment in the struggle for linguistic rights but also forged a new identity and a robust sense of nationalism among the Bangalees (Rahman et al., 2019). This nationalism became a unifying force that eventually led to the nation's independence in 1971.

Despite the triumph of independence, Bangla continued to hold a central place in the post-liberation era, serving as a powerful symbol of unity and national identity. The language, once a source of contention, became an enduring representation of the struggles and aspirations that coalesced into the sovereign state of Bangladesh. However, the historical influence of colonialism, particularly British rule, significantly impacted the linguistic landscape of Bangladesh. The British colonial era, characterized by its first contact with the Indian subcontinent, left an indelible mark on the region. English emerged as the language of instruction in tertiary education and a means of communication with the British rulers before the subcontinent's partition in 1947 (Rahman & Pandian, 2018a). Lord Macaulay's directive in 1835, driven by cultural condescension and bureaucratic motives, aimed at creating a class of obedient Indian administrators by promoting English education. This directive contributed to the incorporation of English into educational disciplines, fostering its extensive use in administrative and educational sectors (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Milon, 2016; Rahman et al., 2019).

During the British colonial era, English not only served as a medium of instruction in all official sectors (Islam & Hasim, 2019) but also played a pivotal role in political discourse, frequently used in debates and communication with local elites. Even after the departure of the British in 1947, the Indian subcontinent retained the linguistic legacy of English. Following the partition, Pakistan engaged in a reassessment and restructuring of its education policy, aligning the curriculum with Islamic principles (Rahman et al., 2010). Despite this realignment, English retained its status as an officially recognized state language and a secondary language during the era of Pakistani governance (Rahman & Pandian, 2018a, 2018b). The 1956 constitution of Pakistan, under Article 214, designated English as the official language for two decades (Khatun, 1992). The political objectives of both Pakistan and Britain converged in granting English priority in educational policy, reflecting a shared vision that persisted beyond colonial rule. This prioritization was based on perceived needs, emphasizing the continued importance of English in educational, administrative, and governmental spheres. The enduring influence of English, rooted in historical legacies, continued to shape educational policies and linguistic dynamics even after the emergence of independent nations from the colonial past.

Position of English after the Liberation of Bangladesh

Following the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, the status of languages, particularly Bangla, underwent significant transformations, reflecting the newly established nation's aspirations and identity. Bangla was promptly declared the national language and later solidified as the "official language" for all government-operated educational institutions through a constitutional amendment in 1972 (Banu & Sussex, 2001; Rahman, 2010; Hasan, 2022). The constitutional act that limited the usage of English and elevated the position of Bangla in official, social, and educational contexts reflected a deliberate effort to emphasize the linguistic identity of the nation (Rahman et al., 2019). The usage of Bangla was not merely encouraged but deemed necessary in every public area, contributing to its pervasive presence in various spheres of life (Hamid & Baldauf, 2014). This legislative move aimed to foster a sense of linguistic unity and cultural identity among the citizens of Bangladesh.

In the aftermath of independence, the Bangladesh Government took proactive measures to shape the educational landscape. Eight education commissions were established to formulate comprehensive educational policy frameworks (Rahman & Pandian, 2018a). However, despite these efforts, the evolving position of English in the post-independence era necessitated ongoing scrutiny and revision, as highlighted by assessments conducted by Chowdhury & Kabir (2014), as illustrated in Table 1. Hamid (2011) observed that the state policy of Bangladesh post-independence inadvertently fueled a rivalry between Bangla and English. The development of one language was perceived as potentially devaluing the other. Recognizing the imperative of English proficiency in the face of globalization and technological advancements, the government of Bangladesh made English education mandatory from grade 1 to grade 12 and in specific fields of higher education in 1989 (Hasan, 2022). This mandate marked a strategic response to the changing global landscape, emphasizing the necessity of English as a tool for engaging with evolving technologies and international discourse.

Commencing English language education from the first day of school became a norm, persisting throughout students' academic journeys. In 1992, the National Constitution of Bangladesh officially endorsed the use of the English language in education. The practicality of this endorsement is underscored by the prevalence of English-authored textbooks, which are not readily translatable into Bangla. Consequently, Bangla ceased to serve as the primary medium of instruction in tertiary education, with English emerging as the most common language in Bangladesh's tertiary education system (Choudhury, 2001). The societal reverence for English, attributed to its stature, influence, and role in cross-border communication, further solidified its position. It's noteworthy that while promoting the instruction of Bengali was associated with reinforcing national identity (Hoque, 2008), a robust understanding of English remained a necessity due to its instrumental role in opening doors to international education, employment opportunities, and cultural exchanges. The dual emphasis on Bangla and English, each with its distinct significance, reflects the delicate balance that Bangladesh seeks to maintain in fostering both national identity and global engagement through language education.

Table 1: Sequential Synopsis of English in Education Policies of Bangladesh adapted from Chowdhury and Kabir (2014, p. 10)

1974 Bangladesh Education Commission	English given priority as foreign language, to be taught from Class 6.
	General emphasis on English language.
1976 English Teaching Taskforce Commission	English language to be taught either in class 3 or class 6, subject to availability of English teachers.
1988 Bangladesh National Education Commission	Grade 3 suggested as a recommended starting point for English language education.
	Grade 6 suggested as a uniform starting point for English language education.
1991 National Curriculum Committee	English language education introduced in class 3.
	English language was introduced as a compulsory subject in class 1 (1992).
2000 National Education Policy	English language set as a medium of instruction for kindergartens.
	Curriculum and all text material used in kindergarten translated into English.
	Introduction of English language as an extra subject from class 1 to 2 and as a compulsory subject from class 3
	Along with Bengali, English language could be a medium of instruction from the secondary level (Class 7).
2003 National Education Commission	Emphasis on English language as a medium of instruction at the tertiary level.
	Re-emphasis on English language learning from the primary level.
	One objective of primary education is to acquaint learners with English language skills as a foreign language.
	Emphasis on rebuilding the overall English language curriculum.
	Emphasis on organizing foreign training for trainers of Primary Teachers Institute (PTI) and National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE), and local training for all secondary school teachers to improve English education.
2010 National Education Policy	Emphasis on introducing a 6-month English language course at the tertiary level.
	English language was recognized as an essential tool to build a knowledge-based society.
	Emphasis on English language writing and speaking from the very beginning of primary education.
	English language to be set as a compulsory subject adopted in all streams from the secondary level.
	The introduction of English as a medium of instruction could commence from the secondary level.
	Emphasis should be placed on appointing an adequate number of English language teachers at the secondary level.
	English should be made a compulsory subject in all colleges and universities
	English language (along with Bengali) to be the mediums of instruction at the tertiary level.
Emphasis on the need to translate books written in English to Bengali.	

Status of English in Bangladesh as EFL or ESL

Learning English has become a psychosomatic matter in Bangladesh (Alam et al., 2021). The status of English in Bangladesh is a subject of significant debate among academicians, centering on whether English should be classified as a Foreign Language (EFL) or a Second Language (ESL). Carter & Nunan (2001) delineate ESL as a context where English is commonly used alongside state languages in parliamentary and public spaces, whereas EFL refers to using English as a foreign language, primarily in academic settings like classrooms. The distinction between EFL and ESL reflects the extent of English integration into daily life.

In the context of Bangladesh, which is among the most populous countries globally, English is acquired both as EFL and ESL (Hamid and Honan, 2012). The debate intensifies as scholars like Farooqui (2007) argue that practicing English outside the classroom is challenging, as classmates may mock, and even family members may not engage in English conversations. Despite English being offered as a subject in Bangladeshi schools, colleges, and universities, the predominantly monolingual nature of Bangla-

speaking life in the country limits the opportunities for practical English use beyond the educational setting (Hasan, 2022).

The classification of English as EFL in Bangladesh is supported by McArthur (1996), who suggests that the community's usage of English falls somewhere between a second and a foreign language. However, the classification debate persists, as Ali (2010) designates English language teaching in Bangladesh as ESL, emphasizing its recognition alongside Bangla. Recent developments in language policy add complexity to this debate. The Bangladeshi government, through the National Education Policy in 2010 (Milon, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2010), mandated English as an obligatory second language. This policy shift aimed to formalize and strengthen English education across educational levels, aligning with the global significance of English proficiency. Chowdhury & Kabir (2014) assert the necessity for a coherent and consistent English language policy, emphasizing the need for clarity and direction in language education. The existence of three separate educational systems—General Education, English medium, and Madrasah education—further complicates the linguistic landscape. Each system plays a distinct role in shaping language education, reflecting the diverse linguistic needs and preferences within the country (Ali & Walker, 2014).

In tertiary-level education, the language scenario becomes more nuanced. State-run universities in Bangladesh often employ a mixed language approach, combining Bangla and English. However, English is commonly used for official matters. In contrast, private universities predominantly use English as the medium of instruction (Hamid et al., 2013). This dichotomy in language use reflects the complex linguistic tapestry in higher education. Despite the varied linguistic landscape, English continues to be a significant influence in urban-educated Bangladeshis' lives, impacting employment opportunities and societal interactions (Rahman, 2005). The multifaceted nature of English language usage in Bangladesh underscores the need for a nuanced language policy that considers the diverse linguistic contexts within the country.

Background of the Study

In the academic landscape of Bangladesh, English stands as a pivotal medium of instruction, playing a crucial role in shaping competent and skilled graduates (Karim et al., 2021). The historical and cultural context of Bangladesh underscores the complexity faced by public universities in the country in balancing the diverse linguistic needs of their learners while also promoting English proficiency. The imperative role of English in higher education was emphasized by the reintroduction of remedial English courses in established public universities after Bangladesh gained independence in 1971 (Hasan, 2022). This move reflected a recognition of the significance of English proficiency in preparing students for the demands of a globalized and competitive job market. The reintroduction of these courses highlighted the commitment of public universities to address language challenges and equip students with the necessary language skills.

However, the language dynamics within public universities in Bangladesh remain intricate. Faculty members, while delivering lectures in various subject areas, often adopt a blended approach, combining both Bangla and English. This reflects an attempt to cater to the linguistic diversity of the student body and facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. In contrast, faculty members at private universities consistently employ English as the primary mode of instruction across all academic courses. This divergence in language use between public and private institutions

introduces a unique dimension to the language landscape in higher education. The consequences of these language dynamics extend to the employability of graduates. It has been observed that graduates from private institutions, where English is the predominant language of instruction, tend to enjoy greater success in finding employment compared to their counterparts from public universities. Businesses and government agencies actively seek out English-speaking individuals, placing graduates from private institutions at a distinct advantage in the competitive job market. This employment disparity adds a layer of complexity to the ongoing debate about the role of English in higher education in Bangladesh.

Interestingly, despite the evident advantages of English proficiency, state universities in Bangladesh do not actively promote the language. The reasons behind this stance might be multifaceted, involving considerations of linguistic diversity, cultural preservation, and educational philosophy. This research stems from the recognition of the challenges faced by teachers in public universities, where the linguistic landscape is more intricate and the demands on faculty members to navigate language diversity are pronounced. The study seeks to delve into these challenges, providing insights into the factors influencing language policies and practices within public universities in Bangladesh.

Research Methodology

This review paper relies on secondary sources of data to comprehensively examine the position of the English language in Bangladesh concerning higher education. The researchers conducted an extensive literature review, drawing insights from diverse academic works, and utilized two prominent research databases, ERIC and PsycINFO, to gather relevant information. Additionally, Google Scholar was employed as a supplementary resource to ensure a comprehensive coverage of available literature. To systematically gather pertinent information, the researchers employed a targeted approach using specific keywords related to the subject matter. These keywords included "English language in Bangladesh higher education," "English as a medium of instruction in Bangladesh," and "English as a foreign or second language in Bangladesh." This strategic use of keywords aimed to focus the literature search on key aspects crucial to understanding the dynamics of English language usage in the higher education landscape of Bangladesh.

In addition to the electronic databases, the researchers incorporated books from Google Books and peer-reviewed articles from Academia into their research methodology. By leveraging these sources, they aimed to triangulate information and ensure a robust and diverse perspective on the subject. The inclusion of books provides historical and in-depth insights, while peer-reviewed articles offer contemporary and academically rigorous perspectives. Acknowledging the importance of transparency and scholarly rigor, the researchers made a concerted effort to cite and acknowledge all secondary sources of data. This ensures that the information presented in the review paper is traceable and can be verified by interested readers. The comprehensive approach to data collection, involving various reputable databases and sources, enhances the reliability and validity of the findings presented in this review paper.

Discussion

English is a Language of Esteem in Bangladesh

English holds a position of high esteem in Bangladeshi society, a sentiment attributed to its prominence, impact, and its crucial role in cross-border interactions, particularly in the context of

globalization (Hasan, 2022). The language is progressively gaining significance as a tool for innovation and international communication. However, it is important to note that English teaching in Bangladesh is not universally accessible but is rather confined to a specific segment of the population. The wealthier section of the Bangladeshi population actively invests in expanding their knowledge of the English language and culture. The ability to converse in English is seen as a status symbol, allowing the nation's social elite to maintain their positions of power (Imam, 2005). This emphasis on English proficiency has led many Bangladeshis to believe that acquiring proficiency in English can open doors to prestigious job opportunities and even enable a "luxurious" life abroad.

Graduates from private institutions, where English is the primary medium of instruction, demonstrate a higher inclination to secure employment in both business and government sectors compared to their counterparts from public or government institutions. The choice of private universities by the social elite and political elites for their children's education, either domestically or overseas, adds a layer of complexity to the position of English instruction in Bangladesh. While political elites use English as a strategic tool in politics and advocate for the promotion of Bengali as the primary language of instruction in tertiary education, their own children often enroll in private universities, where English is smoothly integrated into the curriculum (Imam, 2005). This apparent contradiction underscores the contentious nature of English instruction in the country, revealing a nuanced relationship between the political discourse surrounding language and the practical choices made by those in positions of influence. In essence, the status of English in Bangladesh is intricately tied to notions of prestige, power, and opportunity. The language serves as a gateway to social and economic advancement, creating a complex landscape where societal aspirations, political ideologies, and practical considerations intersect.

Status of English in Public Tertiary Education Level in Bangladesh

The prominence of the English language in the educational landscape of Bangladesh has been officially recognized and institutionalized through legislative measures. In 1992, the government took a significant step by passing legislation aimed at reintroducing English as a subject at the higher education level across all government universities in the nation (Banu & Sussex, 2001). This legislative move reflected a strategic decision to elevate the status and role of English in tertiary education. As a result of these policy changes, English became a mandatory subject in public universities during the 1990s, alongside other regular courses offered in various tertiary subjects (Rahman, 2005). This marked a deliberate effort to integrate English into the academic curriculum, signaling its importance in the academic and professional development of students at the higher education level.

The language of instruction in state-funded higher education exhibits a nuanced approach. While Bangla serves as the primary language for humanities and social science courses, English takes on the role of the medium of instruction for courses related to technology, science, medicine, and engineering (Hamid et al., 2013). This division reflects a strategic allocation of languages based on the nature of the academic disciplines, aiming to align language instruction with the requirements and global standards of each field. The dual-language approach in public universities acknowledges the diverse linguistic needs of students across different academic disciplines. This recognition also reflects an awareness of the international dimension of education, particularly in fields where English serves as a global lingua franca. By mandating English instruction in specific domains, the government aims to equip students with the language skills necessary for engaging with contemporary advancements

in science, technology, and medicine, thereby enhancing their global competitiveness. Overall, the status of English in public tertiary education in Bangladesh is characterized by a deliberate legislative effort to reintroduce and mandate English as a subject. The nuanced language allocation based on academic disciplines demonstrates a strategic approach to aligning language instruction with the evolving demands of various fields of study in the global context.

Status of English in Private Tertiary Education in Bangladesh

The landscape of private tertiary education in Bangladesh underwent a transformative shift with the enactment of the Bangladeshi Parliament's Private University Act of 1992. This legislative move paved the way for private universities to provide tertiary-level education, and notably, these institutions adopted English as the medium of instruction (Hamid et al., 2013; Milon et al., 2018a, 2018b). The adoption of English as the primary language of instruction in private universities is a key distinguishing feature that sets them apart from their public counterparts. The prestige associated with the English language in Bangladesh is prominently reflected in the educational choices made by the social elite (Hasan, 2022). Affluent families, often belonging to the top 5% of the nation's income groups, actively choose private institutions for their children's education (Alam et al., 2007). The preference for private universities among the social elite can be attributed to the belief that an English-medium education not only provides a competitive edge but also aligns with the global standards of higher education.

According to Banu & Sussex (2001), a substantial proportion, at least 20%, of graduates from English-medium programs in Bangladesh secure admission into private tertiary institutions. This indicates a correlation between the English-medium educational background and the choice to pursue higher education in private institutions. The statistical landscape of higher education in Bangladesh further emphasizes the significance of private universities in shaping the linguistic exposure of learners. As of the latest available data from the University Grants Commission (UGC, 2023) of Bangladesh, there are a total of 166 universities in the country, with 112 being private and 54 public universities. Sultana (2014) underscores that a majority of students in private universities come from Bengali-medium primary and secondary institutions, constituting 63% of the student body.

The enrollment figures provide additional insights into the prevalence of English as the medium of instruction in private tertiary education. Bangladesh Education Statistics (2022) indicates that approximately 310,107 students are enrolled in private universities, highlighting the significant role these institutions play in shaping the educational landscape. In contrast, nearly 30% of Bangladeshi students who completed grade twelve opt for public institutions, resulting in 185,910 students enrolled in public universities (The Daily Star, 2014). The interrelationship between the quantity of students and English as the medium of education is apparent in the context of private universities. The high enrollment figures in private institutions, coupled with their English-medium instruction, contribute to the widespread exposure of learners to the English language. This exposure is perceived as a valuable asset, aligning with societal aspirations for global competitiveness and success in an increasingly interconnected world.

Significance of English in Higher Education Institutions in Bangladesh

The educational landscape of Bangladesh has experienced a paradigm shift with the establishment and proliferation of both public and private higher education institutions. The initiation of this transformative phase dates back to the founding of the first Private University in 1992, which catalyzed

a significant evolution in the nation's educational framework (Rahman, 2005). This marked the beginning of a deliberate effort, guided by government regulations and educational initiatives, to broaden access to higher education and accommodate a higher proportion of Higher Secondary School (HSC) graduates annually (Farooqui, 2007). The existence of both public and private higher education institutions underscores a noteworthy transition in the educational paradigm of Bangladesh. The government's strategic plan to further enhance the establishment of universities beyond Dhaka is a testament to the commitment to democratize access to higher education and reduce the necessity for HSC graduates to travel for university studies (Hasan, 2022). The growth of private and state-run institutions, with private universities holding numerical dominance, reflects an inclusive approach that provides educational opportunities to a broader segment of the population.

While the expansion of private universities is particularly pronounced in urban areas, aligning with broader trends in urbanization and economic development, the role of English in shaping educational experiences extends to both public and private institutions. Rahman (2005) notes that the growth of private universities is concentrated in expanding urban areas, emphasizing the interconnected relationship between educational opportunities and urban development. In both public and private universities, the significance of English as the medium of instruction is pivotal. This choice of English as the medium is not merely a linguistic preference but a strategic decision that aligns with the globalized nature of higher education and the demands of an interconnected world. The role of English is central to shaping the educational landscape of Bangladesh, influencing the aspirations and achievements of the country's student population. As the number of both public and private institutions continues to rise, English remains a key factor in the pursuit of academic excellence and global competitiveness. The preference for English as the medium of instruction in private universities contributes to their perceived advantages over public institutions, especially in terms of global standards and aspirations for international competitiveness. However, it is essential to recognize that both public and private institutions play crucial roles in the educational ecosystem of Bangladesh, contributing to the nation's progress (Alam et al., 2022a) and the empowerment of its diverse student population.

Conclusion and Implications

The landscape of English education in Bangladesh, particularly within the realm of higher education, has been thoroughly examined in this comprehensive review. Drawing on contemporary literature, the discussion has illuminated the challenges and complexities associated with the status of English in Bangladesh's tertiary education (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Hamid, 2016; Milon, 2016; Milon et al., 2018a, 2018b), offering insights into the historical, political, and socio-cultural dimensions. One of the central observations derived from the literature is the inconsistency in English proficiency, especially within public universities. While private institutions uniformly adopt English as the medium of instruction, public universities exhibit a more varied approach, combining Bangla and English in teaching. This discrepancy not only poses challenges for educators but also creates disparities among students, impacting their employment prospects.

The government's emphasis on English education, evident in policy shifts during the 1990s, has attempted to address this linguistic disparity. Mandating English as a compulsory subject from primary to college level and reinstating it as a mandatory subject in higher education reflects a concerted effort to enhance English proficiency among Bangladeshi learners. However, the research underscores that

despite these efforts, there remains a persistent need for improvement in English language skills among students (Siddique, 2004; Rahman, 2007; Kirkwood & Rae, 2011). The significance of English in Bangladesh extends beyond the academic realm; it is perceived as a prestigious language associated with social advancement and economic prosperity. The language has gained prominence in business, reflecting its status as a tool for global communication and a key determinant in accessing economic opportunities as well as for changing the image of a nation (Milon et al., 2018a, 2018b; Alam et al., 2018; Rahman et al., 2019; Alam et al., 2022a, 2022b). Private companies prioritize hiring individuals with higher English skills, thereby driving private universities to emphasize English education to align with market demands.

Nevertheless, the review emphasizes the importance of adopting a balanced, "glocal" approach that recognizes and preserves the linguistic diversity of Bangladesh. While English offers international opportunities, the foundation of language usage should be grounded in the cultural richness represented by Bangla and other ethnic languages. This recommendation aligns with the recognition of Bangladesh's multilingualism, a crucial aspect of its historical, social, and cultural fabric. Addressing the challenges outlined in this review requires a comprehensive and objective assessment of language policies. The Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission (UGC) are urged to acknowledge the impact of inconsistent policy formulation on English language instruction. A sustainable language policy that upholds English standards in tertiary education should be forged through equitable planning and inclusive language principles for both public and private universities.

Looking ahead, the paper advocates for more in-depth research on language education in Bangladesh. The current body of empirical studies is deemed insufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in this domain. The newly formed Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) is encouraged to play a more active role in maintaining the standards of higher education (Ehsan, 2021), considering its potential impact on language instruction. In conclusion, the significance of English in Bangladesh's tertiary education is pivotal for realizing the government's vision of a "Smart Bangladesh" and achieving the country's socioeconomic goals. As Bangladesh aspires to become a middle-income country in the twenty-first century, the effectiveness of language policies and their alignment with the nation's cultural and linguistic diversity will play a crucial role in determining the success of this ambitious endeavor. The challenges and opportunities outlined in this review serve as a call to action for policymakers, educators, and researchers to collectively contribute to the evolution of Bangladesh's language education landscape.

Declarations

The manuscript has not been submitted in any other journal or conference.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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