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Language ideology, development of English proficiency, and performance in professional communication: voices of STEM + business graduates of English medium university

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Abstract

The current study aims at unpacking the language ideologies of the STEM + Business graduates in relation to English medium instruction (EMI) and how they perceive the contribution of EMI towards English proficiency development. It also intended to unfold the extent to which EMI education may have contributed to their employability and fulfillment of workplace communication needs. Inspired by inadequate evidence on the effect of EMI on English Language Proficiency (ELP) and employability, the researchers engaged with the participants who could draw on their EMI experiences in developing ELP, attaining employability, and fulfilling workplace communication needs in English. Theoretical aspects of language ideologies, ELP, and employability set the conceptual ground of the study. Adopting the interpretive phenomenological approach and harnessing semi-structured interview questions, the study collected data from eight participants. The study found that the language ideologies of the graduates were shaped by the perceived role and importance of English to serve academic and economic purposes through the availability of curriculum corresponding to global standards, access to knowledge, English-oriented atmosphere and ELP development, and EMI policy adoption and implementation in higher education institutions was seen as a panacea to avail the facilities described above. The participants also confirmed that EMI education benefitted their ELP, enabling them to obtain jobs and perform workplace communication in English.

Keywords: English medium instruction **(**EMI), Language ideology, English language proficiency, Employability, Professional communication, Higher education institutions, Graduates' perspectives

Introduction

The students who enormously value the ideologically driven dividend of English Medium Instruction (EMI) are intrigued to enroll in EMI-adopter Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that are perceived as platforms having the potential to accelerate the improvement of students' English Language Proficiency (ELP) and subsequently

preparing them to avail job opportunities in the local and global markets (Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Galloway & Ruegg, 2020; Galloway et al., 2017; Rahman & Singh, 2020). Shaped by neoliberalism and globalization, their language ideology sows a sense of linguistic entrepreneurship that aids in strategically utilizing language-related resources in the global market (De Costa et al., 2016; Tri, 2021). Premised upon the economization of English, the language ideology of EMI enterprise strives to gain the dividend described above for the students by implementing the policy to teach the academic subjects in English rather than to teach the language for daily communication (Karim et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2018; Richards & Pun, 2022). On that note, Wannagat (2007) characterizes EMI as a means to improve "students' L2 proficiency by teaching subject matter through L2" (p. 663) which corresponds to the study by Belhiah and Elhami (2015) who claim that significant improvement in students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing was caused by the use of EMI. Their claims reinforce the widely cited benefits of EMI developing students' ELP and securing graduates' better employment opportunities (Sahan & Şahan, 2021). Bozdo˘gan and Karlıda˘g (2013) report a higher graduate employability rate as one of the perceived outcomes of EMI, which was also pointed out in Hamid et al. (2013a). Such perceived outcomes of EMI are also reiterated in Briggs et al. (2018), Dearden and Macaro (2016), Peng and Xie (2021), Richards and Pun (2021), and Rahman et al., (2022a2022b). Peng and Xie's (2021) meta-analysis revealed that Chinese EMI students were found to outperform Chinese-medium students in both learning the contents of the academic subjects and the English language. Similarly, as reported in Dearden and Macaro's (2016) comparative study, EMI teachers from Austria, Italy, and Poland believed that frequent exposure to English language input helped students improve their English proficiency. In a self-provoked debate on whether EMI is a social good or marketing tool, Kamasak and Özbilgin (2021) argued that ELP development is accompanied by financial benefits, e.g., increased employability, obtaining job or exploring earning prospects, which are the favorable corollaries of EMI education. However, this ELP development as the outcome of EMI may be questioned based on findings from other studies. For example, Lei and Hu (2014) revealed that the medium of instruction had no statistically significant effect on English proficiency or English learning and its use. Instead, they found that the prior English proficiency of undergraduate EMI students was the strongest predictor of subsequent English proficiency and English-related effects. The reason behind underscoring ELP as a potential outcome of EMI in many EFL countries is that they suffer from graduates' low rate of employment due to their poor proficiency in English (Chan, 2021; Devira, 2017; Khan & Chaudhury, 2012; Rajprasit et al., 2015; Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013; Singh & Harun, 2020). Richards and Pun (2022) argue that developing ELP through EMI is an incidental outcome of EMI. They contend that the subject teachers are not language teaching specialists. EMI may not be expected to produce proficient or expert users of English. This argument is further justified by Pecorari and Malmstom's (2018) accounts that subsume the characteristics central to EMI: English is the language used for instructional purposes, not the subject being taught, and language development is not a primary intended outcome. On this pragmatic ground, EMI differs from EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) since the latter approaches focus on English and are taught by English specialists.

Against this background, the current study intended to examine the views and ideologies of STEM + Business graduates concerning the use of EMI in HEIs. It also aimed at understanding the contribution (if any) of EMI to developing ELP, creating employability, and fulfilling workplace communication needs. The context of the study is Bangladesh, where the ideologically driven motivation to program EMI in privately run HEIs is its capacity in producing human capital through infusing linguistic capital (Rahman & Singh, 2020). On this ground, undertaking such a study in this context is plausible. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the language ideology concerning EMI among STEM + Business graduates in Bangladesh?
2. How do they perceive the contribution (if any) of EMI towards English proficiency development?
3. How and to what extent EMI education may have contributed to their employability and workplace communication needs?

Globally, EMI has been studied by incorporating the aspects of language ideologies, language management, language practices, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students. Yet limited research has been conducted to encompass graduates' language ideologies of EMI. Also, little is known about EMI and its impact on human capital development regarding ELP and communication skills (Curle et al., 2020; Soruc et al., 2021), with an exception, e.g., Sahan and Şahan (2021) investigated the perspectives of students and alumni on language learning and career prospects through EMI. This can be contrasted with the ever-growing pressure on HE to turn graduates into human capital and prepare them for work at home or abroad. Hence, by widening its focus and taking Bangladesh as an illustrative case, the current study intends to learn the language ideology concerning EMI among STEM + Business graduates, their perceived contribution of EMI towards ELP development, employability, and workplace communication needs. The study would inform the commodification of EMI education driven by neoliberal ideology (Flores, 2013).

Literature review

Language ideology and English medium instruction

Silverstein (1979) defines language ideologies as embedded in the collection of opinions or beliefs that the speakers or users of a language possess about the language, which informs the premise to continue a language system and usage of the language in society. Language ideologies derive from historical roles, economic values, political power, and social functions enacted in a particular language (Blommaert, 2006; Curdt-Christiansen, 2014; Kroskrity, 2010). The economic utility, power, and value of a language in society form the evaluative perception and conception of the language users about a language, which ultimately constitute language ideologies (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Kroskrity, 2010). In Spolsky's (2009) words, language ideology is a driving force in selecting a language to be spoken in a community. The assumption about the appropriate language choice and attitudes to that language form language ideology that helps determine the language to be practiced in a community or a context of communication (Spolsky,

2009). The collection of "values, statuses assigned to named languages, varieties, and features" is vital in this process (Spolsky, 2009, p. 4). In this capacity, the language-in-education policies seem to consider the assumed benefits of EMI and incorporate the inexorable trend of EMI in developing countries to empower citizens with the language of development (Erling & Seargeant, 2013). Driven by the language ideology attached to English and motivated by its role in the educational domain relative to other languages, the function of EMI remains extant in HEIs (Dafouz & Smit, 2016).

EMI is assumed to render a neoliberal shape of an individual characterized by an autonomous and flexible self who is able to cope with the changing trend and needs of the job market (Flores, 2013). With English's recognition as linguistic capital in a knowledge-based economy (De Costa et al., 2020; Li, 2013), neoliberal ideology asserts that language learning is instrumental to self-enterprising. EMI and neoliberal ideology are connected, whereby neoliberal ideology sets an impetus to gain academic success by exposing individuals to EMI in order for them to compete in the job market (Piller & Cho, 2013). Hence, by enrolling in EMI institutions, enrollees show a positive attitude toward language learning and create their identity as entrepreneurs in the competitive market (Block, 2018). Everyone, ranging from parents to stakeholders, demands knowledge of English, which stimulates students to ideologically determine to be the consumers of EMI education (Rahman et al., 2022a). Thus, the ideology of the stakeholders culminates in EMI adoption in HEIs (Rahman & Singh, 2020).

EMI, ELP, and human capital development

The current trend of EMI adoption originated in European HE in the mid-1980s to exert immense focus on increasing the global mobility of students and staff under the umbrella of internationalization (Wächter & Maiworm, 2008). Ali (2013) and Hamid et al. (2013b) conceptualize EMI in Asia as embedded in the internationalization of HE and local business, improvement of the quality of education, access to knowledge, and production of human capital and global citizens. It is widely perceived that teaching the subject contents through EMI confers the growth of ELP and assures economic mobility around the globe (Hamid et al., 2013b; Haider, 2017). Thus, the benefit of EMI is linked to gaining linguistic capital that contributes to human capital development in the neoliberal economy (Bourdieu, 1993; Erling, 2017). De Costa et al. (2016) argue that the inclusion of the neoliberal idea in education transforms language learning into an activity that learners perceive as essential to gain linguistic capital, which would offer linguistic entrepreneurship to learners. Eventually, they would content themselves with an enhanced self-worth, especially in the job market.

Seemingly, the vision of implementing EMI is linear to the human capital theory which underscores developing market-relevant skills for graduates to be active participants in the global economy (Erling, 2017). ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries, therefore, institute EMI believing that it would be effective for graduates to enter the job market with improved ELP (Macaro, 2017). Neoliberalism influences languages and plays a decisive role in language-in-education policy (Ali & Hamid, 2022). The HEIs in ASEAN countries are driven by neoliberalism and adopt EMI believing that it is an investment to producing English-proficient human capital. ELP is materialized in producing human capital since it is characterized as a challenging skill embodied in

individuals and contributes to their economic elevation (Ali et al., 2023b; Ali & Hamid, 2022; Blair, 2011).

Zainuddin et al. (2019) found that English is a prerequisite for increasing employability. Low proficiency in English may lose out on job seekers' employment opportunities (Zainuddin et al., 2019). Thus, English gains the status of a commodity following the free market trend (Block, 2008). It is commodified like other marketable commodities and perceived to be exchanged in formal academic settings (Park & Wee, 2012). The philosophy of neoliberalism states that economic and social transformation is the result of free-market concepts (Barnawi, 2018) that take competition into account (The Guardian 2016, as cited in Ali & Hamid, 2021) and that results in English's dominant position and identity as key tools enacted to the culmination of economic growth (Euromonitor International, 2010; Roshid, 2018). Thus, ELP is identified as the human capital that enables individuals' mobility and secures a nation's economic development (Chiswick, 2008; Seargeant & Erling, 2011). Especially developing countries uphold English's status as the human capital with the aspiration to pursue Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that require access to the globalized network and business, economy, employment, and science and technology (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Seargeant & Erling, 2011). Thus, efforts to teach and learn English seem to be an investment in the process of human capital development (Rassool, 2013). The investment is expected to empower citizens with ELP which would pave an avenue for them to engage in the global market and contribute to economic growth (Seargeant & Erling, 2011).

English language proficiency development and employability

The current study embarks on exploring how graduates' ELP development may be supported by EMI and how EMI education may contribute to their employability and workplace communication needs. For Arkoudis et al. (2012), ELP development starts with the basic communication skills that the students bring to the university; the discipline-specific language skills that are acquired through study; and the professional language skills with which the graduates leave the university. Arkoudis et al. (2012) develop a coherent model that indicates the trajectory of ELP development. It involves a continuum of three stages which can be understood from Fig. 1.

This model is useful to understand the interplay between ELP and employability, which informs the institutional endeavors to develop ELP and contribute to students' employability. The following support systems are rendered to students as part of the institutional initiatives.

(a) *ELP for learning* Fundamentally, this step deals with curricular and co-curricular components. As part of curricular elements, English programs and/or courses are offered that strive to develop students' ELP for studying in HEIs. The HEIs seem to assist students in developing English skills that enable them to succeed in graduate studies. There is a diverse range of courses (e.g., Foundation Course in English, English Fundamentals, English Composition, Advanced Writing Skills and Presentation, Communication Skills, English Reading Skills and Public Speaking, and English Writing skills and Communication), but they have common aims to strengthen students' ELP to participate in the knowledge acquisition process (Karim et al.,

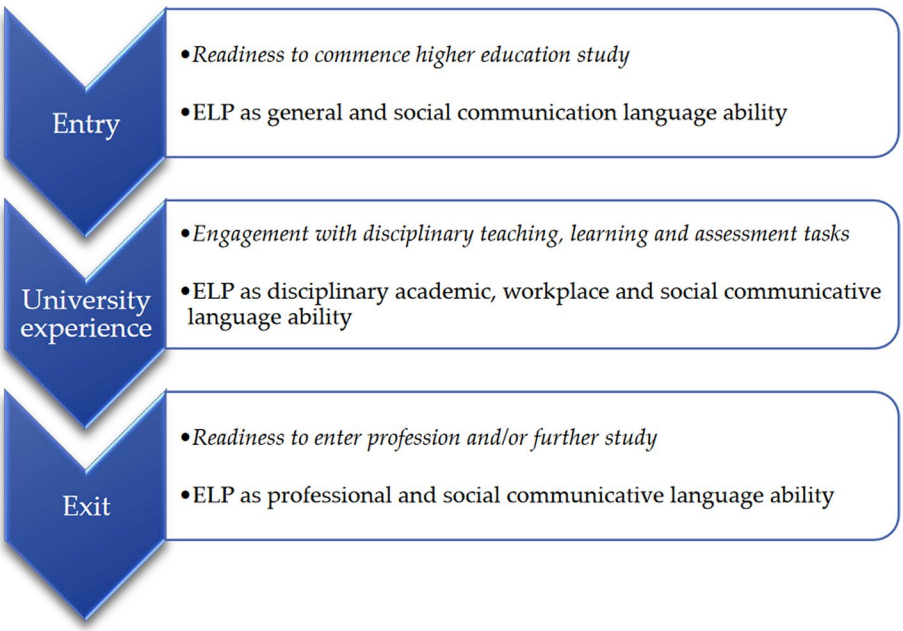

Fig. 1 ELP developmental continuum (Arkoudis et al., 2012, p.13)

2020). Arkoudis et al. (2014) identify these as "Foundation subjects in first year" and "First year orientation and transition programs for ELP" (p. 20). Moreover, higher education institutions offer short courses, units of study, workshops, and other activities, which constitute co-curricular components, and help with ELP development for their study (Arkoudis et al., 2014).

(b) *ELP for employability* This provision refers to courses, activities, and programs that intend to equip students with ELP for workplace needs (Arkoudis et al., 2014). For instance, professional English, communication skills, and business communication courses are offered by many universities that distinctively focus on workplace communication. These initiatives are embedded in the curricula, and students are taught in the formal learning environment (Arkoudis et al., 2014). Opportunities are also made available to the students through job fairs, debate clubs, and other related activities that are conceived as co-curricular initiatives that may inform students about communication and other professional skills required for employment (Arkoudis et al., 2014). The introduction of EMI in HEIs has also link to creating employment opportunities through the attainment of ELP, as noted by several studies, e.g., Rahman et al. (2020), Bozdo˘gan and Karlıda˘g (2013), and Briggs et al. (2018).

(c) *Other career support* Aiming at developing students' ELP, though not directly but related to the profession, HEIs often arrange workshops and tutorials on CV writing and job interviews (Arkoudis et al., 2014). Generally, university career clubs arrange such workshops and tutorials. Alongside in-house ones, resource persons can also be hired from outside to provide career support to the students. Also, students are encouraged to participate in volunteer programs, career mentoring programs, and social peer mentoring programs. All these initiatives cater to the development of ELP which in turn may contribute to employability.

The English language education and EMI in Bangladesh

With the mandate given to teach English as a compulsory subject from Grade 1 in the early 1990s, English language teaching was limited to teaching discrete grammar items, memorization of vocabulary, and translation of short stories and poems written in English. The grammar-translation method was replaced by communicative approaches to develop students' communicative competence (Ali & Hamid, 2021). Within this communicative focus, the national curriculum emphasized teaching English, identifying it "as an essential work-oriented skill" (National Curriculum, 1995, p. 135). Yet the landmark pedagogical shift from the grammar-translation method to CLT showed limited success in producing English-proficient students as the assessment of English in secondary and higher secondary levels comprises assessing reading and writing skills only (Islam et al., 2021a, 2021b; Karim & Mohamed, 2019; Karim et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2019). Although textbooks include listening and speaking activities, the assessment discourages teachers and students to become active in the classroom to acquire these skills (Karim & Mohamed, 2019; Karim et al., 2019, 2021). As a result, the majority of the students enroll in HEIs with minimal functional skills in English. As Islam and Stapa (2021) reported, students were unable to raise questions or queries, continue the interaction, or share thoughts and ideas in English. As such, they struggle both in their academic and professional lives.

The Private University Act was passed in 1992 which subsumed the plan to establish private universities (Karim et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2020). English was chosen as the sole medium of instruction in these universities. The stakeholders consider EMI as a significant tool for enhancing students' ELP in Bangladesh (Rahman & Singh, 2020). It is expected that EMI would produce English-proficient graduates who will be employed in the local and global job markets (Rahman & Singh, 2020). The privatization of HE was guided by this neoliberal ideology to pursue the internationalization of higher education on the one hand and graduate employability on the other (Hamid & Baldauf, 2014).

Aiming at internationalizing HE and stimulating the growth of students' ELP so that they can excel in forming their identity as global citizens, 110 private universities have adopted EMI-only policy. Pedagogically, EMI concerns the English-only approach (Fang et al., 2022), indicating that in addition to receiving instruction in the classroom in English, students are also expected to: take the tests, discuss in the classroom, complete assignments, prepare lab reports and meet any other academic requirements in English (Sarkar et al., 2021). As regards teaching staff, graduates from public universities are sometimes prioritized during recruitment at private universities (Karim et al., 2023). Besides, graduates from private universities are also recruited to teach in these institutions due to wider exposure to EMI in their education and good results (Rahman et al., 2022a). In addition, graduates with foreign degrees are highly preferred and recruited to teach in private universities. The directive issued to these teachers is to deliver lectures and to facilitate discussions in English, and to encourage the students to use English in the class. Such obligations to communicate only in English are in place in these universities in order to help them prosper in their professional lives (Rahman & Singh, 2020). This assumed outcome of EMI triggered the authors of the present article to explore Bangladeshi graduates' perspectives on the benefits of EMI in fulfilling communication needs in their respective professional fields.

Methods

Research design

This study used the interpretive phenomenological approach (Heidegger, 2019), which allowed the researchers to conduct in-depth interviews with STEM + Business graduates to unpack their language ideology concerning EMI and its potential contribution to their ELP, employability, and workplace communication. The researchers drew upon this methodological approach since "it is concerned with lived experiences and seeks reality in individuals' narratives of their experiences of and feelings about specific phenomena, producing their in-depth descriptions" (Cilesiz, 2009, p. 240). Moreover, the approach allowed the researchers to look for the meaning that graduates made of EMI in HE and its relevance to ELP, employability, and professional communication as they enacted it in their day-to-day lives (Heidegger, 2019). Epistemologically, qualitative evidence was drawn from the experiences of the graduates were recipients of education through EMI. Furthermore, the underpinning assumption of this approach suggests that "presuppositions or expert knowledge on the part of the researcher are valuable guides to inquiry and, in fact, make the inquiry a meaningful undertaking" (Lopez & Wills, 2009, p. 729). With this understanding, the researchers, with their positionality as applied linguistics and education researchers with experiences in researching EMI in HE, harnessed plausible tools for collecting the data that are contained in graduates' experiences of receiving EMI education and working in the STEM + Business sectors.

Participants

The present study selected eight participants based on accessibility and purposiveness (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Cohen et al., 2013). The second author identified the graduates who had completed their education from an institution that features EMI and who were employed at the time of the interview. The inclusion criteria determined by the researchers concerned involving participants with primary, secondary and higher secondary education gained through Bangla medium instruction along with their graduation completed from STEM + Business faculties. Some of them worked in local companies while others worked in multinational organizations. In both sectors, they dealt with foreign clients and buyers; hence, they frequently used English for professional purposes. The first language of all participants is Bangla. Table 1 provides some basic information about the participants.

Data collection

At the outset of data collection, we invited the participants using an invitation letter which explained the purpose of the study, methods of disseminating the findings, their freedom to withdraw from the study, and the guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants signed the consent form before data collection.

Semi-structured interviews with the participants served as the primary research tool for this study (Cresswell, 2015). Such a form of interview elicited critical and comprehensive views that allowed the researchers to understand the graduates' language ideologies, ELP development through EMI pedagogy as part of their preparedness for

Table 1 Demographic information of the participants

Pseudonyms	Age (Years)	Gender	Education	Designation	Experience (Years)
P1	37	Female	MBA in Finance	Office Manager, Academic Department at a Private University in Bangladesh	7
P2	40	Male	MSc in Computer Networks & Communication	Senior Officer, Network & System at a Private University in Bangladesh	9
P3	38	Female	MBA in Finance	Officer, Office of Registrar Private University in Bangladesh	8
P4	31	Male	MBA in Marketing	Officer of External Affairs Private University in Bangladesh	3.5
P5	38	Male	MSc in Computer Science	Web Developer, Central Information Technology Services at a Private University in Bangladesh	8
P6	29	Male	BBA in Accounting	Executive Officer, Department of Management at a Private Hospital in Bangladesh	3
P7	37	Male	MSc in Biodiversity Management	Office Manager, Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor at a Private University in Bangladesh	7
P8	34	Female	MBA in HRM	Officer, Admission Department at a Private Hospital in Bangladesh	6

their professional lives, and empowerment to fulfill workplace communication needs in English. To answer the first research question, we developed semi-structured interview questions (Appendix 1). Guided by Silverstein (1979) who indicates that the collection of opinions or beliefs that the speakers or users of a language possess about a language forms language ideologies, the interview questions for answering the first research question were formulated to learn language ideologies. Hence, the participants' opinions about the role and importance of English, the reasons for adopting and implementing English-medium education policy, and the role of EMI in HE were unearthed through interview questions to learn their language ideologies. To answer the second and third research questions, we adapted semi-structured interview questions (Appendix 2) from Clement and Murugavel (2015).

The data were collected from all participants between August 2022 and October 2022 via scheduled face-to-face meetings. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Before the interviews, the participants were briefed about the research, their involvement in the interview, and how the privacy and confidentiality of the data would be safeguarded. Following the initial discussion, each interview lasted approximately 30–35 min.

Data analysis

The transcriptions of the interviews were sent to the participants for member checking as part of strategies to establish credibility in this study. According to

Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" in qualitative study. In this study, member checking was employed whereby each participant was sent a transcript of their interview data via email to review and suggest correction for maximizing the accuracy in presenting the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After that, we commenced the data analysis. The data analysis process was recursive as we "went back and forth with the data to interpret the meaning" (Kaur et al., 2021, p. 2303). We adopted Van Manen's (1997) approaches for isolating the themes in three different ways. We performed a detailed reading at the outset by reading and re-reading the raw data of each participant. We attempted to identify important keywords and sentences and tried to understand what these revealed to us about the phenomenon under study, which is consistent with the 'detailed reading approach' (Van Manen, 1997). After that, we endeavored to highlight meaningful words, phrases, and statements to paste and tabulate those in a Word document to search for the underlying meanings and assign them into concepts and categories. This step gave birth to the sub-themes that generated the meaning of the emerging phenomenon. This strategy was applied to analyze the data generated from all participants. This process was in line with Van Manen's (1997) 'selective or highlighting approach'. Finally, we examined the data as a whole and the sub-themes that were identical across the responses of all the participants were used to form the main themes of the study. We accomplished this following 'holistic reading approach' suggested by Van Manen (1997).

Findings of the study

The findings of the study are presented following the order of the research questions. Hence, we first reported the language ideologies of the participants. After that, EMI's contribution towards English proficiency development is delineated. Finally, we outlined how and to what extent EMI education may have contributed to the participants' employability and workplace communication needs.

Language ideologies concerning EMI

The researchers commenced the investigation by unearthing the participants' language ideologies concerning EMI. They obtained the graduates' opinions on the role and importance of English in Bangladesh, thoughts about EMI adoption and implementation in their university, and views about the role of EMI in HE, which constituted the language ideologies.

Role and importance of English in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, English is perceived as a gateway to individual's socioeconomic prosperity. Citizens are driven by the overwhelming value of English, which indicates that only English can alleviate poverty, level up the status of its users in society, give voice to the voiceless, and confer opportunities that otherwise remain unconsumed in the absence of English. Such perception is ubiquitous in every walk of people who opt to enjoy local and global benefits whereby proficiency in English is a prerequisite. The participants of this study echo societal perspectives. The following quotes of the

participants are the testimony of lenses used to see the role and status of English in this polity.

> *Without English, it is impossible to pass even a day [...] English is considered more important than Bangla in Bangladesh for academic purposes, career opportunities, business expansions, and so on. (P1)*
>
> *The usage of English is inevitable and a must-have skill that one must possess to develop him/herself for the current generation and career goals. (P4)*
>
> *[...] English is the most popular global language, so English is needed everywhere, especially in countries like Bangladesh, where development is rapidly needed. (P7)*
>
> *The government is searching for more opportunities to create a better relationship with the rest of the world [...] Effective communication is essential. It will help us to represent our nation to the rest of the world. (P3)*
>
> *The role of English is enacted to maintain proper communication in corporate and big organizations for all sorts of activities across the globe. (P6)*

The participants possessed a propensity of seeing English as a tool to gain academic, national, business, and career prospects. The aforesaid role and importance inclined to English can result from a deep-rooted orientation to English. On the academic level, students are taught a paragraph on 'importance of learning English', which may inform the subconscious mind to inculcate English as a tool to enjoy an upbeat life. Moreover, the locus of the economic notion linked to English is ubiquitous in school textbooks. For instance, Ali et al. (2023a) have highlighted a lesson titled 'Let's become a skilled workforce' in which the English language is given such a status that the absence of its skills deprives one of obtaining a job. The intention of including such a lesson is to inform the schoolers that English is a powerful predictor of an individual's successful mobility in the trajectory of career-building. On the familial level, the parental obligation to learn English may play a pivotal role in profiling the role and status of English. For instance, Roshid and Sultana (2023) have shown that parents feel the importance of developing their offspring's listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English. Conducting the focus group discussions with parents, Roshid and Sultana (2023) have found that parents do not want their children to suffer in the job markets, businesses, or building careers due to inadequate proficiency in English. Parental position in necessitating English seems to be logical when Ara (2020) presented the unanimous use of English in different professions in Bangladesh and propagated that coupled with multinational ones, national companies, banks, government, and private organizations prioritize recruiting candidates who possess a good command of English. The recent findings from Al Amin and Hamid's (2023) study have also confirmed the instrumental value of English, which is paved via EMI, in obtaining government and non-government jobs. Hence, we argue that parents in every walk of life cultivate a notion in children that success in life and proficiency in English are positively correlated; similarly, EMI set the impetus for our participants to view English as a savior to career, business, and nation. The pernicious effect of this view is the growth of paramount interest in recent years in receiving EMI education by neglecting the role of other languages in knowledge construction (Rahman

& Singh, 2022). The view about the role and importance of English is a significant deterrent to receiving bi/multilingual education, which invites debate concerning the quality of graduates when knowledge is used as the benchmark to determine graduates' standards in Bangladesh (Karim et al., 2023).

EMI policy adoption and implementation

The participants attempted to rationalize the adoption and implementation of English-medium education policy. In their views, access to knowledge and development of ELP for professional life occupied a significant place in their reasonings. Some quotes on the testimony of EMI policy adoption and implementation are as follows:

> *All the academic curriculums and books are in English […] Universities have no other option but to adopt EMI. (P1)*

> *To fulfill the purpose of effective communication, show competence, and make the graduates more presentable in the job market and higher studies, implementing the EMI policy is a perfect decision. (P3)*

> *My university has adopted and implemented an EMI policy so that the students get a chance for higher education as well as a good job where English is a mandatory language. (P7)*

> *After completing the university degree, a student moves to professional life and needs to communicate with the international community […] Learning English is unavoidable […] may be paved via EMI. (P2)*

> *English skill has become a prominent requirement in every aspect of the career. To prepare their student as skilled manpower in the world, universities are focusing on EMI. (P8)*

EMI is framed to integrate teaching language through teaching content (Mohan, 1979). Although teaching Business + STEM courses following EMI remains the focal point in HEIs, the goal of teaching and learning English at the policy level's disposal is undeniable (Hamid & Al Amin, 2022). Hamid and Al Amin (2022) present the dual benefits of EMI by arguing that "[…] students learning the content while also enhancing their capacity for English" to be used in "educational, social and professional" domains (p. 20). Furthermore, the process of being accultured into the English language via EMI was also brought to the fore.

> *This is done to ensure that the students are ready to take on the current challenges of globalization and build themselves optimally so that they can work and adapt in a multicultural and multilingual environment. (P4)*

The participants foresaw a prosperous academic life that would later serve an individual to avail a successful career conferred by EMI. The findings maintain a resonance with Sarkar et al. (2021)'s study that enveloped attaining good marks in the academic journey, pursuing higher education abroad, and obtaining satisfactory jobs in multinational companies as students' perceived benefits reaped through EMI education. Rahman and Singh (2022) also unfolded the same benefits that one could reap by immersing

in EMI education. The participants of Rahman et al.'s (2020) study also favored EMI in HE. In these three studies, the participants were students at EMI universities, and they presented the probable benefits that are going to be tailored through the means of EMI. Unlike them, our participants were employed graduates and recipients of EMI education. Their rationalization of EMI policy adoption and implementation was guided by more practical experience than inference. Hence, the added benefit of EMI presented by them, which was not voiced in other studies, subsumed that acculturation to an atmosphere where English is the only means of communication serves distinct purposes.

Role of EMI in higher education

The role of EMI was seen by the participants as offering tremendous opportunity to gain knowledge from textbooks and research papers, develop English language proficiency, and enhance critical thinking ability.

> *EMI helps to understand the topics clearly by gaining access to the books written in English [...] broadens our knowledge about various topics related to our subject. Sometimes, we read books and tried to contextualize the knowledge, which enhances our critical thinking ability. Having the knowledge and English proficiency, we become ready to face challenges in international levels. (P1)*

> *All the textbooks, including literature, science and technology and social sciences are written in English. Moreover, the researchers also deliver their report in the same language. (P3)*

Other respondents also reported a similar view. The possibility of acquiring knowledge to a greater extent had been found to be reverberated in conjunction with EMI's other roles, like enhancing critical thinking ability, and developing ELP. It has been acknowledged in Sahan and Şahan's (2021) study that EMI leverages wider access to content (related to Engineering) knowledge. However, it is argued that students compromised knowledge acquisition at the expense of ELP (Karim et al., 2023). The insights from the senior associate professors and professors documented in Karim et al. (2023) were subject to the questionable quality of knowledge gathered by the students of EMI institutions. They debated on the quality of graduates and their limited contribution to nation-building or national policy making. Our participants' views about the role of EMI in acquiring knowledge do not outweigh the views of the senior teachers of different public and private universities in Bangladesh (Karim et al., 2023), but their demographic profile enable us to deduce that the knowledge gained via EMI education may have accelerated their contribution to bounded territories through the employment in offices, like academic departments, office of the registrar, central information technology services, pro-vice-chancellor's office, office of external affairs, and network and system department at a private university, management and admission departments at a private hospital, where they were posted as office Manager, officer, Senior Officer of Network & System, Officer of External Affairs, Web Developer, Executive Officer, Office Manager, and Assistant Admission Officer. The issue of knowledge was highlighted in Karim et al.'s (2023) study because of the senior teachers' involvement as interviewers in Public Service Commission, which is the recruitment body of Bangladesh Civil Service

(BCS) officers who are among the major stakeholders in national policy-making. They perhaps observed inadequate knowledge possessed by the candidates while scrutinizing their exam scripts or conducting viva. They held EMI education liable for insufficient knowledge acquisition since the academic documents of the candidates are kept in front of them during viva, and they figured out that the ones who graduated from EMI institutions show little success in responding to questions. Hence, knowledge is seen at stake when it is imparted in HEIs that adopt EMI and this is not the knowledge that the participants of this study have been harnessing in their jobs for years; rather, this is the knowledge that a nation needs to excel further in terms of education policy, human capital development, foreign policy making, financial policy making, and so on. Therefore, knowledge received from EMI institutions does not impair employment opportunities, but the question is where the graduates are employed. Karim et al. (2023) unearthed that these graduates are employed in the service sectors, and their rare presence in upper-run positions is ubiquitous. Hence, one of the participants in their study argued that the nation is not run by its own knowledge, but the knowledge hired from abroad, e.g., experts from China, Japan and other western countries are hired to provide consultancy in national projects (Karim et al., 2023).

In addition to unveiling the language ideologies of the graduates, we attempted to learn how the graduates perceived the contribution of EMI towards the development of ELP.

EMI and English language proficiency

The participants confirmed that EMI maximized their exposure to English. To cast light on it, with unfavorable geographical positioning and pre-tertiary education in Bangla medium schools and colleges that demanded little languaging in English, the respondent graduates' enrollment in EMI institution was a gateway for investing efforts to learn English through content, lectures, or any means pertinent to academic journey. Four-year period of graduation seemed to be synonymous to four-year immersion in English practice. Eventually, the growth in listening and speaking skills of English was evident in their responses. They managed to overcome public speaking phobia as a result of wider communication in English and classroom presentations. By and large, they claimed that they possessed confidence in using English because of EMI.

> *My desire to practice and learn English grew due to EMI. (P1)*
>
> *I had to give more effort in every course to learn English […] due to EMI. (P2)*
>
> *[…] from Bangla medium institutions […] after enrolling in an EMI university, I was instructed to talk to the other students and officers, and teachers in English alongside accomplishing all academic activities in English. After 2-3 semesters, I was able to speak in English. (P3)*
>
> *It took me four years to graduate and in these four years, the practice was immense. (P4)*
>
> *When I initially started at [my university], it was tough for me to adjust because it followed EMI, and all of the materials were in English. I could speak a little English, but I had trouble comprehending verbal instructions and listening. But by the end*

of graduation, my listening has improved a lot. Now, I feel comfortable in English speaking and listening. (P5)

EMI built confidence in me in using English to serve communicative purposes [...] I feel more comfortable when I use English in my communication. (P8)

I am Bangladeshi, and I was not very comfortable in English, but EMI excelled my communication skills. (P7)

My teachers used to deliver their lectures in English which helped me develop my listening. Besides, we had to give presentations in our courses which helped me to improve my speaking skill. (P6)

The notion of EMI's contribution to ELP appeared to be attributed to the development of listening and speaking skills. The participants of Sahan and Şahan's (2021) study have concurred that EMI acts as the panacea to have improved English skills. As regards the responses of our participants, it may provoke one to think why they gave credit to EMI for the development of two English language skills, given English is taught as a compulsory subject from grade 1 to 12 (primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels) and 12-year education should have been conducive to graduates' attainment of listening and speaking skills. Yet the reality is different, with no inclusion of listening and speaking skills in the assessment (Islam et al., 2021a, 2021b; Karim & Mohamed, 2019; Karim et al., 2019). As such, seldom did the graduates involve in practicing listening and speaking skills. The washback effect is students' and teachers' reluctance to activate the practice of these skills in secondary and higher secondary levels. Being instigated by the desire to obtain good grades in the secondary school certificate and higher secondary school certificate examinations, they remain biased toward practicing reading and writing activities within the framed syllabus. Although the national curriculum equally emphasizes four skills of English and identifies these as essential work-oriented skills, 12-year education seemingly leaves no impact on the development of listening and speaking skills. Hence, on one hand, our participants' report concerning listening and speaking skill development indicated a positive outcome of EMI; on other hand, it invited one to debate concerning the extent to which the national curriculum is contributing to producing linguistic capital. Yet we argue that the responses could be the result of graduates' overprotective stance in favor of EMI enterprise in HEIs. It should surprise one that pre-university education could not remove one's shyness in public speaking, comprehending listening instructions and lectures. It showed limited success in providing space for practicing listening and speaking.

In addition to unfolding their language ideologies concerning EMI and its perceived contribution towards English proficiency development, the researchers investigated how and to what extent EMI education may have contributed to graduates' employability and workplace communication needs, which is the fundamental concern of the third research question in this study.

EMI and readiness for employability

With diverse aspects being kept at the fore, EMI's contribution to preparing the graduates to settle well in their workplace was learned during interviews. Some participants

highlighted the contribution of the courses offered in the EMI institution. The excerpts below demonstrate evidence of the scope of how readiness is linked to employability as a result of EMI.

> *[…] some courses with materials on academic and professional writing […] Writing a business letter and report and a memo was taught […] built confidence in accomplishing official communication. (P1)*

> *I feel confident about using English for professional purposes because in my first, second, and third semester, I [took] three English courses […] courses on speaking, writing, and business English. These courses made my foundation and base of English to continue communication (verbal and written) at my workplace. I can write official letters, reports […] modify any report, essay, or document. These are highly required skills in any profession. (P2)*

> *In a course like business communication, I learned how to write a memorandum, write a business letter, be presentable for a job, do a presentation, do group work and teamwork. (P8)*

The courses identified as conducive to serving official purposes are not offered in EMI institutions by their discretion only. University Grants Commission (UGC) approved what courses to be taught in HEIs, irrespective of the medium of instruction. Within the approved framework, HEIs offer courses to their students. For instance, courses that have relevance to business communication and academic and professional writing are offered everywhere in HEIs. Manifestly, the incremental growth in English listening, speaking, reading, and writing is deeply knitted when such courses are taught. The quotes mentioned above deviated from the scope of the study, which focused on the medium of instruction, i.e., EMI, adopted to teach these courses but not the lessons learned from these courses. Certainly, such courses are designed to equally focus on the rigorous practice of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In particular, EMI universities remain at the forefront of offering different English courses to students in the initial semesters by screening their status of ELP during admission tests. These positively impact ELP development and readiness for jobs. Although how EMI played a role in preparing the graduates to settle well in their workplace was convolutedly answered by P1, P2, and P8, their responses invoked us to blatantly realize that EMI is not the sole gateway to infuse ELP (Tai & Zhao, 2022); other specialized courses, such as EAP or ESP courses, offered in HEIs also contribute to ELP development among the students (Soruc et al., 2021). We presume that the graduates' prolonged involvement in various workplaces and the benefits of language skills enjoyed in professional lives may have induced them to highlight the contribution of these skills diffused in the ESP and/or EAP courses taught through EMI. Yet some of them made their responses relevant to how EMI may have prepared them to settle well in their workplace.

> *Due to EMI, my English skills have developed automatically. I was required to always write and read in English at my university. I had to speak English in class. These practices improved my English abilities, preparing me for the workplace. (P5)*

P6 and P7 also felt the attainment of similar readiness yielded by EMI. Furthermore, the graduates' acculturation to the work environment that features communication in English was also gained through EMI. Thus, working in an organization that demands daily communication in English can easily be suited to the ones who received education in EMI institutions. P4 articulated, "if I have to work in a multinational company, copying with the atmosphere demanding the use of English is necessary, which is paved through EMI". P4 pointed out, "I heard from the colleagues coming from the Bangla (graduates' L1) medium universities that they face communication problems in English". Therefore, it can be noted from the comment of P4 that the communication advantages enjoyed by the graduates from EMI institutions outweighed the advantages experienced by the graduates from Bangla medium institutions. One of the participants in Al Amin and Hamid's (2023) study, after being declined in a job interview, has rationalized that Bangla medium education left her behind in the job interview while her English medium counterpart was selected, presenting the testimony of how EMI education empowers an individual in the job market. Therefore, it may be argued that EMI secured employment chances by cementing their ELP.

EMI and meeting workplace communication needs

The major workplace communication needs that were highlighted by the participants include writing emails, producing reports, developing business proposals, drafting meeting minutes, carrying out professional conversations with local and international colleagues and clients, and describing business products, which, as they confirmed, were significantly met by EMI. They affirmed that they were comfortable continuing verbal and written communication and performing workplace presentations. For instance, P1 reported, as a result of EMI, "I am getting an advantage at my workplace". P2 added,

> *[…] can do verbal and written communication in the office using English in comparison to my colleagues who graduated from Bangla-medium universities. I can write official letters, sometimes reports, or modify any report, essay, or document.*

In addition, P4 profiled the communication needs fulfilled by EMI, mentioning,

> *My boss always asks me to draft all his emails, and he even asks me to write all the proposals in English because he knows my proficiency is good.*

In the same vein, P5 noted, "in my workplace, every task is completed in English. We solely use written English communication. So, I think it would have been quite challenging to utilize English at work if I hadn't attended an EMI institution." Besides, P7 shared a comparison stating,

> *I can see the differences between my email and colleagues' email languages. They graduated from national universities which follow Bangla medium instruction. So, there are differences between my writing skill and their writing skill and their performance and my performance in the spoken discourse.*

P8 also echoed,

> *[…] graduates from Bengali medium institutions have difficulties meeting workplace communication needs, which I easily perform.*

EMI-driven education also enabled the participants to perform verbal communication in English, which is invariably demanded in transnational organizations as was confirmed by the participants. For example, P6 highlighted, "I deal with many foreign clients with whom I must communicate in English […] If I hadn't studied at an EMI-compliant university, it would've been a great difficulty for me to use English." Likewise, P5 illustrated,

> *Occasionally, I work on international projects and must deal with foreign clients. It demands English to communicate, describe the company's products, or receive and respond to phone calls. I can handle them successfully. I believe EMI is the reason behind my improved speaking ability.*

P7 also exemplified the implication of EMI at the workplace, highlighting,

> *My workplace is an IT firm, and I work in the marketing department, which is brand development […] core responsibility is to organize fairs, conferences, and seminars, on behalf of principal companies like Asus, Dell, and LG. Because of receiving education via EMI, I find it quite normal to converse with them, and I do it successfully.*

EMI apparently created an English learning climate in the classroom since knowledge is instilled and acquired in English. The responses indicated that if they had otherwise been exposed to learning the content, they could be deprived of the opportunity to develop English skills. In short, the maximum exposure to English and eventually the engagement in that language, continuous communication with students, teachers, and officials using that language, and the provision to learn the discipline content in English stimulated the growth of the participants' ELP. As such, they have been showcasing success in meeting the communication needs in English at their workplaces, as evident in interview data. At workplaces, English is the singular means of communication when multilingual interlocutors interact to settle particular business deals, treaties/agreements, MOU, etc. However, in many organizations, English is widely used to serve workplace communication needs within the internal official bodies to whom Bangla is also mutually intelligible. Roshid and Chowdhury (2023) have pertinently argued that English is not always the "unavoidable practical means of communication" (p. 3). The logical singular use of English in various domains is linked to diversity in interlocutors' (e.g., buyers and suppliers) sociocultural and national identity positions (Roshid & Chowdhury, 2023).

Discussion and conclusion

As the data suggest, the participants unequivocally acknowledged that English was more powerful than their L1 (first language) as long as their education and employability were concerned. In addition, they indisputably noted that business and professional activities were inconceivable without some amount of ELP. With its inseparable integration into

the globalization process, as they echo, English gains its ubiquitous status through the implementation of EMI policy in HE, which is essential since it tailors access to a curriculum of global standard, makes study resources available to students, produces skilled manpower, assists students in developing intercultural and global competence, enables them to cope with the 21st-century challenges posed by globalization, especially by multiculturalism and linguistic pluralism, and enhances students' research literacy. They stated that HEIs that continue in any language other than English limit students' educational and professional opportunities; consequently, the graduates might be losing the competitive edge in comparison to the recipients of EMI education. Therefore, according to the participants, the benefits of learning subject content in English include access to volumes of educational resources, development of mental horizon through materials available in English, and satisfaction ensured by the quality of subject content in English. They concluded that being connected to this English-oriented atmosphere galvanized their ELP, which gravitated to numerous opportunities for them to include and expand business and professional lives. The graduates' language ideologies were shaped by epistemic and economic values and the historical roles of English in privileging those who intake it (Blommaert, 2006; Curd-Christiansen, 2014; Kroskrity, 2010). Driven by these ideologies attached to English and motivated by the aforesaid benefits, they spoke in favor of EMI in HEIs (Dafauz & Smit, 2016).

Spolsky (2009) noted that the collection of "values, statuses assigned to named languages, varieties, and features" was important in determining a language choice, and in the case of our study, the participants' language ideology is profiled based on epistemic and academic values of English, triumphing in its selection as a medium for imparting knowledge. In Spolsky's (2009) words, language ideology is a driving force in the selection of a language to be spoken in a community. The gamut of values embedded in EMI concerns the growth in ELP through which Asian countries aim to increase graduates' chances for employment in domestic and international markets, which begets EMI-driven education by the perceived ideology that it yields English-proficient graduates (Dearden & Macaro, 2016; Rahman & Singh, 2020). This view corresponds to the language ideology of our participants and is consistent with many studies which present EMI as instrumental to getting jobs. Hence, immediately after unpacking their language ideologies, we ponder to learn how the graduates perceived the contribution of EMI towards English proficiency development and how and to what extent EMI education may have contributed to their employability and workplace communication needs.

EMI conferred the participants' maximum exposure to English by characterizing it as a language of instruction in HEIs (Pecorari & Malmstom, 2018). Coupled with this, the participants' immersion in the foundation courses, i.e., EAP and ESP courses, during the first year of their undergraduate programs, added to their orientation to the continuous subscription to the use of English (Karim et al., 2020), which results from the academic initiative to develop their preparedness for EMI since it is compulsory to receive knowledge and accomplish all academic activities in English in EMI institutions (Sarkar et al., 2021). Doiz and Lasagabaster (2018) found a natural enactment between the use of English and students' lives, which corresponds to the graduates interviewed in this study. They have been in prolonged exposure to English for four years at the university, which

naturally maximized their ELP. Eventually, they developed confidence in using it. They found the English-taught courses in conjunction with EAP and ESP courses conducive to their enhanced ELP. The preparatory EAP and ESP courses are offered at universities in Turkey, the Middle East, and Hong Kong, and language specialists are entrusted to design and teach these courses (Richards & Pun, 2021). Arkoudis et al. (2012) show that at the entry level, the focus is given to yielding readiness to commence study in HEIs. ELP as general and social communication language ability remains at the forefront at this stage. The effort leads to the development of ELP to accomplish disciplinary, workplace, and social communications (Arkoudis et al., 2012). Arkoudis et al. (2014) explain that institutions pay special attention to tailoring English programs and/or courses that primarily strive to develop students' ELP for studying in HEIs. The participants in Sarkar et al.'s (2021) study confirm that English foundation courses are offered to them in the first year as part of institutional initiatives. They add that these courses benefit their English reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Furthermore, the present study also reveals that due to enhanced ELP, not only their communicative ability observes an acceleration, but they also become accultured to an environment that always demands communication in English. According to Ali (2013) and Hamid et al. (2013b), EMI offers graduates to be global citizens, which is paved through access to English (Erling & Seargeant, 2013). Access to English caters to the improvement in ELP for the participants of the study and eventually gives birth to human capital (Ali & Hamid, 2021).

The participants profiled English as the human capital that had a robust impact on their employment (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Seargeant & Erling, 2011). Regarding how and to what extent EMI education may have contributed to their employability, the participants' responses are aligned with the human capital theory, which underscores developing market-relevant skills for graduates to be active participants in the global economy (Erling, 2017). For them, ELP is a market-required skill that shapes linguistic capital for them, leading to their employment (Bourdieu, 1993; Erling, 2017; Ali & Hamid, 2022; Spring, 2015). In short, EMI secures the employment of these English-proficient graduates in national and international organizations. Fundamentally, ELP and employability are linked (Arkoudis et al., 2014). In other words, ELP developed through studying at EMI universities leads to better employment opportunities, as the participants believed.

With respect to how and to what extent their workplace communication needs were met by EMI education, the graduates strongly endorsed that they had developed skills in writing official letters and correspondences, official and business reports and proposals, presenting business products, and dealing with local and foreign clients; they also noted that these were the outcomes of receiving education in an EMI institution. In the ELP development continuum, Arkoudis et al. (2012) assert that graduates become content with the readiness to harness English meaningfully at their workplaces. By and large, our respondents see ELP as a catalyst to their current employment, and driven by the acquired ELP, they are performing meaningfully in meeting the communication needs that demand the application of English. In addition to ELP driven by EMI, HEIs also design curricula that embed professional English, communication skills, business and human communication courses in conjunction with English foundation courses, which

grow a sense of professionalism and ability in handling official communication at workplaces by catering linguistic capital (Arkoudis et al., 2014).

While the participants acknowledged that their HE received in an EMI institution cultivated their ELP and that ELP underpinned their employment, they also informed that their colleagues who received education in Bangla medium institutions were suffering from the lack of ELP. As regards the development of ELP and access to employment, the variable outcomes were attributed to a different medium of instruction settings: "I can see the differences between my email language and my colleagues' email language. They graduated from National University; the National University teaches through Bangla medium instruction…" is a pressing response and reminds us of the unequal distribution of resources, which also symbolizes emerging social inequalities in a polity driven by neoliberalism (Ali & Hamid, 2021). To illustrate, modern high-tech private universities tend to promote the skillisation of students' ELP as part of an expensive education program. Only students from middle-class or elite families can afford such education. Hamid (2016) argues that those who are financially solvent can only subscribe to the costly HE provided by the private institutions, which are mostly situated in metropolitan areas, and their academic success is ascribed to the guaranteed outcome in comparison with their counterparts facing difficulty to subscribe to the expensive education. Thus, they are receiving education in public institutions that charge low tuition fees. Therefore, the profile of education in rural areas is relegated to uncertain academic success for them (Hoque et al., 2023). Pertinently, Holborow (1999) argues that "English is either the modernizing panacea or the ruthless oppressor, depending on your place in the world" (p. 2).

Despite EMI being a global trend, private HEIs remain at the forefront compared to public universities (Dearden, 2014). As per Bangladesh Education Statistics (2021), the average number of students in 110 private universities is 3018, while 50 public universities, which are not EMI universities, have 18,030 students in each on average. The statistics show that the teacher-student ratio in EMI-provisioned private universities is 1:22, while the ratio is 1:58 in their public counterparts. The data suggest that public universities deal with many students who might have succumbed to the education system featured with an infrastructural deficiency compared to their private counterparts who are privileged to manage expenses and materialize the benefits of infrastructural advancement. To cast light on it, teachers in private universities are obliged to support students both inside the classroom and outside the classroom, i.e., during consultation hours, which may not be available to the ones studying in public universities due to the distressful teacher-student ratio. Thus, attending to individual needs is seemingly onerous. Specifically, at National University, the number of teachers against the number of students is inadequate in contrast to the scenario prevailing in private universities. Thus, we can assume the unequal distribution of resources might benefit some students while leaving a significant number of students disadvantaged since many are unable to afford the expensive EMI education in private universities. Unequal access to English causes variation in learning outcomes (Ali & Hamid, 2021; Rahman et al., 2022b), which is evidently felt in the participants' responses. Ali and Hamid (2021) argue that those in advantaged contexts outperform disadvantaged counterparts in terms of gaining employable skills. However, in reality,

it is seen that the graduates from non-EMI universities are also employed since our participants addressed them as "my colleagues". On a pragmatic level, (Ricento, 2018) contends English is not the sole brand that mobilizes individuals. According to Ricento (2018), "Certainly, English has value for many of these mobile individuals; however, I have tried to demonstrate that English is not the inherent hegemon, nor the de facto oppressor, nor the ticket to social or economic mobility, nor the crucial factor in promoting a global demos that it is claimed to be, to varying degrees… (Ricento, 2012, p.49)". Thus, claim like only ELP is serving employment may be an overstatement. Bangladeshi superficial and romanticized perception posits English as a panacea to enabling people for employment opportunities (Ali et al., 2023a, 2023b). Our study is limited in this capacity to show how ELP as a driving force of linguistic capital associates with other qualifications, credentials, and human qualities, which are inevitable for obtaining jobs, and to create employment opportunities.

Moreover, while sharing their lived experiences of how ELP benefits from EMI education and how ELP facilitates their communication needs at workplaces, our participants excitedly articulated the name of their institution, which we concealed due to maintaining anonymity, indicating their attempt to showcase the institution's contribution to accommodate them in the employment process and continue the job responsibilities. It matches with AL-Seghayer (2011), who advocates ELP as an empowering tool to secure one's employment. On top of that, the participants' responses seem to be the kind of success stories that they pose as the outcomes of their huge investment in their enrollment and graduation from an EMI institution. Such success stories can be tempting but cannot be generalized because the employees recruited in jobs under BCS are mostly from public universities and are serving in various positions to guide, monitor and maintain nation-building activities. If ELP became the only attribution of EMI institutions, then the jobs under BCS would have been inaccessible to the ones studying in non-EMI public universities that are robust and maintain nationalistic sentiment in upholding the status of the national language. Considering such accounts, Hamid and Al Amin (2022) argue that "EMI has emerged as a dividing line between public and private universities, creating unhelpful debates in the sector" (p. 21), whereby graduates of EMI adopters hold the tendency to possess a feeling of superiority. Thus, our participants' narratives in favor of ELP development through EMI education cannot be conclusive remarks. Most importantly, the notion of sensing ELP as a catalyst for the growth of an individual, a society, and a nation has been challenged in the global south, including Bangladesh (Ali, 2022; Ali & Hamid, 2022; Chowdhury, 2022). Philipson (2018) argues that many societies across the globe gain economic success with little or no access to English. Moreover, the widely cited benefits of learning English for an individual and a nation to survive in the modern world (Batthacharya, 2013) motivate parents to induct their children into the unhealthy competition of learning English (Rahman, 2022). The unhealthy competition is perhaps responsible for our participants' firm belief that ELP engendered the success that they are enjoying today. It also generates a feeling of superiority to others who studied at non-EMI universities.

Fundamentally, the deeply held outlook and ideologies concerning the power of English in societies (Bloomaert, 2005) in post-colonial countries (Rahman et al., 2018) construct their cognition to report that a shift from Bangla medium education

in primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels (12-year education prior to the enrollment in HEIs) to EMI education progresses their ELP and secures their jobs. As regards the ELP development continuum proposed by Arkoudis et al. (2012), the basic communication skills that the students brought with them are nurtured through the English foundation courses offered in the first year of undergraduate programs in EMI institutions (Karim et al., 2020), which is further advanced through discipline-oriented language skills that result in the acquisition of professional language skills to advantage them after the graduation in managing jobs (Arkoudis et al., 2014). The trajectory of ELP development is clearly visible in EMI universities. Yet the graduates from non-EMI institutions are also featured with qualities and recruited to serve as high officials in government, non-government, national, and international organizations that require the frequent use of English. Thus, it is important to investigate the ELP development continuum in non-EMI institutions. However, one thing prevalent in public universities is that English is used to teach science, technology, engineering, and medicine whereas Bangla is used to teach subjects related to humanities and social sciences (Hamid et al., 2013a). Since they have an inexplicit medium of instruction policy, the mixture of Bangla and English is seen in the classrooms in public universities (Hamid et al., 2013a), which may contribute to the graduates' advancement in ELP.

Methodically, the current study would deem to be effective since the byproduct of the findings reported in this study is the presentation of the ELP development process of the participants in an EMI institution. On the epistemological ground, this knowledge may be additive to the conceptualization of the medium of instruction policy in HEIs in countries that have distinctive ideologies in terms of the medium of instruction policy in HE (Karim et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2020, 2022a, 2022b). Secondly, through that knowledge, EMI institutions' strategies can benefit from that of non-EMI institutions. Considering the proposal, further studies can inform whether inequalities in HE can be minimized in terms of the medium of instruction policy and whether equal access to English and knowledge can be implementable. This is proposed on the ground reality unveiled by Karim et al. (2023) that in EMI institutions, knowledge acquisition is compromised at the expense of attaining ELP. Oppositely, advocates of EMI argue that the attainment of ELP becomes limited when gathering discipline knowledge and upholding the status of national language remain at the focal point in non-EMI institutions. Future studies settling on such ecological niches would foreground how the cultivation of ELP as a human capital accompanied by the dissemination of knowledge can be equally strategized since an English-only policy might challenge the sustainable growth of a nation.

Appendix 1

1. What are your opinions on the role and importance of English in Bangladesh?
2. Why do you think your university has adopted and implemented an English-medium education policy?

3. What role does English-medium instruction play, in your opinion, in higher education?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

Appendix 2

1. How do you see the development of your ELP because of EMI education?
2. How do you see your preparedness with ELP to settle well in their workplace?
3. How comfortable are you in continuing verbal communication including, participating in the official meeting, conversing with colleagues, receiving and responding to phone calls, dealing with foreign clients, and so on, in English at your workplace? Please, explain.
4. How comfortable are you in performing the presentations including, preparing and performing professional presentations, e.g., product and proposal presentations, presenting annual and scientific reports, and so on, in English at your workplace?
5. How comfortable are you in continuing written communication and activities including, writing emails, business and official letters, lab reports, annual and scientific reports, and so on, in English at your workplace?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

Abbreviations

HE	Higher education
HEIs	Higher education institutions
EMI	English medium instruction
ELP	English language proficiency
STEM Students	Students of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

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The first author conceptualized the study and wrote 'Introduction', 'Literature Review' 'Methods', and 'Discussion and Conclusion'. The second author contributed to the data collection and data presentation. The third and fourth authors contributed to amalgamating the resources for shaping 'Introduction' and 'Literature Review'. They also yielded comments on the first draft of the 'Introduction', 'Literature Review', and 'Methods'. Additionally, the third author also performed proofreading and the fourth author helped in designing tools for collecting data. The fifth author assisted the second author in the 'Data collection'.

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