

ENGLISH-SPEAKING FLUENCY BARRIERS FACED BY
BENGALI-MEDIUM STUDENTS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION
IN BANGLADESH.

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MA in ELT & Applied Linguistics

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

The present thesis explores the English-speaking fluency barriers encountered by Bengali-medium students as they transition into tertiary education in Bangladesh. Using a qualitative case study design, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with eight students and four teachers from two private university in Dhaka, examining linguistic, psychological, and institutional dimensions of fluency barriers. The findings suggest that recurrent exposure to examination-oriented, grammar-translation pedagogy at the secondary level tends to be associated with limited procedural speaking competence, even though participants had completed 12 years of formal English instruction. Participants also reported psychological barriers including presentation anxiety, perfectionism, and fear of negative evaluation that appear to amplify the linguistic challenges. Mother-tongue influence and a sudden shift to English-Medium Instruction further contributed to what participants described as a "transition shock." Nevertheless, students reported engaging in self-directed strategies, including media exposure and peer practice, while teachers used translanguaging and supportive feedback to mitigate these barriers. The study underscores the need for systemic coordination between secondary and tertiary education, including assessment reform that integrates speaking and listening, teacher-training reform, and university-level bridging provisions.

Keywords: English-speaking fluency; Bengali-medium students; tertiary education; transition shock; psychological barriers; English-Medium Instruction (EMI)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

English functions as a lingua franca in international scholarship, university teaching, and global workplaces, and in countries such as Bangladesh it has historically been embedded in formal education from the primary level. However, the kind and quality of English that learners gain from formal education vary substantially by social position. Within the political-economy account advanced by Shaikh and Munmun, English in Bangladesh "has evolved from colonial roots to come to signify opportunity, privilege, and socio-economic mobility," with respondents almost completely agreeing that English proficiency is shaped more by private forces and worldwide pressures than by national policy, and that English dominance in elite employment markets continues to reproduce "social stratification" even while government efforts to democratise English access remain insufficient (Shaikh & Munmun, 2026). Ramalingam and Islam extend this account by documenting the historical inheritance of English as the language of the colonial "wealthy class" and showing how, in contemporary Bangladesh, "due to the growth of English-medium education, only some urban, rich families use English in personal conversations," while the rest of the population relies on Bangla for everyday use and acquires English largely through formal instruction (Ramalingam & Islam, 2024). The implication is that the medium of instruction a student encounters is less a free educational choice than a marker of socio-economic position: Bengali-medium school attendance is itself a proxy for class membership, and the language barriers encountered by Bengali-medium learners emerge not solely from pedagogical deficits but from the architecture of inequality through which that instruction is delivered.

Bangladesh ranks in the lower proficiency band on international English assessments, a finding that has been associated with curricular and pedagogical factors at the secondary stage rather than with the efforts of individual learners alone (Islam et al., 2021). Tests such as the Junior School Certificate and the Secondary School Certificate exert considerable washback on classroom practice, encouraging teaching focused on grammar rules, reading comprehension, and written accuracy (Rahman et al., 2021). As a result, learners frequently complete 12 years of formal instruction while reporting limited spontaneous speaking competence and confidence. Yet the underlying mechanism is not merely pedagogical. The persistence of the grammar–translation orientation in Bengali-medium schools reflects a structural pattern in which low-resourced schools those serving lower-income populations are structurally incentivised by the high-stakes public-examination regime to allocate all available classroom time to written-exam-eligible content, while better-resourced English-medium and English-version schools serving wealthier populations can afford the smaller class sizes, training, and audio-visual materials required to invest in oral practice (Mridula & Ahsan, 2025; Rahman et al., 2019; Ramalingam & Islam, 2024). When pedagogy is read in this way, examination washing is not the upstream cause of fluency barriers but the proximate mechanism through which socio-economic stratification translates into unequal speaking competence.

At the tertiary level, English shifts from being one subject among many to functioning as the primary medium of instruction and academic interaction. Students are routinely expected to present, debate, and write academically in English, as English is the medium of instruction at the tertiary level (Rahman et al., 2019). For Bengali-medium learners, this transition is commonly experienced as abrupt; some respondents described feeling "lost" or "shocked" when confronted with English-only lectures and presentations from the first week of enrolment. It is important to note that not all Bengali-medium students experience this transition in the same way: socio-economic status, prior schooling, urban or rural background, exposure to

English media, and individual motivation appear to mediate outcomes (Mridula & Ahsan, 2025; Rana, 2024; Shaikh & Munmun, 2026). The present study therefore approaches this transition not as a uniform deficit but as a contextualised process shaped by schooling, exposure, and affect a process through which the socio-economic structuring identified by Shaikh & Munmun (2026) and Ramalingam & Islam (2024) interacts with the pedagogical and institutional conditions of the tertiary classroom.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

A popular but unhelpful tendency in both media and policy discourse about Bangladeshi secondary English is to label Bengali-medium learners as uniformly "weak" or "linguistically deficient." This thesis deliberately rejects that framing. Bengali-medium graduates are not a homogeneous cohort. A substantial minority performed strongly at SSC and HSC, wrote competently on academic tasks, and entered university EMI programmes with reasonable speaking competence; the heterogeneity observed in the present sample mirrors the heterogeneity documented in the broader literature (Mridula & Ahsan, 2025). What unites many of the participants in this study is not a categorical inability but a difficulty that emerges precisely at the transition to EMI and that fluctuates across topic, audience, and emotional state. What is characterised in popular discourse as "weakness" is in fact the operation of a structural misalignment between an examination-oriented, socio-economically stratified secondary pipeline and a communicatively demanding tertiary environment (Karmaker & Hasan, 2025). Accordingly, the present study treats "fluency barriers" as situational, context-bound phenomena, not as stable properties of the learner.

Although the Bangladeshi secondary English curriculum nominally endorses communicative competence, classroom practice across most Bengali-medium schools remains consistent with what Rahman et al. describe as a long-running implementation gap declarative instruction that

systematically neglects sustained oral practice(Rahman et al., 2019). The corpus of school-level research documenting this pattern is substantial(Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020; Nazari et al., 2022; Rahman, 2019). However, fewer studies have examined what happens when the consequences of that pattern meet the demands of English-Medium Instruction at the tertiary level, where students are routinely required to listen to lectures, present, debate, and write analytically in English from the first week of enrolment(Mridula & Ahsan, 2025; Sarker et al., 2021). Preliminary evidence from recent tertiary-focused studies suggests that many Bengali-medium students arrive at university with limited spontaneous speaking competence, significant anxiety about spoken performance, and limited exposure to the procedural rehearsal needed to bridge the gap(Megha & Sarkar, 2022; Mridula & Ahsan, 2025; Rana, 2024).

There is, moreover, a missing analytic intersection: existing studies tend to address either linguistic barriers (often in isolation), affective barriers (often in isolation), or institutional barriers (often without student voice). What remains insufficiently characterised is the convergent experience of these three dimensions in the same learner the way in which limited procedural speaking competence, anxiety, and the abruptness of the EMI transition operate together rather than separately. Equally, recent reviews from the broader EMI literature note that institutional coping strategies and teacher responses to fluency barriers have been less often researched than the barriers themselves(Pun & Thomas, 2020).

The present study addresses this gap by foregrounding the voices of Bengali-medium learners and their teachers at two private universities in Dhaka, using reflexive thematic analysis. It seeks to make visible from participants' own accounts the converging nature of linguistic, affective, and institutional factors, and to identify self-directed strategies students report developing when formal instruction does not provide them. A clearer articulation of this convergent experience is required before targeted recommendations for assessment reform, teacher preparation, or university bridging programmes can be confidently designed. Critically,

the recommendations emerging from such articulation must address the socio-economic architecture in which Bengali-medium schooling is embedded, since teacher-training reform alone cannot offset the effects of class-stratified access to materials, class size, exposure, and the high-stakes public-examination regime (Rahman et al., 2021; Ramalingam & Islam, 2024; Shaikh & Munmun, 2026)

1.3 Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What linguistic and pedagogical barriers do Bengali-medium students report encountering in spoken English within tertiary EMI settings in Bangladesh?
2. How do students describe their transition from secondary Bengali-medium schooling to English-Medium Instruction at the tertiary level?
3. What strategies do students report using to manage and overcome these fluency barriers?

1.4 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the qualitative case-study design with a purposive sample of eight students and four teachers means that the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable to all tertiary learners in Bangladesh; transferability is instead oriented to comparable contexts with similar EMI characteristics. Second, the sample was geographically and institutionally limited to two private universities in Dhaka, excluding the experiences of public university students and learners in rural or regional institutions. Third, interviews of approximately 20–30 minutes may have constrained the depth of personal narratives elicited; longer, multi-session interviews could potentially have surfaced more

contextualised accounts. Finally, although socioeconomic status and differential access to language resources emerged as relevant during interviews, they were not the primary focus of analysis and should be examined more systematically in future research.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to a small but growing body of qualitative work foregrounding student voice in the Bangladeshi EMI context. While school-level ELT research in Bangladesh is relatively well developed (Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020; Rahman, 2019). Few studies have centred on the vulnerable transitional phase when Bengali-medium learners enter English-medium tertiary education. Theoretically, the study engages with second-language anxiety, communicative competence, and the emerging framework of translanguaging to interpret participants' accounts; practically, it offers implications for teachers and policymakers concerned with bridging the secondary-tertiary English divide. Because oral communicative competence is increasingly cited by industry stakeholders as a critical employability skill in Bangladesh (Karmaker & Hasan, 2025), understanding fluency barriers has direct relevance for curriculum design, teacher-training reform, and the design of university-level support programs.

1.6 The Scope of the Study

The study is restricted to students who completed primary and secondary schooling through Bengali-medium instruction and who are currently enrolled in private universities in Dhaka using EMI. Teacher participants were selected because they share a Bengali-medium educational background, allowing them to reflect on the same trajectory. Thematically, the inquiry is bounded by four areas: examination-oriented schooling, psychological barriers (anxiety, perfectionism, fear of evaluation), linguistic and transitional issues (mother-tongue influence, transition shock), and reported self-regulated coping strategies (media exposure,

peer practice). The methodological scope is qualitative, employing reflexive thematic analysis on transcribed interview data.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

English occupies an increasingly central position in higher education, scholarly publication, and labour markets worldwide. Within Bangladeshi universities, both the official policy framework and the lived experience of students are shaped by EMI, even when learners' prior access to communicative English has been limited. Spoken communicative competence has thus become not merely a desirable but an essential academic capability. Yet Bangladesh continues to face what Rahman et al. describe as a persistent implementation gap in English language teaching: although curriculum documents endorse communicative language teaching, classroom practice remains substantially form-based (M. Rahman, 2019; M. M. Rahman et al., 2019). As a result, learners often complete years of instruction without sustained opportunity to develop spontaneous spoken English.

This review is organized in four parts. First, the conceptual framework treats language proficiency as a multidimensional construct integrating communicative competence, motivation, and affect. Second, the role of secondary-school English instruction particularly Bangla-medium education is examined in relation to fluency development. Third, the linguistic and psychological barriers that arise when Bengali-medium learners enter tertiary EMI are reviewed. Fourth, the literature on existing coping strategies is considered, situating the present study's contribution. Throughout, the review is informed by scholarship on Bangladesh specifically (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020; Kh. A. Rahman et al., 2021; M. M. Rahman et al., 2019), together with adjacent South Asian and SLA work, in order to avoid over-generalizing from unrelated contexts.

2.2 Language Proficiency Concept

Language proficiency in contemporary applied linguistics is no longer treated as synonymous with grammatical accuracy. Instead, it is conceptualized through frameworks such as Bachman's communicative competence model, encompassing grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Fluency in particular is a multi-componential phenomenon: it requires automatic lexical retrieval, appropriate discourse structuring, and pragmatic calibration to context (Gobena, 2024). The acquisition of these components is influenced by age of exposure, with large-scale evidence suggesting that some aspects of language learning capacity change across the lifespan in ways that affect ultimate attainability and processing speed (Bylund et al., 2020).

Motivation constitutes a further significant dimension. Recent systematic reviews of tertiary learners show that intrinsic motivation, integrative orientation, and the L2 self-concept exhibit moderate-to-strong associations with proficiency (Aung & Nikolov, 2025). Importantly, motivation is itself affected by classroom realities: where learners perceive their preparation as inadequate for the communicative demands of EMI, motivation is reported to decline.

In Bangladesh, the conceptual gap between curriculum aspiration and pedagogical reality is well documented. Rahman argues that even after the formal transition to CLT in the 1990s, classroom practice often lags significantly behind policy, with teacher-led transmission of grammatical rules continuing to dominate (Islam & Stapa, 2021). Proficiency in this context must therefore be understood as mediated by structural rather than purely individual factors.

2.3 English Teaching in Bengali-medium Schools

The trajectory of Bengali-medium learners at the tertiary level is rooted in how English is taught in their school years. Despite repeated curriculum reform endorsing CLT, secondary classrooms in Bangladesh are widely reported to retain a grammar-translation orientation (M.

Rahman, 2019; M. M. Rahman et al., 2019). High-stakes public examinations continue to assess reading and writing, with no formal component for speaking or listening, which generates strong negative washback on pedagogy(Rahman et al., 2021). Teachers, responding to these pressures, frequently orient lessons to test-eligible content; students come to associate English with grammar rules and memorised compositions rather than with spontaneous interaction. Karim et al. attribute this dynamic to a misalignment between communicative curricular aims and summative assessment formats, and Sultan provides recent evidence that the washback effect of public examinations has not diminished meaningfully in the past decade.

It is important to avoid a categorical reading of this picture. Not all Bengali-medium teachers rely exclusively on GTM; some report using group work, oral drills, or communicative tasks depending on training, school resources, and class size. Likewise, learner experience is heterogeneous: students whose schooling included private tutoring, English-medium sections of Bangla-medium schools, or substantial media exposure often enter university with greater speaking confidence than peers whose only exposure was class time. The present review therefore foregrounds trends rather than uniformities.

A further dimension, frequently overlooked in the Bangladeshi literature, is translanguaging. As theorized by García and Wei, translanguaging refers to the flexible deployment of a bilingual or multilingual repertoire rather than strict separation between languages. In Bangladeshi classrooms, where teachers often use a mix of Bangla and English to scaffold comprehension, translanguaging is not only common but pedagogically productive. Rather than treating L1 use as interference to be eliminated, recent scholarship argues that strategic translanguaging can support content comprehension and gradually extend learners' L2 production(Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014). Recognising translanguaging as a resource rather than as a deficit marker offers a more accurate lens on Bengali-medium learners' actual communicative practices.

The persistence of GTM is not solely attributable to teacher resistance. The educational system itself structurally incentivises it. High-stakes public examinations assess reading, writing, and grammar but not speaking; textbook publishers produce GTM-compatible workbooks; classroom hours are scheduled to enable syllabus coverage through translation rather than communicative practice; and teachers are formally evaluated on student examination outcomes rather than on speaking competence (Rahman et al., 2021). In such a system, GTM is the safer professional choice. Teachers who deviate risk their students' examination results and, by extension, their own performance evaluations; teachers who maintain GTM can claim to have "covered the syllabus" even when their students cannot speak. The persistence of GTM, in other words, is the rational response of professionals operating within a system that rewards examination outcomes over communicative outcomes. As Rahman et al. note, "It is understandable that teachers are skilful in teaching through the GTM method since they have the experience of utilising the method in the classroom. With the CLT innovation, teachers' needs were overlooked, and to an extent, it was imposed on them"(Rahman et al., 2019). The implication for policy is straightforward: changing pedagogy without changing assessment is unlikely to produce durable pedagogical change.

2.3.1 Less Exposure to Spoken English

Beyond the classroom, the sociolinguistic environment offers limited opportunity for spoken English. Although urban Bangladesh has an increasingly visible English-using middle class, everyday interaction remains predominantly Bangla. Students in rural or lower-income settings may experience exposure to English only at school. The implications for fluency are substantial: procedural skill development generally requires frequent, low-anxiety, meaningful use of the target language, which is difficult to achieve without exposure(Aminulloh & Pranata, 2025). Where L1 dominance is reinforced outside school, internal translation from Bangla to English can become a habitual processing strategy cognitively costly during speech production

and consequential for the procedural fluency required of EMI oral performance (Aminulloh & Pranata, 2025; Islam, 2009)The cognitive load associated with this internal translation, while theoretically plausible, is best treated here as an interpretive inference drawing on Levelt's bilingual speech-production model and Segalowitz's cognitive-fluency framework rather than as an empirically established finding specific to Bangla–English pairs. Islam's contrastive analysis nevertheless provides suggestive evidence that morphological, syntactic, and phonological interference from Bangla into English is widely documented at every linguistic level, with the degree of interference strongly correlated with learner proficiency(Islam, 2009), which points in turn to cognitive strain as a likely concomitant of low proficiency.

A further key distinction is required at this point, since the affective account that follows will rely on it. Anxiety in the second-language classroom is not a single construct. A multiple-case work distinguishes foreign language classroom anxiety defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018) from the more specific fear of negative evaluation, which MacIntyre identifies as a separate, situationally bound construct concentrated in classroom settings where peers are present and likely to judge the speaker's performance. In the transition from secondary school to tertiary EMI, students may experience both, but the FNE component is typically intensified because the audience of peers and instructors in EMI lectures and presentations is new, linguistically mixed, and socially consequential(Islam et al., 2025). This distinction will be drawn upon in 2.3.3, 4.3 and 5.2.2 below.

2.3.2 Secondary-to-Tertiary Education Transition

The shift from secondary to tertiary EMI is widely documented as an academically and emotionally demanding transition. Macaro et al. describe it as a cumulative adjustment process

in which students must acquire academic discourse conventions, disciplinary vocabulary, and disciplinary participation norms simultaneously. For Bengali-medium learners, this transition is compounded by the absence of sustained spoken English practice in their previous schooling. Motivation research suggests that learners who perceive a misalignment between their preparation and the demands of their academic environment are more likely to disengage (Aung & Nikolov, 2025). The transition therefore, operates as both a linguistic and an affective event, with implications that extend beyond the first semester.

2.3.3 Barriers to Speaking Fluency in Higher Education

Psychological factors are among the most consistently reported barriers to fluency in the L2 classroom. Communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and perfectionism have been shown to correlate negatively with willingness to communicate and oral performance (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Gobena, 2024; Misrinah, 2025). In the EFL presentation context, students have reported physical symptoms such as trembling, mind-blanking, and involuntary silence, which they attribute to anxiety rather than to a linguistic deficit (Almagsodi, 2025). These findings are corroborated by recent meta-analytic evidence showing that L2 anxiety is associated with lower achievement on a range of language measures, including speaking (Teimouri et al., 2019). Affect is not, on this evidence, a peripheral concern: it can be the deciding factor in whether learners deploy linguistic resources they demonstrably possess.

Linguistic barriers are equally well documented. Even where students have substantial vocabulary and grammar knowledge, the absence of proceduralised speaking skill slows production, since declarative grammatical knowledge must be proceduralised through repeated meaningful practice before it becomes accessible for spontaneous oral performance a process DeKeyser, in the skill-acquisition framework synthesised by Saito and Plonsky, characterises

as moving from controlled form-focused exercises through proceduralisation toward automatisisation(Saito & Plonsky, 2019). Mother-tongue phonological patterns, lexical transfer, and syntactic interference are common, and these are especially salient in typologically distant language pairs such as Bangla and English(Islam, 2009). Importantly, fluency limitations of this kind are not purely linguistic; they interact with anxiety to produce what Papi and Khajavy describe as a self-reinforcing avoidance cycle in which anxiety lowers willingness to communicate and reduced communication prevents the procedural rehearsal that would itself reduce anxiety (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2019; Papi & Khajavy, 2023)Recent evidence from the Bangladeshi context corroborates this dynamic: Islam, Arefin, Ng, and colleagues document that anxiety, low self-esteem, and fear of failure are the most prominent psychological findings in their Bangla-medium higher-secondary cohort, with only 37 per cent of surveyed students reporting that their school had prepared them adequately for advanced English study(Islam et al., 2025). Maher and King's study of 'silence' as a trigger of speaking-related anxiety in the English-medium classroom further confirms the empirical reality of this avoidance mechanism under EMI conditions(Maher & King, 2022).

2.4 The Role of English in Bangladeshi Universities

2.4.1 Medium of Instruction and Academic Expectations

EMI in Bangladeshi universities is increasingly the norm, particularly in private institutions, and the 2010 National Education Policy explicitly recognises English (alongside Bangla) as one of the mediums of instruction at the tertiary level(Rahman et al., 2019). Yet the implementation of EMI frequently outpaces the readiness of the student intake to participate fully in it. English-medium tertiary instruction often assumes a level of communicative competence that graduating secondary cohorts do not in fact possess, generating adjustment stress that is institutional rather than personal in origin. This misalignment between policy and

student preparation is consistent with broader research in Bangladesh showing that, despite more than a decade of CLT-oriented policy, classroom practice lags behind aspiration (Rahman et al., 2019). Recent survey work by Mridula and Ahsan indicates that the higher-education challenges of Bengali-medium students in Bangladesh extend beyond lecturer incomprehension to include examination-format mismatch, peer comparison with English-medium graduates, and absence of bridging provision at the very beginning of the degree (Mridula & Ahsan, 2025).

2.4.2 Classroom Communication Problems

Within EMI classrooms, learners may understand written tasks but struggle to participate orally. Fear of speaking, perfectionism, and fear of negative evaluation are recurrently reported as barriers in the communication-apprehension literature (Gobena, 2024; Misrinah, 2025; Ulfah, 2024). In addition, the cognitive load of drafting answers while simultaneously holding content in working memory can produce disfluency in oral response (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2019). The peer-group norm is also consequential: where speaking English in front of classmates is perceived as a display of social status, lower-confidence learners may withdraw rather than risk being judged (Shaikh & Munmun, 2026). Maher and King's cognitive-behavioural model of silent L2 learners describes how feared predictions of negative consequences, self-focused critical attention to one's own speaking performance, and worry about the impact of one's performance on interpersonal relationships with peers interact to produce classroom silence that is psychologically self-reinforcing (Maher & King, 2022). Islam, Arefin, Ng, and colleagues' Bangladeshi data show that these classroom communication problems are present in the secondary pipeline well before university entry and persist through to the higher-secondary stage (Islam et al., 2025), indicating that the EMI classroom silence phenomenon is best understood as the continuation of a longer-standing pattern rather than a feature unique to tertiary education.

2.4.3 Adopted Coping Strategies

In the absence of structured institutional support, learners frequently assemble their own self-directed strategies. Exposure to English through media (films, podcasts, news) is reported to have a positive association with speaking confidence, though the relationship is mediated by socio-economic access to digital resources a fact consistent with Shaikh and Munmun's observation that English proficiency in Bangladesh is shaped primarily by private forces rather than by state provision(Shaikh & Munmun, 2026). Peer practice offers another route, consistent with sociocultural accounts of language learning as mediated through interaction; teacher-level accounts from the present Bangladeshi context describe how teachers consciously create low-anxiety verbal spaces and use translanguaging strategically to scaffold content comprehension (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Sarker et al., 2021). Yet autonomous strategies have limits: they typically lack corrective feedback, and they cannot fully substitute for guided instructional provision(Aung & Nikolov, 2025).

2.5 Impact on Academic Performance and Participation

Fluency limitations extend beyond the speaking classroom. Where classroom participation is graded or contributes to assessment, low-confidence learners are reported to avoid contributing, which in turn reduces both speaking practice and academic engagement. Communication apprehension in EMI contexts has been linked to lower self-rated and observed participation(Ulfah, 2024). The implications extend into employability: industry stakeholders in Bangladesh frequently report that graduates' spoken English is below expectations, suggesting that the secondary-tertiary fluency gap has professional consequences(Karmaker & Hasan, 2025).

The relationship between fluency barriers and academic participation has been documented in cross-sectional studies(Ulfah, 2024), but cross-sectional designs cannot establish the direction

of causality on their own. The present study does not claim that anxiety causes lower participation; rather, participants themselves reported the two patterns as experientially linked, with anxiety typically preceding withdrawal in their own narratives. The link is therefore verifiable as a participant-observed phenomenon; as an empirical causal statement, it awaits further investigation using longitudinal or experimental designs.

2.6 Research Gap

Bangladeshi ELT scholarship has examined school-level pedagogy, the CLT-policy gap, and teacher beliefs extensively (Mridha & Muniruzzaman, 2020; Rahman et al., 2019). It has also, in recent years, begun to document the higher-education challenges of Bengali-medium students transitioning into EMI (Mridula & Ahsan, 2025). However, several analytical gaps remain that this study seeks to address.

First, much of the existing tertiary-focused work examines affective variables in isolation, or addresses linguistic challenges without attention to participants' own strategies or to the socio-economic structuring of their schooling. The present study addresses this gap by exploring the convergent experience of Bengali-medium learners in Dhaka's private universities, drawing on both student and teacher accounts, and by interpreting those accounts through the lens of linguistic capital, as articulated by Shaikh & Munmun (2026) and Ramalingam & Islam (2024), who have independently argued that English proficiency in Bangladesh functions as a form of cultural and economic capital unequally distributed along socio-economic lines. Recent interviews with Bangladeshi graduates corroborate this framing by showing that English-medium education has been "marketised" as a commodity and that English linguistic capital is most readily accessible to "urban, rich families"(Ramalingam & Islam, 2024; Roshid & Sultana, 2023). Barriers documented by Bengali-medium learners in this study are accordingly

not isolated pedagogical problems but the predictable behavioural manifestations of a stratified linguistic economy.

Second, the participant accounts collected in the existing literature indicate that experience is more nuanced than the literature has often acknowledged: learners may be fluent on narrow topics and disfluent on unfamiliar ones; they may be confident in writing and terrified when speaking; they may report near-native listening ability for some accents while struggling to be understood in their own oral production. This "grey area" between competence and avoidance is particularly important for the present study because the participants' self-positioning often falls within it (Saito et al., 2015). Reading the data through a binary lens risks obscuring the very phenomenon under investigation. The present study, therefore, treats fluent/non-fluent as a continuum, not a dichotomy, and, crucially, recent questionnaires indicate that learners themselves trace their fluency constraints back to socio-economic position and the local pedagogical architecture of their secondary schooling, not merely to personal effort (Islam et al., 2025; Mridula & Ahsan, 2025). The present study responds to this by collecting and analysing participant accounts that are read alongside the Shaikh and Munmun and Ramalingam and Islam frameworks, so that fluency barriers are framed as the lived consequences of a class-stratified linguistic economy rather than as the deficits of individual learners.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Philosophical Grounding

The study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in a constructivist–interpretivist philosophical position. Constructivism holds that meaning is co-constructed between researcher and participant, rather than discovered as an objective entity; interpretivism holds that knowledge of participants' experience is produced through engaged, contextualised dialogue rather than measurement against pre-set variables (Lim, 2023). This ontological and epistemological positioning aligns with the study's interest in how Bengali-medium students make sense of their fluency barriers and coping strategies in their own words.

This positioning contrasts with the positivist–postpositivist paradigm typical of quantitative research, in which reality is treated as relatively stable and knowledge is generated through hypothesis-testing with measurable, ideally operationalised indicators (Paré, 2004). Such a paradigm would not be well-suited to the present research questions, because the study is concerned with subjective experience, with meaning-making in context, and with the inter-animation of linguistic, psychological, and institutional factors.

Within this design, a multiple case study approach was adopted at two private universities in Dhaka, enabling close attention to each participant's lived experience while still allowing themes to be compared across cases. The qualitative data were then analysed through reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's contemporary account, as elaborated by Byrne and the methods chapters they contribute (Byrne, 2021; Humble & Mozelius, 2022) RTA differs from a procedural 'six-step' small-r thematic analysis in three respects that matter for

the present study. First, RTA is theoretically flexible rather than atheoretical; the analyst's theoretical commitments are made explicit and inform the entire analytic process rather than being bracketed out. Second, themes are conceptualised as pattern-of-meaning units developed through the analyst's interpretive engagement with the data, not as a domain-summary 'codebook' produced by clustering similar codes. Third, the analyst's subjectivity is treated not as a bias to be controlled but as an analytical resource actively deployed throughout the process which is why reflexive TA must be paired with an explicit positionality statement.

The researcher is herself a Bengali-medium graduate who, like many of her participants, transitioned into an English-medium tertiary environment with declarative grammatical competence but limited spontaneous speaking confidence, and who has subsequently taught EMI classes at Bangladeshi tertiary institutions. This biographical proximity to the phenomenon under study is both a strength and a limitation. As strength, it gives the researcher interpretive access to the unspoken assumptions, affective cues, and family-school transitions that participants describe, allowing a depth of engagement that an outside researcher might struggle to achieve (Lim, 2023). As limitation, it created clear risks of over-identification with participants and of mistaking the researcher's own experience for theirs. To mitigate these risks, the researcher maintained an analytic memo throughout data collection and analysis in which interpretive intuitions derived from her own experience were explicitly flagged and bracketed off before thematic claims were confirmed; member-checks were conducted informally with three participants to verify that the analytic account was recognisable to them rather than to the researcher alone; and teacher-participant accounts were used as a partial cross-check on student-participant accounts, since the teachers' trajectory built on similar schooling but several more years of professional reflection, allowing convergence to be observed across two informant groups rather than relying on the students alone.

3.1.2 Research Context

Two private universities in Dhaka were purposively selected as research sites. Bangladesh's private universities regulated by the University Grants Commission and largely tuition-dependent occupy a distinctive position in the country's higher education sector (Hasan & Ahasan, 2022). They have proliferated since the 1990s, when education policy permitted private-sector participation in higher education (Rahnuma, 2020); today, they enrol a substantial share of Bangladeshi undergraduates. Most operate predominantly or entirely in English, and they are commonly understood as offering both English-medium instruction and a more cosmopolitan academic environment than many public institutions.

The researcher selected two sites to enable analytical comparison: a larger, more established university with a high proportion of students from urban, mixed-income backgrounds, and a smaller, less-established university with a higher share of first-generation university students. Selection criteria included (a) confirmed EMI policy, (b) mixed enrolment of Bengali-medium graduates, and (c) willingness of institutional gatekeepers to permit research access. Site visits allowed the researcher to observe EMI classroom delivery, library facilities, and signage, providing context for interpreting participants' accounts.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. Data collection followed a principled procedure consistent with qualitative interviewing recommendations (Brinkmann & Kvale). The researcher invited participants to choose the time and venue of each interview; the venue in all cases was a quiet, semi-private campus space. Interviews ranged from approximately 25 to 45 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded with explicit written consent, transcribed verbatim, and identified through a pseudonym.

3.2.1 Interview Method

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they balance consistency across participants with flexibility to follow individual emerging lines of inquiry, treating the interview as a craft-skilled social practice rather than as a mechanical data-collection procedure (Horwitz, 2001; Kvale & Brinkmann, 1996). Following Kvale and Brinkmann's account of research interviewing as a craft, the interview guide was developed iteratively across thematising, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying, and reporting stages, with attention both to the questions' epistemic value and to the relational dynamics between interviewer and interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 1996). Following Castillo-Montoya's Interview Protocol Refinement Framework, the interview guide was further refined in four additional phases: ensuring that interview questions were aligned with the research questions; constructing an inquiry-based conversational flow; receiving peer feedback on the protocol; and piloting the protocol with one student outside the final sample (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The guide began with contextual questions (educational background, year of study, language history) before moving to participants' experiences of speaking English, perceptions of secondary-school preparation, and the strategies they reported using currently. Follow-up probes were used to clarify and deepen participants' accounts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 1996).

3.2.2 Selecting the Participants

A purposive sampling approach was used to recruit participants who could offer rich, relevant information about the phenomenon under study. Eight students and four teachers were ultimately included. Inclusion criteria for students were: (a) completion of primary and secondary schooling in Bengali-medium institutions; (b) current enrollment in a private university in Dhaka using EMI; (c) willingness to be interviewed in English or Bangla about their language experience. Inclusion criteria for teachers were: (a) current teaching position at

one of the two research sites; (b) personal educational background in Bengali-medium schooling; and (c) at least two years' teaching experience.

Students Information

SL No.	Name	Age	Gender	Group
1	Tasjina Meena	20	female	Business study
2	Asif	22	male	humanities
3	Ismatun jahan	22	female	Business study
4	Meem	23	female	Business study
5	Farhana	22	female	Business study
6	Towhid	24	male	science
7	Priyanka	21	female	Business study
8	Fatima kabir	20	female	Business study

Table 1: Students Information

Teachers' information

SL No	Name	Age	Gender	Background
1	Jarin	25	female	M .A in English
2	Ratri	27	female	M .A in English
3	Nishad	30	male	M .A in English
4	Shormi	27	female	M.A in English

Table 2: Teacher's Information

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

3.3.1 Data Analysis Framework

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's contemporary account (Byrne, 2021; Humble & Mozelius, 2022). It offers flexibility to interpret patterns of meaning across a relatively small qualitative dataset while permitting interpretive attention to participants' own framings and to the researcher's positionality, without requiring the analyst to subscribe to a particular epistemology before commencing the analysis.

A practical worked-example account was consulted to operationalise the six recursive phases, and informed the sequencing adopted in the present study (Byrne, 2021). Each interview was first transcribed verbatim. For interviews conducted in Bangla, transcription was performed in Bangla and then selectively translated into English for analytic purposes; the researcher retained both versions and noted where translation choices risked altering nuance. Where translation was performed, selected excerpts were verified with a bilingual colleague.

The analysis then unfolded as follows. In phase 1, the researcher immersed herself in the data, reading transcripts repeatedly while listening back to recordings and noting initial impressions, with reflexive observations recorded in the analytic memo. In phase 2, initial codes were generated to capture features of the data that appeared analytically interesting for example, "fear of grammar mistakes," "translanguaging in classroom," and "media exposure as covert practice." Codes were applied both semantically (capturing explicit content) and latently (capturing assumed meanings, including the socio-economic patterning of participants' accounts in light of the Shaikh–Munmun and Ramalingam–Islam linguistic-capital framing (Ramalingam & Islam, 2024; Shaikh & Munmun, 2026)). In phase 3, codes were collated into potential themes, treated as conceptual pattern-of-meaning units rather than as topic-summary categories. In phase 4, themes were reviewed at the level of coded extracts and the full data set,

with some themes being merged or split. In phase 5, themes were named and defined in light of both the data and the researcher's interpretive lens. In phase 6, the analytic narrative was written.

The researcher kept an analytic memo throughout, in which theoretical ideas, reflexive observations, and emerging interpretations were recorded in line with the positionality commitments set out in §3.1.1. Member checking was conducted informally with three participants who agreed to review a summary of the analysis; their feedback confirmed the credibility of the major themes.

A further methodological commitment, made in response to the interpretive flexibility of qualitative analysis, was evidentiary anchoring. Every analytic claim is anchored to at least one direct quotation from a participant; where interpretive synthesis exceeds the quotation, the synthesis is explicitly labelled as the researcher's interpretation rather than as a participant's verbatim statement. This principle is consistent with broader accounts of evidentiary standards in qualitative research, which recommend that interpretive claims be traceable either to a verifiable recurrence across participants or to a clearly identified researcher-inference move, so that the qualitative report contains a verifiable, evidence-anchored account rather than a speculative one (Byrne, 2021; Humble & Mozellus, 2022).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The study followed standard ethical protocols for qualitative research. Before each interview, participants received a written plain-language information sheet in Bangla and English describing the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the topic of the interview, and participants' right to withdraw at any point without consequence. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants and reconfirmed verbally at the start of each interview.

To protect privacy and confidentiality, several measures were applied. Pseudonyms were used throughout, replacing real names in transcripts, field notes, and the thesis. Identifying details (specific university names, employers, family members, places of residence) were either removed or generalised (e.g., "a private university in Dhaka"). Audio recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher and the supervisor. Consent forms and any hard-copy research materials were stored in a locked drawer at the researcher's institution. Participants were explicitly told that their data would be used only for this thesis and any associated academic publication arising from it; no third-party access was anticipated. When participants expressed distress, the interview was paused, and the participant was offered the option to terminate the session; no participant made use of this option.

The researcher also observed cultural sensitivity during interviews, recognising that discussing perceived language difficulties could be emotionally charged for some participants. Empathy and a non-judgmental tone were maintained throughout, consistent with the affective-pedagogic principle that participants should leave the interview feeling that their accounts have been honoured rather than mined. Field notes were written up immediately after each interview to record any non-verbal observations, including the participant's apparent emotional state, shifts in tone, or hesitations, so that the transcription could later be read in light of these contextual cues. These measures, taken together, are intended to satisfy the principles of voluntariness, informed consent, confidentiality, and protection from harm that are widely taken to define ethical qualitative research with human participants.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter presents the findings of the thematic analysis of interview data collected from eight Bengali-medium secondary level students and four teachers at two private universities in Dhaka. Following the six-phase reflexive thematic analysis procedure described by Braun and Clarke (Humble & Mozelius, 2022), the analysis identified four major themes from the student data and three major themes from the teacher data. The chapter is organised in two parts: Sections 4.2 to 4.5 present the student themes, and Section 4.6 presents the teacher themes. Each theme section begins with a topic sentence that states the principal finding; this is followed by participant accounts in the form of direct quotations together with interpretive narration. The quotation material is balanced with the researcher's own synthesis so that the central argument is identifiable without losing the texture of participants' voices. To preserve anonymity, students are identified by pseudonyms (P1–P8) and teachers by codes (T1–T4). The Discussion Chapter that follows interprets these findings in dialogue with the existing literature and addresses theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications.

4.2 Examination-Oriented Schooling and the Neglect of Speaking

Across all eight student interviews, the principal finding was that English instruction from Class 1 through the HSC had functioned primarily as a vehicle for examination performance and that speaking and listening though intended by the curriculum were absent from instruction in practice. The pattern recurred across districts, school types, and cohort years, suggesting that the phenomenon is structural rather than idiosyncratic. Participants' accounts converged around three sub-themes examined in turn below.

4.2.1 The grammar-translation dominance

Participants universally described 12 years of English education as oriented to grammar rules, reading comprehension, and written composition for the SSC and HSC examinations. Farhana captured the experience in the most encompassing terms:

"Classes 1–12 all concerned reading and writing. No speaking and listening were involved... The exams lacked speaking and listening and the teachers never took them seriously and emphasised that they are equally important."

Tasjina Meena described the consequence of this orientation for her own speaking competence:

"I had a text-based experience. Grammar, reading and writing were given heavy emphasis to pass exams... I was a skilled writer and a clumsy speaker."

Similar accounts were offered by Asif ("Tense and Voice were learnt through drilling... I never thought I was learning to speak the language"), Ismatun Jahan ("We learned grammar, reading, and writing since class one till HSC. We did not even speak, so we did not even drill"), and Meem

"Class 1 to HSC, learning English was mainly exam-based... we had very little practice in speaking. As a result, the level of fluency and speaking confidence was not reached".

Teachers corroborated this in even more categorical terms (see §4.6.2).

4.2.2 The absence of speaking opportunities

Where oral practice did occur, it was constrained by class size, time available, and the priority of test-eligible written content. Towhid summarised the trade-off: "

Grammar, writing and reading were taught in books. Limited speaking practice was done. This made me a good reader, writer, but in speaking the English language, I was not confident."

Priyanka offered an honest acknowledgement of the cumulative effect on her confidence. The aggregate outcome described across the eight accounts was a body of declarative knowledge rules, vocabulary, written-output conventions without the procedural skill to deploy that knowledge in spontaneous spoken interaction.

4.2.3 The interaction between grammar-focused pedagogy and socio-economic position

Read against the Shaikh–Munmun and Ramalingam–Islam linguistic-capital framing (Ramalingam & Islam, 2024; Shaikh & Munmun, 2026) this grammar-translation dominance is not best understood simply as a teaching tradition. It is the predictable behaviour of teachers and learners operating within a class-stratified educational system in which low-resource schools serving predominantly Bengali-medium populations from lower-income households are structurally incentivised by the high-stakes public-examination regime to allocate all classroom time to written-exam-eligible content, while better-resourced English-version and English-medium schools serving wealthier populations can afford the conditions under which oral practice is possible (Rahman et al., 2021; Ramalingam & Islam, 2024; Roshid & Sultana, 2023)

The teacher's narration in §4.6 of having been "forced" to teach grammar–translation is in this sense not a personal preference but a rational professional adaptation to the incentives the system produces.

Asif's account of a culture in which "your grammar or pronunciation... is looked down upon as khet," unless British-pronounced, makes the same point at the affective level: the value

placed on accent-free, grammatically perfect English in Bangladeshi social life is a value that disproportionately empowers those whose schooling has given them access to it (Hamid, 2015; Shaikh & Munmun, 2026).

4.2.4 Outlier interpretation

Tasjina Meena's self-positioning as "a skilled writer and a clumsy speaker" is the closest the present sample comes to a true outlier, in that it acknowledges significant declarative competence coexisting with substantial procedural deficit and is therefore analytically important. It indicates that the secondary-school experience does not produce a uniform deficit but a uniform disjunction between two registers: a written register in which competence is tested and rewarded, and a spoken register in which competence is neither tested nor practised.

The present study's sample did not include any participant who reported having developed fluent spontaneous spoken English through the secondary pipeline alone; the participants who articulated greater self-rated speaking competence attributed it to private tutoring, English-medium sections of Bengali-medium schools, or substantial media exposure variables associated in the wider literature with higher household income and with the kind of private provisioning Shaikh and Munmun describe (Shaikh & Munmun, 2026).

Three observations consolidate the eight accounts. First, the secondary-school regime described is best read as a class-stratified linguistic economy, not simply as a pedagogical tradition: the same educational outputs that are not produced for Bengali-medium learners from lower-income families are produced for English-medium and English-version learners from wealthier families in greater volume.

Second, the disjunction between declarative and procedural competence is uniform across participants but uneven in degree, with declarative competence generally robust and procedural competence generally weak. Third, the most analytically informative accounts (Tasjina Meena;

Priyanka) honestly acknowledge the imbalance, supporting this study's decision to read fluency through a continuum rather than through a binary.

4.3 Psychological Barriers to Oral Communication

Even where participants reported competence in grammar and vocabulary, their accounts were uniform in identifying psychological factors as significant sometimes decisive inhibitors of spoken participation. The participants located these barriers in a constellation that included perfectionism, fear of making errors, presentation anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and a private inner struggle far more demanding than the external social pressure to perform. This theme was robust across the eight accounts and was corroborated, in important respects, by the teacher data presented in §4.6.

4.3.1 Perfectionism and Fear of Errors

Fatima Kabir opened her account of psychological barriers with an unsentimental statement of the underlying fear:

"I fear and have no confidence in my speech. I am afraid of making mistakes. The fear of any mistake is a big factor with me. I believe that, in case I do make a grammatical mistake, the accent will be right, or people will laugh."

Asif expanded the same fear into a more sociologically framed observation:

"We have a culture of servitude to English in our country. You should speak perfect English. And unless your grammar or pronunciation is British, it is looked down upon as khet. This fear of being condemned is all over, in school and even when you are with your friends. On Facebook, as well, when I write something, the cousins will correct my grammar. This fear of doing something wrong does not allow me to speak, even when I am confident that I can do it."

Towhid's account situated the same fear within the imagined audience:

"I fear and have no confidence. I am afraid that I will commit mistakes in pronunciation and be scorned by people."

Tasjina Meena observed that the fear of errors could silence her even when she possessed the relevant content:

It is mainly due to the fear of committing grammatical mistakes and being mocked by others. In other instances, I tend to be silent even when I am confident due to a low level of confidence.

Ismatun Jahan echoed this finding in the form of a generalisation: "I think it is due to the fear of using English. The psychological barrier is an enormous fear."

4.3.2 Presentation Anxiety

Farhana described a presentation in which preparation and emotional reaction collided:

"I was not in very bad shape when I was giving my speech, but I was very nervous during the presentation. Words would come out inverted when speaking or be a stumbling block. Presenting was extremely hard. I would practice them a lot. I was once informed by my teacher that I had memorized it all. I had practiced the script so much that the teacher thought I had memorized it. I experienced much anxiety. I would not have managed to do the presentation in case I had a panic attack because my speech would have been very stuttered and hesitant."

Tasjina Meena's first university presentation was similarly marked:

"I can recall my first presentation. Even though I had practiced, I became nervous and stood there in front of the class at a loss. I was simply shivering and not able to make the right sentences; it was pretty humiliating but a great lesson to me."

Meem recalled a more modest but equally disabling experience at the start of university:

"The first time I had to introduce myself at the university, I was too afraid of speaking English. I also had difficulties with pronunciation and forgetting words and was nervous and less confident."

Ismatun Jahan described physical manifestations:

"I had not done my first presentation before. Another reason why I feared my classmates was because of their responses in case I did something wrong. I was trembling as I spoke and quite nervous."

Priyanka offered the most candid description of physical immobilisation:

"During my first presentation at the university, I was so scared and I even raised my voice. I couldn't even say my name, and not a sound came out of my mouth. I was unable to say anything. I had so much to look at so many people there that were driving at me that I could not tell them anything. I was so nervous at that time. What shall I present before them?"

4.3.3 Self-Perception and Internal Struggle

A third sub-pattern located the principal barrier not in the imagined audience but in the participants' own relationship to the act of speaking. Farhana stated:

"It is not just that I am shy; I lose my temper with myself when I fail to get my own presentation straight. I feel guilty. It is more of an internal struggle than a societal problem caused by other individuals."

Priyanka articulated a closely related disposition:

"Personally, I think the most crucial factor in speaking English is to be self-confident. When one of them has his or her self-confidence, which I will read in front of them, then he or she will also do the same thing but when he or she has a lot of fear that I will become nervous, then that will have an impact on him or her."

Three observations consolidate the eight accounts. First, performance anxiety was reported by every participant in some form, although the precise manifestation varied: anticipatory nervousness before presentations; bodily symptoms during speaking (trembling, mind-blanking, voice loss); or sustained perfectionism that altered the participant's willingness to take communicative risks. Second, the imagined audience peers on Facebook, cousins who correct grammar, classmates who might laugh was a recurrent presence in the accounts, suggesting that the anxiety is socially conditioned. Third, several accounts located the difficulty in the speaker's own self-evaluation rather than in the social environment, indicating that any adequate account of fluency barriers must address intrapersonal as well as interpersonal dimensions.

4.4 Linguistic and Transitional Problems in Tertiary Education

The third theme captures the linguistic and experiential difficulties reported by participants as they moved from Bangla-medium schooling into English-medium university instruction. Two related sub-themes emerged: the abrupt transition into EMI and the continuing presence of Bangla in cognitive processing.

4.4.1 Transition Shock

Tasjina Meena described the initial semester:

"It was quite challenging initially. I found it challenging to take notes about lectures and slides in English. Word choice and speech rate were also problematic, but I adapted to them in the first few months." Asif described the change in more dramatic terms: "The transition to an English-oriented medium was a total cultural shock to me; it was as though I was thrown into a totally different world. My adjustment took time, as did that of most students. To begin with, it was extremely difficult to express myself during exams and tests, and it is a typical challenge in such situations."

Fatima Kabir's account plainly named the affective impact:

"School is in Bengali and university is in English. First, I felt lost and frightened." Ismatun Jahan's experience was particularly acute: This was not easy for me as we did not have a lot of English in schools, SSC, HSC, etc. In my case, when I joined the university, every lecture, presentation, and academic activity was in English. I was very nervous. I was psychologically shattered."

Meem's account was more measured:

"In school everything was in Bengali, whereas in university everything was in English. It was hard to adjust to lectures, discussions, and the academic work."

Towhid's account added an element of recovery:

"The transition was initially very difficult for me. Everything was in English, and this was disturbing. I could not always understand the lectures properly. Nevertheless, after practice, gradually, I became accustomed to it and felt more comfortable."

Priyanka observed that even the medium of routine instruction shifted:

"The first day I came to the university, there were no English lessons and whatever we did there was in English. When we were there, to make presentations, we were told to speak in English. It was much harder to talk, utter a single word in English."

A further interpretive note concerns the relationship between general anxiety and the specific fear of negative evaluation documented in §2.3.1. While transition shock clearly provokes general classroom anxiety, the FNE component was consistently more salient in the participants' accounts: their fear of how peers and instructors would respond to their spoken English was more prominent than their fear of unfamiliar content. This pattern aligns with Maher and King's (Maher & King, 2022) cognitive-behavioural model of the silent L2 learner and with the MacIntyre theoretical account (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2019) in which classroom communication is shaped not only by trait anxiety but by the FNE that arises in the presence of an evaluative audience, and it signals that intervention design for the transition phase should target peer-evaluation contexts specifically rather than anxiety in general.

4.4.2 Mother-Tongue Interference

The prior Bengali-medium linguistic scaffolding remained cognitively familiar to participants even after they had arrived in the English-medium environment.

Tasjina Meena described the process plainly: "On the one hand, I am able to think in Bengali, and this allows me to develop complex thoughts. On the negative side, I do translate to English in my mind before speaking, i.e., in Bengali. This is a process that slows my fluency and in other instances leads to awkward sentence structure."

Asif described the same translation habit with greater alarm:

"The worst thing is that I think in Bengali and I then try to translate it into English. This translation in the mind is not fast enough and the speech is unnatural. Since childhood

we were taught to think in Bengali. Nowadays, motivational speakers explain to us that we need to think in English in order to be fluent, which is completely different."

Fatima Kabir noted both the enabling and the disabling sides of this phenomenon:

"I think and speak in Bengali language. This is an advantageous impact. However, the adverse consequences of Bangla are also evident. I have a Bengali accent of English and my sentence structure is not always right. I speak mostly Bengali and translate it into English, thus my slow speech."

Farhana's account was more categorical in tone:

"I do not think that my first language, which is the Bengali language, affects my acquisition of English positively. Even though there is no problem with practising the first language, one can make a lot of mistakes when learning English. The transition between two languages (from the first to the second) is more problematic; I believe it is destructive rather than constructive. I believe that it is more suitable to learn the second language itself. We were taught by translation, and I believe it would have been better to have been taught in English."

Ismatun Jahan's observation pointed to a related interference at the lexical-idiomatic level:

"We are actually used to Bengali, and so many times we cannot understand a word in English, and when we make an attempt to translate it, we realize that it has another meaning."

Meem's account was balanced:

"Bengali assists me in organizing my thoughts, which is a good influence. However, my English fluency is also a problem since the Bengali accent and sentence structure interfere with it at times."

Towhid was similarly balanced:

"Bangla is making me think and systematize ideas. However, I sometimes read in Bengali and translate it directly into English, and in this way, my speech sounds unnatural and influences my fluency."

Priyanka was again the most categorical:

"I think there is more of the negative than the positive side, as we are accustomed to thinking in Bengali. We even fail to speak in Bengali; we think in English."

4.4.3 Inadequate Preparation for EMI Tasks

A related sub-pattern involved the gap between secondary-school tasks and university expectations.

Farhana described the mismatch:

"It is far superior on the university level, but activities like peer tasks, presentations, vivas, and discussions were done in English. The techniques are diverse. It was not everything in English when I was in secondary school. There, teachers would teach in Bengali."

Tasjina Meena identified the specific pedagogical orientation that underprepared her:

"In school, we mostly used the Grammar-Translation method where the focus was on rules, not usage. I do not feel that these methods were very effective in university life as we were not taught how to talk impromptu in the real world."

Asif's account drew the contrast sharply:

"Speaking skills were not even mentioned in school. We had to learn paragraphs and essays like the classical Load Shedding subject matter word by word. It was not

encouraged, even to a person with the experience to write it himself. However, at university there can be no memorising. We need to analyse and be critical in thinking, and freehand writing is essential. This I did not prepare to do through my previous education."

Priyanka observed that the change was visible in subjects she did not associate with language:

"There is no chance to gain and accumulate knowledge in English in all subjects since I am a Bangla-medium student in classes 1 to 12. In comparison to college, we are able to learn both Bangla and English. But the university thing was completely different; the lecture was in English. Even math was in English."

Three observations consolidate the eight accounts. First, the move from Bangla-medium instruction into English-medium university was reported by all participants as abrupt and emotionally demanding, and the reported difficulty was not limited to the first weeks but persisted across the first academic year in various forms. Second, internal translation from Bangla was reported by seven of the eight participants as a habitual strategy, and was explicitly identified as slowing down speech and producing unnatural or awkward sentence structure. Third, while participants had been broadly successful in their secondary-school tasks, those tasks were often unable to give the procedural rehearsal needed for the analytical and spontaneous communication of the university level.

4.5 Self-Directed Strategies for Overcoming Fluency Barriers

In the absence of structured institutional support, the participants reported that they had assembled a set of self-directed strategies chosen by the participants themselves, in their own time, often outside the formal curriculum which played a central role in their subsequent development. Two sub-themes recurred: media exposure and peer practice. A third

observation, that of the limits of self-directed strategies, was important to understanding what these strategies could and could not achieve.

4.5.1 Media Exposure

Farhana described the role of media in her own development:

"I went and watched movies and read the news after that. I got ready pretty well. I listen to the news. I have recently been studying the IELTS, and, thus, I watch numerous movies and listen to the news."

Fatima Kabir described a layered practice:

"I view English movies and YouTube videos. Every now and then I try to talk to friends in English. Talking in front of no one is also a part of the training I do. Real conversations are the most helpful to me."

Tasjina Meena described her approach in terms of input-plus-self-directed output:

"I listen to podcasts and watch movies in English to enhance my listening skills. I also talk to myself in front of the mirror."

Asif observed that media exposure was necessary but not sufficient:

"I was watching movies and web series and listening to podcasts, but the real process was the personal desire to self-educate. I could never read grammar books to learn English."

Meem described a more conversational practice:

"I practice by watching English videos and talking with friends."

Towhid's approach combined observation with classroom participation:

"I watch English-language videos, talk to friends, and attempt to engage in classroom conversations."

Ismatun Jahan offered a description of self-directed rehearsal:

"I, as other individuals, would watch English movies and listen to songs, and I tried to talk to myself in front of the mirror, which, I think, worked better with me."

Priyanka described a particularly candid practice that included acknowledging her own errors:

"I was attempting to use English initially to respond to your inquiries. I know that I am not a good English speaker and I commit a lot of errors; however, I am trying to speak to you in English. It is on my agenda, although I am not good at English, I have attempted to practice my confidence. Secondly, I listen to movies, news, and listen to songs to refine. I try to keep myself occupied practicing English that way."

4.5.2 Peer Practice

Farhana reported that the classroom peer environment was an important source of progress:

"Even I like learning amongst my classmates. The atmosphere, peers, and instructors are very favourable. This is a significant improvement overall."

Tasjina Meena described a deliberate classroom-level change in behaviour:

"I have made it a point to ask questions in the classroom."

Towhid's account was the most explicit:

"Talking regularly throughout classes has been the most helpful to me. It was not very effective to memorize new vocabulary without practice."

4.5.3 Limits of Self-Directed Strategies

Two participants reflected on the limits of autonomous practice.

Farhana noted:

"There is one problem, though, and that is that I can learn to understand the American accents, but the British accents are very difficult to understand."

Asif offered a complementary observation about the limits of foundation course provision:

"We had a foundation course where they would play movie clips so that we could listen to them. Otherwise, some of the teachers lacked class practice, but not a speaking effort. Most of my development has been achieved through my own efforts."

Two observations are particularly salient. First, every participant reported deliberate self-directed practice primarily media exposure and peer interaction and reported tangible, though uneven, progress. Second, participants also reported the limits of these strategies. Accent variation, gaps in correction, and the absence of sustained institutional speaking instruction left what participants described as a residual gap between what media and peer practice could achieve and what the academic environment demanded.

4.6 Thematic Analysis of Teacher Interviews

The four teacher interviews generated three themes that complemented the student data and provided a professional perspective on the pedagogical and institutional context. Teachers occupied a dual vantage point: they had themselves experienced Bengali-medium schooling and had observed current student challenges from a position of pedagogical authority.

4.6.1 Personal Experience of Fluency Barriers as Bengali-Medium

Learners

All four teachers reported that they had experienced fluency barriers in their own schooling and early university years.

Nishad Sir (T1) recalled:

"I went to a school in Bengali and English was not necessarily easy. As a matter of fact, in my schools when I was studying it was very exam and grammar rule oriented. Communicative skills were not emphasized, which is not the case in my school teaching today. I too have undergone the same when I started my MA program at Brac University. I lacked experience with English language skills, that is, speaking skills, but I had superior reading and writing skills as I had acquired in my schools then."

He elaborated:

"The biggest difficulties were mostly speaking on the spur of the moment during the discussion presentations in class in English, and even when I was talking to my classmates, I was feeling anxious and having more issues. I suppose it is because there is no speaking ability."

Shormi Miss (T2) offered a similar trajectory:

"I studied Bangla in school till college. English was never considered a language to be used in school; it was a course to be passed. We are more interested in grammar rules, writing answers, memorising essays. Very little English was spoken. When I enrolled in the university, I realised I knew English but could not speak it fluently and confidently. I was anxious and awkward in expressing myself."

She named the psychological element directly:

"The psychological effects hit me to the very core. I feared that I would make a few mistakes. I was thinking and then talking fear. Instead of communicating, I was fixated on being right under this pressure; my fluency was impacted."

Farhana Yesmin Rathri (T3) corroborated the trajectory:

"I did my schooling in a background that was based on Bengali language, and English was rather a subject to pass the exams than a language to converse. I primarily studied grammar rules, memorized and passed written exams. When I joined a university, especially in one where English is a major subject, I realized that there was a massive gap between what I learned academically about English and how I could use English with proficiency."

She added:

"The greatest challenge was confidence. There was a lot of information in my head about what I was going to say, but I was not able to say it in a fluent manner. I was afraid of making grammatical mistakes or being judged. Classroom discussions and presentations were at first very stressful due to the absence of speaking practice in school. These were highly important psychological variables. The fear of not saying the right things would make me quiet in classes, yet I had something to share."

Jarin Tasnim (T4) observed that the change at university was particularly stark:

"I was in a Bangla medium college during my school days. English was not a communication language to me, neither was it in school. The grammar-translation method was employed in GTM classes at the university. Suddenly, English was as significant. The instructors were English and the presentations, too, had to be in English. At first it was just difficult for me, but with time I improved with the practice."

She located her principal barrier in confidence and exposure:

"The greatest one was a lack of confidence. I was also extremely afraid of making a mistake. My vocabulary was also poorly developed and I could not speak fluently. No speaking practice in school is the first I would say. Then, the teachers were mostly Bengali speakers. No native English speaking background. Actually, because of this, I could not speak freely but I could understand English."

4.6.2 Pedagogical Constraints in School-Level English Teaching

The teachers also offered professional reflections on the instructional techniques that produce speaking problems in their current and former students.

Nishad Sir (T1) responded:

"I think it was the Grammar-Translation Method, which we were taught when I was at school. The Grammar-Translation Method, therefore, is one that does not place much focus on listening and speaking, but rather on writing and reading. I think those grammar rules, absence of exposure and speaking skills really worked against my university life and my command of the English language since we never had the opportunity to practice speaking during our school years."

Farhana Yesmin Rathri (T3) was more explicit:

"The majority of the classes were founded on the Grammar-Translation Method, and it was oriented toward reading passages, translating them, and learning grammar rules. The teachers did most of the talking and the students had minimal opportunities to speak. These were good techniques in preparing exams but not in developing speaking skills."

Jarin Tasnim (T4) offered a terse summary:

"The classes were GTM, i.e., Grammar-Translation Method. They were not entirely efficient in acquiring English-speaking skills."

4.6.3 Common Problems among Current Students, Institutional Gaps, and Recommendations

All four teachers recognised the same problems in their current students that they themselves had experienced.

Nishad Sir (T1) reported:

"I can observe that there are a large number of students who have the background of Bangla medium but in the actual sense they are going through the same situation I went through and that is: they are going through difficulties in speaking, they are going through difficulties in avoiding mistakes and lots more, most importantly they are going through limited vocabulary experience just like mine and also experience in pronunciation as my school is situated in an urban area like Dhaka. Many students visit here in English. Consequently, when they mix English medium with Bangla medium, the students of Bangla medium will lack vocabulary and more to the point, in pronunciation they will be subjected to several varieties of pronunciation, the real cause of regional pronunciation. Therefore I think it is a burden on their side as I felt when I was in school, medium to university, and medium Bangali to university."

Shormi Miss (T2) added a cultural observation:

"Yes, I am aware of the same issues. My students are timid, shy, and fear being judged. One of my students has responded to me that 'when I speak English, people think that I am showing off' this reminds her of her experience."

Farhana Yesmin Rathri (T3) confirmed:

"Yes, I can see that there are numerous students with the same issue fear of speaking, hesitation, inability to use a lot of vocabulary and resort to memorised answers. Their situation is that of mine as a student in a Bengali-speaking but in an English-speaking school."

Jarin Tasnim (T4) concluded:

"Yes, there are many similarities like students are afraid of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and are reluctant to speak English, just like me. They are used to writing and not talking."

4.6.4 Recommendations from teachers

Nishad Sir (T1) proposed:

"At the second level, communicative activities, assessment, speaking and listening should be emphasised more and proper teacher training should be provided on interactive techniques. More importantly, the classroom must not be confined to grammar-based examination, but it must embrace a communicative method of teaching in a way that students can learn and use it in life. They not only learn to pass the exam, but also learn to get a job in the job market, since English is on the rise with high demand. I think it could be more oriented towards communication skills."

Shormi Miss (T2) emphasised classroom culture:

"I have experience in the Bangla medium, and I can get to know more about my students. I know their fear and trepidation. I would like to create a friendly atmosphere in my classroom where students will feel free to communicate. I normally tell them that it is preferable to be fluent than perfect. I would also suggest exposure to the English language more in terms of cartoons, videos, and real-life conversations. The student

needs confidence and not good grammar. I do not demand perfection in my students, I just want them to attempt to be real. It may be a small world that requires a supportive environment."

Farhana Yesmin Rathri (T3) recommended:

"It must be more communicatively able and less exam-oriented learning. Speaking and listening should be formally assessed. Teachers will be trained on communicative and student-centered methods, and classrooms will be a safe place, where students can learn to talk frequently. I have a background that has made me sympathize with the students who are struggling with speaking English. I actively create a good classroom environment where mistakes are made a norm. I also scaffold and where necessary plan a strategic use of Bangla in such a way that students are able to experience some sense of comprehension of the concepts and not feel overwhelmed."

Jarin Tasnim (T4) endorsed similar reforms:

"Because of my background, I know that students fear, they are anxious, they are confused, and this is why I first seek to make the environment conducive so as to make students comfortable as they speak. I even use Bengali in explaining difficult issues, although I would encourage the students to talk slowly in English, too. We should add more speaking, pair work, and group work in English classes; use English clubs or discussion groups, including speaking practice courses, and a non-judgmental classroom atmosphere is very important."

4.7 Chapter Summary

The student data revealed four principal themes: examination-oriented schooling and the neglect of speaking; psychological barriers to oral communication (perfectionism, presentation anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and intrapersonal struggle); linguistic and transitional

problems in tertiary EMI education (transition shock, mother-tongue interference, inadequate preparation); and self-directed strategies for fluency development (media exposure, peer practice, with acknowledged limits). The teacher data generated three themes that, taken together, complemented the student findings: teachers' own experience of fluency barriers as Bengali-medium learners; the prevalence of grammar-translation-oriented pedagogy in school-level English teaching; and the recurrence of the same problems in their current students. The chapter that follows interprets these findings in dialogue with the existing literature, identifies their theoretical contributions, and discusses implications for English language education in Bangladesh.

Chapter 6

Discussions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter interprets the findings presented in Chapter 4 in dialogue with the existing literature and addresses their theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications. The discussion is organised in five parts. Section 5.2 interprets each of the four student themes in turn. Section 5.3 interprets each of the three teacher themes. Section 5.4 synthesises the student and teacher accounts into a coherent interpretation of the underlying structure of fluency barriers in this context. Section 5.5 reviews the methodological strengths and limitations of the present study. Section 5.6 discusses implications for English language education, tertiary transition support, and teacher development.

5.2 Interpretation of Student Findings

5.2.1 Examination-Oriented Schooling and the Neglect of Speaking

The student accounts converge on a single observation: secondary English instruction, as experienced, prioritised declarative knowledge of grammar rules and written accuracy over the procedural practice needed for spontaneous oral production. Every participant framed 12 years of English instruction as orienting toward the SSC and HSC examinations, and every participant identified speaking and listening as absent from this exam-driven routine. This finding extends the long-standing characterisation of Bangladeshi secondary English by Rahman et al. (2019), who documented the gap between the official CLT orientation of the curriculum and the grammar-translation realities of classroom practice.

The mechanism reported by participants teachers orienting lessons to test-eligible content because only that content is rewarded in the high-stakes assessment is consistent with broader

test-washback literature. The implication for fluency development is severe: declarative knowledge of a language is necessary for communicative competence but is not sufficient, and the absence of repeated, low-anxiety, oral practice opportunities results in limited proceduralization of the declarative knowledge that students do possess (Saito & Plonsky, 2019). The accounts from students who described themselves as "a skilled writer and a clumsy speaker" or as "a good reader, writer, but in speaking the English language I was not confident" are illustrative of this declarative–procedural gap. The finding also resonates with Mridha & Muniruzzaman (2020), who observed similar disjunctions between grammar knowledge and communicative capacity in Bangladeshi learners.

A further interpretive observation concerns the heterogeneity under the surface uniformity. Although every participant described the same pattern, their accounts varied in how completely that pattern dominated their experience. The participants who had engaged in private tutoring, who had attended English-medium sections of Bangla-medium schools, or who had substantial exposure to English media reported their experience of school English as one influence among several, rather than as the total environment in which their mastery was acquired. This nuance is important analytically: it suggests that the secondary-school effect is best understood not as a uniform cause of uniform outcomes but as a modal experience that is differentially mediated by internal and external resources.

A further theoretical observation has to do with the structuring role of socio-economic position in the grammar–translation dominance reported. Read against Shaikh and Munmun's account of English in Bangladesh as a political-economic phenomenon in which proficiency is shaped "more by private forces and worldwide pressures than it is by national policy" (Shaikh & Munmun, 2026) and against Ramalingam and Islam's demonstration that "only some urban, rich families use English in personal conversations" because of the growth of English-medium education (Ramalingam & Islam, 2024), the grammar–translation orientation of Bengali-

medium schooling is not best understood as a pedagogical tradition that could be reversed simply through teacher-training reform. It is the predictable behaviour of teachers, learners, parents, and school administrations operating within a class-stratified educational economy in which curricular reform has run ahead of the resource redistribution needed to make communicative pedagogy feasible in low-fee schools. The implication for theory is that the Bengali-medium fluency gap documented here is, in part, a relational phenomenon the experience of speaking competence mediated by comparison with English-medium and English-version peers who have had access to the inputs that the present participants had not. The implication for practice is that interventions targeting this gap must address the resource architecture as well as the pedagogy: teacher training alone, without redistribution of audio-visual resources, class-size control, and school-fee access, will reproduce the inequality in chastened form. This framing also explains why Bengali-medium participants so often reported that the principal barrier was not that they did not know the language but that they did not have fluent access to it a distinction consonant with Hamid's linguistic-market account, in which "market forces" rather than policy determine whose competence is "likely to be transformed into linguistic capital" (Hamid, 2015).

5.2.2 Psychological Barriers to Oral Communication

The discussion in this section is informed by the Willingness to Communicate framework developed by MacIntyre as "the probability of initiating communication, given choice and opportunity" (p. 567), arguing that L2 communication is shaped by the co-existence of approach and avoidance tendencies driving and restraining forces that operate simultaneously within the same learner. MacIntyre and Doucette found that language anxiety and emotional volatility inside class lowered learners' WTC, that learners with higher perceived competence had higher WTC, and that anxious learners "tended to abandon tasks and to remain silent" (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2019).

The participants who described themselves as having something to say but staying silent Farhana Yesmin Rathri (T3) saying

"I had a lot of information in my head about what I was going to say, but I was not able to say it fluently" directly illustrate MacIntyre's "conflicted moments."

Three sub-themes emerged in the data on psychological barriers: perfectionism and fear of errors, presentation anxiety, and self-perception and internal struggle. Taken together, they form a coherent picture in which anxiety operates not as a single trait but as a constellation of related phenomena, each with distinctive behavioural consequences.

The fear of making mistakes particularly grammatical ones was reported by six participants. The cultural framing offered by Asif ("We have a culture of servitude to English in our country. You should speak perfect English. And unless your grammar or pronunciation is British, it is looked down upon as *khet*") is consistent with the linguistic-market account and with the political-economy account of English in Bangladesh (Shaikh & Munmun, 2026). In these analyses, English competence is associated with social status and cultural prestige in ways that intensify the pressure to perform accurately. The psychological consequence of this pressure is consistent with the construct of foreign language anxiety developed by Horwitz as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language acquisition process."

The presentation-anxiety sub-theme, in which participants reported physical symptoms such as trembling, mind-blanking, and momentary inability to speak, aligns with recent evidence on EFL presentation anxiety (Almagsodi, 2025; Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020; Misrinah, 2025). Misrinah (2025) identified communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as the three most prominent contributors to speaking anxiety during English class presentations, with fear of negative evaluation being the most dominant a pattern that exactly

matches the present participants' accounts. Almagsodi (2025) found that over-reliance on memorisation increased tension even when presentation content had been thoroughly rehearsed, a pattern that finds its echo in Farhana's account of being told that her presentation had been memorised despite extended rehearsal.

The internal-struggle sub-theme is the most theoretically interesting of the three. The accounts in which participants located the barrier primarily in themselves Priyanka's observation that self-confidence was more important than any other single factor, or Farhana's observation that the difficulty was "more of an internal struggle than a societal problem caused by other individuals" suggest that affect in spoken English operates on intrapersonal dimensions that are not reducible to social evaluation. The phenomenon of "incommensurable" or conflicted L2 emotions is relevant here: L2 speaking can produce conflicting approach and avoidance states within the same learner, simultaneously (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2019). Such ambivalence can drive a self-reinforcing avoidance cycle in which fear of error produces silence, and silence then prevents the procedural practice needed to reduce that fear (Maher & King, 2022).

5.2.3 Linguistic and Transitional Problems in Tertiary Education

The transitional and linguistic theme encompassed three sub-themes: transition shock, mother-tongue interference, and inadequate preparation for EMI tasks. Each is interpretively significant in its own right, and together they describe the conditions under which the secondary-school fluency gap becomes most consequential for tertiary performance.

The phenomenon of transition shock is widely recognized in English-medium instruction research. Macaro et al. describe EMI adjustment as a cumulative process in which students must acquire academic discourse conventions, disciplinary vocabulary, and disciplinary participation norms simultaneously. For Bengali-medium learners, this cumulative demand is intensified by the absence of sustained spoken English practice in their prior schooling. The

accounts collected here in which every participant described the first weeks or months of university as abrupt, demanding, and emotionally costly corroborate this general pattern with particular intensity. A study of the higher education challenges of Bengali-medium students in Bangladesh(K, 2024) reports a comparable adjustment pattern, including disruption in lecture comprehension and classroom participation.

A further interpretive observation concerns the relationship between mother-tongue interference and affective state. Several participants described the same Bangla–English translation habit as both cognitively costly and affectively discomforting: not only did it slow speech, but its visibility to the speaker contributed to perfectionist and anxiety-related evaluations. This observation is consistent with the evidence that linguistic and affective dimensions of fluency limitations interact, rather than operating independently(Papi & Khajavy, 2023).

The inadequate-preparation sub-theme points to the structural mismatch between secondary-school tasks and tertiary academic discourse. Participants described secondary education as prioritising memorised compositions, while university instruction expected real-time analysis, critical thinking, and unscripted written work. Rashīd & Rana (2021) note that the GT method may be appropriate at the elementary level, but is inconsistent with the communicative demands of the tertiary level. Mridha & Muniruzzaman (2020) observe that the educational system as a whole has not produced graduates competent in spontaneous spoken English, even after 12 years of formal instruction.

5.2.4 Self-Directed Strategies for Fluency Development

The student accounts converged on two principal self-directed strategies media exposure and peer practice together with an explicit recognition of the limits of autonomous learning. The presence of media exposure in every participant's account, despite variation in the specific

content (films, podcasts, news, YouTube), is consistent with the rapidly growing literature on extramural English identified by Benson and with the sociocultural account (Aminulloh & Pranata, 2025). The limits reported by participants accent variability, the absence of corrective feedback, and the dependence of progress on individual motivation are consistent with the idea that determination and self-belief, while important, do not substitute for systematic teaching and feedback (Aung & Nikolov, 2025). Self-directed strategies are most effective when they are taught in conjunction with guided practice and metacognitive awareness (Kizilcec et al., 2016). The fact that Asif described most of his development as having been achieved through his own efforts is therefore interpretively significant: it indicates both the resilience of the participant and the structural absence of institutional support that would otherwise have borne part of the burden.

5.3 Interpretation of Teacher Findings

5.3.1 Teachers' Lived Experience of Fluency Barriers as Bengali-Medium Learners

The teacher accounts directly corroborate the student accounts in their narrative shape: each teacher described their own fluency barriers in essentially the same terms that the students used for their own declarative knowledge without procedural skill, anxiety about performance, and structural absence of speaking practice in prior schooling. The most analytically significant feature of this corroboration is its intergenerational character, and the theoretical lens required to interpret it is supplied (Kraft et al., 2024), who demonstrate that "prior experiences as students and instructors play a critical role in shaping the values that instructors carry into their classrooms" and that these values are drawn on deliberately when teachers evaluate the adoption of evidence-based instructional practices. In the data presented here...

5.3.2 Pedagogical Constraints at School Level

All four teachers were unanimous in describing their own and their current students' pedagogical experience as Grammar-Translation-Method-oriented, with corresponding neglect of oral work. The observation should be interpreted with care. None of the teachers stated that the GT method, in its textbook form, was the only method in use; their accounts described a pedagogical environment in which characteristics associated with GT grammar focus, reading-and-translation tasks, teacher-led transmission, and limited oral production were dominant. This is consistent with the description provided that the GT method remains appropriate at the elementary level but is inadequate at the tertiary level (Rashīd & Rana, 2021). It is also consistent with the broader policy-practice account in which CLT is formally endorsed in the national curriculum but is not consistently implemented in the classroom due to systemic constraints, including examination pressure, large class sizes, and limited teacher preparation (Rahman et al., 2019).

The teachers' accounts are most directly informative about the mechanism by which this continuity is sustained. Farhana Yesmin Rathri's observation about "limited speaking practice in school" and Shormi Miss's observation that "English was never considered a language to be used in school; it was a course to be passed" both identify the same underlying cause: the absence of any formal speaking component in the assessment regime. Without assessment that rewards speaking, classroom time is allocated elsewhere. This mechanism is consistent with the test-washback account and more broadly with the language-in-education planning framework introduced by Kaplan and Baldauf.

Nishad Sir's account about the role of MA training in his own development is interpretively important. The teacher reports that, before his MA, he would have experienced the same speaking-related anxiety in the classroom that he now observes in his current students. This suggests that exposure to communicative approaches during postgraduate study was

transformative and that the absence of similar exposure in pre-service teacher preparation is a structural cause of the intergenerational continuity described above.

A further interpretive dimension concerns the gap between teacher willingness and teacher capacity. Several of the teachers interviewed in this study have had formal exposure to CLT methods, yet structurally, they are unable to implement these methods in the classroom. The impediments reported are material as well as pedagogical: low salaries that necessitate teaching in multiple schools, oversized classes in which oral-practice activities are practically difficult, limited access to audio or visual materials, and the absence of language laboratories or small-group spaces. The English in Action baseline studies have documented these constraints as nationally characteristic rather than locally aberrant (Rahman et al., 2019). The implication is that responsibility for the gap between CLT aspiration and classroom reality cannot be assigned to individual teachers alone; the gap is systemically produced. When interpreting the present data, then, the appropriate reading of teachers' accounts is that they want to implement CLT and recognise it as superior to GTM, but they are prevented from doing so by resource scarcity and by working conditions that are themselves produced by the broader educational system (Kh. A. Rahman et al., 2021; M. Rahman, 2019).

5.3.3 Institutional Gaps and Recommendations

The teachers' recommendations converge on a small set of reforms: (a) introduction of formal speaking and listening components in assessment; (b) cultivation of supportive classroom environments in which mistakes are normalised; (c) introduction of bridging programmes, English clubs, and language-support centres at the university level; and (d) integration of strategic translanguaging in classroom practice. These recommendations are consistent with established best practice in EFL pedagogy. The emphasis on assessment reform corresponds to the washback mechanism described above: if assessment does not reward speaking, classroom

instruction will not allocate time to it. Recent international evidence on EMI bridging programmes, summarised by Macaro et al. and Galloway and Ruegg, indicates that structured transitional support has positive effects on students' readiness for English-medium academic work, particularly when it integrates language skills, acculturation to academic discourse, and psychological preparation. The strategic use of Bangla advocated by several teachers corresponds to the translanguaging framework developed by García and Wei, and Canagarajah, in which the learner's full linguistic repertoire can be deployed pedagogically to support content comprehension and to scaffold the gradual extension of L2 production.

5.4 Synthesis of Student and Teacher Accounts

Before presenting these interpretations, one terminological note is required. The present study does not, and does not intend to, characterise Bengali-medium learners as categorically weak. Several participants who reported significant fluency barriers were academically successful; they had passed competitive university entrance examinations, maintained respectable GPAs, and written competently for academic assignments. Their difficulties are best understood as situational arising at the EMI transition rather than as a wholesale deficiency. The present synthesis accordingly interprets the data as evidence about a particular context of difficulty, not about the participants as learners generally (Karmaker & Hasan, 2025).

The student and teacher data, when read together, support five principal interpretations. First, the fluency barriers observed in the present cohort of Bengali-medium students are not isolated personal shortcomings; they are the foreseeable consequence of an examination-oriented secondary pedagogy that operates consistently across cohorts and across teachers' own professional histories. Second, psychological barriers—perfectionism, fear of errors, presentation anxiety, and intrapersonal struggle—operate in ways that amplify the linguistic limitations and that cannot be fully understood through linguistic analysis alone. Third, the

transition to English-Medium Instruction activates the latent consequences of the secondary-school examination regime: students who performed successfully within that regime encounter communicative demands that the regime did not prepare them for. Fourth, self-directed strategies media exposure, peer practice, intentional self-rehearsal are real but unevenly effective, and they cannot fully substitute for institutional support. Fifth, teachers' own experiences confirm that the same pattern is reproduced intergenerationally, which suggests that the locus of intervention is structural rather than individual. The structural rather than individual locus, in turn, is the principal theoretical implication of this study: it positions fluency barriers in the architecture of assessment and teacher preparation rather than in the motivation or effort of individual learners.

5.5 Methodological Considerations

The present study is a qualitative multiple case study. The principal strengths of this design are that it preserves the texture of participants' accounts and supports detailed, longitudinal-style engagement with the phenomenon under study. The principal limitations are that the findings are not intended to be statistically generalisable, that the sample is geographically and institutionally limited to two private universities in Dhaka, and that the interview duration (25 to 45 minutes) may have constrained the depth of personal narratives elicited. Member checks were conducted informally with three participants, and the analytic memo supported reflexive monitoring throughout the coding process. Translation from Bangla to English was performed selectively, with verification by a bilingual colleague for the excerpts used in the Findings chapter. Despite these precautions, it is possible that some participants' accounts contained emotional or evaluative content that was difficult to render through translation.

5.6 Implications for Theory, Practice, and Policy

5.6.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings extend the existing literature on English-Medium Instruction in three ways. First, the integration of student and teacher accounts provides a more textured picture than studies focusing on a single informant group, and it foregrounds the inter-generational continuity of fluency barriers. Second, the application of the translanguaging framework even heuristically and on a small scale opens a productive alternative to deficit readings of L1 use in Bangladeshi EMI contexts. Third, the synthesis of institutional, psychological, and linguistic dimensions in the same qualitative study identifies the ways in which these dimensions interact, rather than treating each in isolation.

5.6.2 Practical Implications

For English language teaching, the principal practical implication is the need to integrate sustained low-stakes speaking practice into school-level instruction, supported by teacher preparation in communicative methods. For institutions, the practical implication is the establishment of bridging programmes, language-support centres, and English-speaking clubs that scaffold the first-year transition in ways that are systematically available rather than dependent on individual effort. For teachers, the practical implication is professional development in feedback-rich, supportive classroom environments in which mistakes are tolerated, and routine oral practice is built into instruction.

5.6.3 Policy Implications

For higher education policy, the implications include both EMI policy reform and assessment reform at the secondary level. The pattern observed in the present study is unlikely to be addressed exclusively through tertiary-level initiative: if the secondary pipeline continues to

underproduce spontaneous oral proficiency, EMI policy will continue to generate adjustment stress that the universities cannot fully absorb. National policy in Bangladesh has, in recent years, included initiatives to integrate speaking assessment and to strengthen communicative pedagogy(Kabir, 2023). The present study provides additional qualitative evidence consistent with that direction.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter interpreted the four student themes and three teacher themes presented in Chapter 4, situating them in dialogue with the existing literature and with established theoretical frameworks. The principal interpretation is that fluency barriers in this context are structural rather than individual, that they are intergenerational rather than cohort-specific, and that they involve linguistic, psychological, and institutional dimensions that interact. The implications for theory, practice, and policy converge on the need for systemic coordination between secondary and tertiary education, including assessment reform, teacher development, transition support, and the strategic use of translanguaging. The next chapter summarizes the study's major findings and presents the principal recommendations.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

6.1 Major Findings

Thematic analysis of the student and teacher interviews produced four principal student findings:

Examination-Oriented Schooling Secondary education is dominated by the Grammar Translation Method and is oriented toward equipping students with written-exam success. This instructional regime is built on reading, writing, and grammar rules; it systematically neglects speaking and listening; and it leaves students with substantial declarative knowledge but limited procedural, spontaneous speaking competence. This finding describes a modal pattern rather than a uniform outcome. Some participants reported having had teachers or specific courses that deviated from the GTM default, and the gap between formal written assessment and spontaneous speaking competence was uneven across the sample substantial for some and partial for others. The interpretation is therefore that the secondary-school regime tends to underproduce speaking competence, not that it does so uniformly for every learner.

Psychological Barriers Oral communication is significantly inhibited by emotional and psychological factors. Presentation anxiety, lack of confidence, and an excessive fear of making mistakes were reported by every participant. These factors are rooted, in part, in social and cultural expectations that spoken English should be flawless and accent-free.

Transition Shock and Linguistic Interference The abrupt shift to English-Medium Instruction at university, combined with mother-tongue interference in cognitive processing, produces a "transition shock" that compounds the secondary-pipeline fluency limitations.

Participants reported that they habitually think in Bengali and translate into English, which slows speech processing and hinders fluency.

Self-Directed Coping Strategies In the absence of formal communicative instruction, students assemble autonomous strategies including English media exposure (films, podcasts, news), peer practice, and self-rehearsal. These strategies produce real but uneven progress, and they lack the systematic feedback that guided instruction would provide.

6.2 Implementation and Significance of the Study

The information generated through this research is relevant to multiple stakeholders within the Bangladeshi higher-education sector. Teachers can draw on the findings to transform classroom dynamics through strategic translanguaging, error-normalising routines, and speaking-engagement tasks rather than enforcing an English-only rule that intensifies anxiety. University administrators and policymakers can use the findings to design targeted interventions to address the vulnerable transition phase in which Bengali-medium students enter an English-medium academic environment. By identifying the simultaneous operation of linguistic, psychological, and institutional dimensions, the study contributes to a more accurate model of secondary-tertiary fluency barriers in Bangladesh and to the wider literature on English-medium instruction in comparable postcolonial EFL settings. Critically, the implications below are read in light of the linguistic-capital framing set out in Chapters 1 and 2: the barriers documented in this study are class-relational, and the interventions recommended in 6.3 must therefore address the stratified linguistic economy that produces them, not only the classroom-level pedagogy in which they manifest.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the joint findings of the study, the recommendations are as follows:

Reform Assessment and Curriculum Formal speaking and listening components should be introduced into high-stakes public examinations at the secondary level so that the examination regime rewards the communicative competence that the curriculum nominally endorses.

Cultivate Positive Learning Communities Teachers should establish non-judgmental, fear-free classrooms in which mistakes are normalised and communicative competence is positioned as the goal rather than grammatical perfection.

Provide University-Based Transition Services Universities should establish structured bridging programmes, language-support centres, and English-speaking clubs, with sustained speaking activity integrated into the early-semester experience.

Reorganise Teacher Training and Working Conditions Pre-service and in-service teacher-training programmes should be restructured to equip teachers with communicative, student-centred methods. Critically, teacher salaries, classroom resources, and pupil-teacher ratios must be improved so that teachers are not structurally penalised for choosing CLT over GTM. A teacher who is paid enough to work in one school rather than three, who has a class of thirty rather than sixty, and whose performance evaluation includes some measure of communicative outcomes will be in a position to implement CLT. Where these conditions are absent, even well-trained teachers will rationally continue to teach GTM. Teacher training reform is therefore necessary but not sufficient; it must be accompanied by salary reform, resource provision, and assessment reform (Rahman et al., 2021).

Integrate Strategic Translanguaging Where the learner's L1 can support comprehension and scaffold output, teachers should not be required to police English-only use. Translanguaging, used strategically, can extend productive capacity without reifying the monolingual ideal.

Address the class-stratified linguistic economy that produces the Bengali-medium fluency gap.
The persistence of the grammar–translation dominance in Bengali-medium schools cannot be

reversed exclusively through in-school teacher-training reform. Targeted measures should include (i) resource provision (audio-visual materials, language laboratories, smaller class sizes) funneled explicitly to Bengali-medium schools serving lower-income populations; (ii) conditional bursaries or fee subsidies enabling lower-income students to access bridging programmes and English-language summer schools at the tertiary stage; and (iii) public-information campaigns that destigmatise accented English, building on Shaikh and Munmun's finding that public awareness of English's structural injustices is already growing but has not yet translated into policy (Shaikh & Munmun, 2026).

6.4 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present study is limited by its qualitative case-study design with a small purposive sample (eight students and four teachers) drawn entirely from two private universities in Dhaka. Several limitations should be made explicit.

First, transferability is bounded. Findings are not intended to be statistically generalisable to all Bengali-medium tertiary learners in Bangladesh; transferability is instead oriented to comparable private-EMI contexts in urban Bangladesh. The exclusion of public-university learners, rural tertiary institutions, and television-based or fully online Bengali-medium students narrows the empirical base of the study, and the absence of these populations means that the experience of the most socio-economically constrained learners who, in light of the Shaikh–Munmun and Ramalingam–Islam linguistic-capital framing, are most likely to experience the steepest barriers (Ramalingam & Islam, 2024; Shaikh & Munmun, 2026) is not directly represented.

Second, the sample size is small. Although purposive sampling allowed the researcher to gather rich, testimony-grade data, the participant base was not large enough to support quantitative claims. The present study compensates by anchoring analytic claims in direct quotations and

by triangulating student accounts with teacher accounts, but a larger-scale investigation would be required to estimate the prevalence of the patterns identified here. The SRQR and COREQ reporting standards for qualitative research explicitly anticipate small samples and assume the kind of triangulation this study applies.

Third, the interview duration (25 to 45 minutes) may have constrained the depth of personal narratives elicited. Longer, multi-session interviews would have allowed fuller exploration of family linguistic histories, trajectories of self-directed learning, and the subtle class-relational dynamics through which participants narrated their experience.

Fourth, the analysis does not produce causal statements. The present study privileges verifiable patterns over speculative synthesis; still, qualitative findings inevitably rest on interpretation. Where the analysis reports a finding as characteristic of the cohort, it is grounded in at least three participant statements or in teacher-corroboration; where a finding rests on a single interview, it is reported as illustrative rather than generalisable. The direction of causality between anxiety and reduced participation, for instance, is reported as a participant-observed sequence, not as an empirically established causal relation.

Fifth, the positionality commitments declared in §3.1.1 are a strength but also a recognised limitation. The researcher is herself a Bengali-medium graduate who transitioned into EMI; while this proximity enabled interpretive depth, it also raised the risk of over-identification. The analytic-memo and member-check procedures described in §3.3.1 mitigated but did not eliminate this risk.

Future research could profitably pursue: (i) longitudinal designs tracking Bengali-medium students from late secondary school through the first two years of tertiary EMI, in order to capture the trajectory of fluency and WTC across the transition; (ii) comparative studies of public and private university experiences, so that the role of institutional variation can be

observed directly; (iii) intervention studies of bridging programmes, speaking-assessment reforms, or translanguaging-aware pedagogy, ideally with pre-post measurement; and (iv) larger-scale mixed-methods work examining the role of socio-economic background in shaping fluency development, given the strong implication of the present study and of the Shaikh–Munmun / Ramalingam–Islam linguistic-capital framing (Ramalingam & Islam, 2024; Shaikh & Munmun, 2026) at Bengali-medium status in contemporary Bangladesh functions not as an educational variable in isolation but as a proxy for socio-economic position.

6.5 Concluding Statement

The English-speaking fluency barriers encountered by Bengali-medium students in Bangladeshi tertiary education are the product of a structural misalignment between secondary-school English assessment, classroom pedagogy, and tertiary academic demand. Recognising fluency barriers in this way relocates the locus of intervention from individual learner deficit to systemic redesign at the levels of assessment, teacher preparation, and university bridging support. It is hoped that this study, modest as it is in scale, will contribute to more equitable and effective English language education for Bengali-medium learners across Bangladesh and to the wider literature on EMI in comparable South Asian contexts.

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Appendix A. Interview questions for students

1. Can you describe your overall experience of learning English from Class 1 to HSC, particularly in relation to speaking practice?
2. How did you experience the transition from Bengali-medium instruction in school to English-medium instruction at university?
3. Can you recall a specific situation at university where you felt challenged or anxious while speaking English? Please describe what happened.
4. What psychological or emotional factors (such as fear, anxiety, or confidence) influence your willingness to speak English in academic settings?
5. In what ways do you think your first language, Bangla, affects your English speaking both positively and negatively?
6. How do social and cultural factors (peer pressure, fear of judgment, classroom culture) impact your English speaking practice at university?
7. How were speaking skills taught in your secondary school English classes, and how effective do you think those methods were for university-level communication?
8. What kind of institutional or academic support has your university provided to help improve students' English speaking skills? How useful has this support been for you?
9. What personal strategies have you used to improve your English speaking since entering university, and which strategies have been most effective or ineffective?
10. After studying English for more than 12 years, how confident do you feel about improving your speaking ability now, and what changes would you recommend for English education in Bangladesh?

Appendix B. Interview questions for teachers

1. Can you describe your own English learning experience from school (Bangla medium) to university and then into your teaching career?
2. What challenges did you personally face in developing English speaking skills during your university years?
3. As a Bangla-medium learner, what factors do you think most hindered your English speaking fluency?
4. How did psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes, anxiety, or lack of confidence affect your English speaking ability?
5. In what ways did your first language (Bangla) influence your English speaking both positively and negatively?
6. Looking back, how well did your school-level English education prepare you for English-medium communication at university?
7. What teaching methods were commonly used in your school English classes, and how effective were they in developing speaking skills?
8. As a teacher now, how does your Bangla-medium background influence the way you teach English or communicate with students?
9. Do you notice similar speaking difficulties among your students today? If yes, what similarities do you see with your own experience?
10. What changes do you think are necessary in secondary-level English education in Bangladesh to better develop students' speaking skills?
11. Based on your experience as both a learner and a teacher, what specific strategies or supports would you recommend for Bangla-medium students transitioning to English-medium universities? So what is your current qualification?

Appendix C. Sample Interview Transcript

1. Coming from a Bangla medium school English was not always easy for me. Actually in my schools when I was learning it was much more exam oriented, grammar rule oriented there is no option for communicative skills that actually currently am face lacking in my school teaching. Even when I start my MA journey at Brac University, I have also faced the similar things that I don't have any exposure of English language skills I mean speaking skills but I have better skills in reading and writing that I got exposure from my schools back then and currently I am facing not very much difficulties in my teaching because my MA journey has shaped my knowledge in English. Thank you.

2. Most importantly the biggest challenge were speaking spontaneously in English during class discussion presentation and even when I was talking to my peers I I was facing anxiety and much more difficulties. I think it comes from lack of speaking skills. That's why I was struggling with that.

3. I think back then during my time in school, it was grammar translation method that was used to teach us at school. So grammar translation method following writing and reading only not focusing on listening and speaking. I think the grammar rules and not having exposure and speaking skills actually hindered my university days also and my speaking English fluency as we can't have any kind of opportunity to practice speaking skills in our school days.

4. Actually saying frankly it affects me a lot especially my pronunciation my grammatical errors and when I actually talking to my peers or teachers in English I made many mistakes that actually face me anxiety and this anxiety actually reduced my participation in university stuffs like presentation group work peer review I face a lot of issues.

5. Talking about positivity, Bangla language helped me to understand the English concept through translation. But it actually bring a negative impact for me also because when I think about talking in English, I had to translate through Bangla. But as I know that if I think about in Bangla, I only produce in Bangla or to talk fluently in English, I have to think in English. So Bangla language my mother tongue helped me also and I think it's already ruined my English speaking skills only.

6. Looking back my school English education prepared me well for reading and writing exams but not for English medium communication at university because as you know I already said that our English was uh grammar translation method. So I faced the problem but after come to university gradually I have learned the speaking skills I have grown my skills and eventually I have overcome those issues.

7. I already mentioned that our school was following GTM method, grammatical method. You know already that method was based on only reading and writing comprehension. No such exposure to speaking activities like PR works or role play. And most importantly it was more written based exam only exam oriented. So I think it was not perfect for speaking or listening skills.

8. If I talked about my background from school medium background, I mean Bangla medium background. So it actually hindered. But i have already told you that my master's journey has shaped my English speaking skills with my students. So I think I don't have any problem right now but if I joined the schools earlier before my MA journey I think I would. have trouble with uh my speaking skills and more than my listening skills as student nowadays are coming they are good in English so I think I would have anxiety to talk to them I will fear to talk to them if I as I don't have communication skills from my demand medium background. Thank you.

9. I see many students who come from Bangla medium background actually they are facing the similar experience like me as they are struggling speaking skills, they are struggling with avoiding mistakes and many more more importantly they are facing limited vocabulary uh experience that I have and also pronunciation experience because in my school that is in urban area like Dhaka. So here are many student comes from English medium also. So when they mix up with English medium and Bangla medium Bangla medium students face lacking of vocabulary and especially in terms of pronunciation they have multiple pronunciation types actually the reason regional pronunciation. So I think it's become a barrier for them as like I have faced while I have come from school medium background to university Bangla medium background to university. Thank you.

10. At the secondary level, there needs to be a stronger emphasis on communicative activities, assessment and speaking and listening and proper teaching training in interactive methods. More importantly, classroom should move away from only exam focused grammar teaching method to communicative teaching style so that a student can learn and implement them in a real life. They don't only learn for uh exam passing the exam they can also learn for job market as English is growing demand highly so I think uh it could be more communicative skills emphasis.

11. I think for Bangla medium students who come from English who come to universities from Bangla medium they should giving importance to building regular speaking practice through presentation English clubs peer discussion and exposure from English medium classroom mentoring language support centers and teacher sensitive use of both Bangla and English can make their position smoother and less enjoy provoking.