

ENGLISH AS THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH: A COLONIAL LEGACY  
FOR EMPOWERMENT OR A STRUCTURE ASKING FOR  
DECOLONISATION?

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Economics and Social Sciences in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Social Sciences in Anthropology

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## **Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my 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 have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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## Approval

The thesis titled “English as the Medium of Instruction in Higher Education in Bangladesh: A colonial legacy for empowerment or a structure asking for decolonisation?” submitted by K.C. Zamiul Alam (16101143) of Spring, 2022 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of BSS in Anthropology on 25-05-2022.

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## **Abstract**

The only acceptable medium of Education in the public and private universities of Bangladesh is English. Though most of the undergrad students come from the Bangla Medium background, they are expected to use English in all sorts of written and verbal communication. Due to this sudden shift to a medium of foreign language, they get silenced in the classroom due to their linguistic capital. On the other hand, because of English, the students from the English Medium background accumulate greater symbolic capital and stand in a superior academic position. Keeping this class nature in mind, the core objective of this study is to find out why does a foreign language persists as the only acceptable MOI. With the help of responses from undergrad students and inspirations from the theoretical frameworks of Dr. Mohammad Azam Dr. Salimullah Khan, Dr. Shaila Sultana, Frantz Fanon, Ngugi Wo Thiong'o, this study analyzes the merits and demerits of EMI by taking class conflict, the role and function of language, symbolic capital associated with English and the outputs of EMI into consideration. Finally, it indicates that the persistence of EMI is owing more to the colonial history rather than to the promised practical benefits and asks for decolonisation. Postcolonialism, decolonisation, language and language planning in education are the fields this study deals with and creates a conversation about.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Post Colonialism, Decolonisation, Medium of Instruction, Education, English.

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## **List of Acronyms**

EMI            English Medium Instruction

BMI            Bangla Medium Instruction

MOI            Medium of Instruction



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Through education, the state produces its ideal citizens. As much as considering what kind of education is being provided in our educational institutions is important, how and why that education is being provided bears the same magnitude of significance too. What is being taught cannot be taken lightly as it is part of the process of hegemonizing the state's subjects and creating ideal citizens (Gramsci, 1971). Likewise, the methods of teaching should also provide insights about why they are being taught and about their consumer's mindset. That is why it is necessary to take a closer look at the medium of instruction (MOI) for higher education in Bangladesh to construct an outline of the aspirations of the Bangladeshis to find out why and how a foreign medium of instruction persists here as the only acceptable MOI in most of the reputed public and private universities.

Presently, in Bangladesh, 4 types of education can be availed and they are: i) Bangla Medium ii) English Medium (O Levels and A levels) iii) English Version and iv) Madrasa Education (Education based on Islamic texts). Only a small portion of the total number of children attends English Medium schools and evidently, they belong to the elite class of the society (Ahmed, 2008). Moreover, Ahmed showed (2008) that about two third of all enrolled students at the secondary level choose Bangla-medium schools. Furthermore, the question arises how and to what capacity the students will be able to cope up in a English spoken environment in universities when for the past 12 years they were in a completely Bangla spoken environment? In addition to that, Sultana (2014) showed that EMI in higher education is serving the interests of the minority- the students who have accumulated enough linguistic capital- and thus, creating class conflict with the minority.

So, keeping the class nature of this phenomenon in mind, the core objective of this study is to find out why English persists as the only acceptable EMI in the higher education of Bangladesh. By seeking to find whether the current education is producing ideal citizens for the state, this study will analyze the relation of this phenomenon with the colonial past and ask for decolonization if needed.

## **1.1 Personal Experience**

It all started when I finally completed my 12<sup>th</sup> grade and got myself admitted into a private university of Dhaka. For these twelve years I had read in Bangla, communicated with my teachers and peers in Bangla, attended examinations which were in Bangla but suddenly at the 13<sup>th</sup> academic year of my life, when I had taken the first step into my higher education, the organization which has chosen its medium as English, had expected me to speak, write and communicate in English. I clearly remember myself sitting at one corner of the classroom and trying really hard to avoid all sorts of communication as I was afraid of speaking a foreign language. I felt those who were fluent in English, only because of this skill of a language, enjoyed a higher social status in the classroom. Moreover, in my opinion, those who had mastered either American or British accent, were considered elites of the highest sort even among the elites by both the parties (students and teachers). Also, I never felt comfortable even talking to another student who was from the English medium background and I feel like it was the same for them too. I clearly remember once an English medium student could not understand my Bangla and so the group work we were supposed to do inevitably got ruined. As much as I am an introvert, I did manage to make a few friends in my undergrad life and among my friends only a single person was from the English medium background.

Though we were supposed to perform all sorts of communication in English in our university, it was very common to discuss things in Bangla (at least for the Bangla medium

students) as long as the teacher is not raising objections. Interestingly, most of the teachers also code switched between Bangla and English quite frequently especially when they were discussing complex subject matters. Sometimes students would ask the teacher everything he/she just said in English, to repeat in Bangla. Also, I felt a clear distinction between the classes which were fully conducted in English and the ones conducted in a mixture of Bangla and English or even completely in Bangla. When the teacher used Bangla, the classroom became comfortable for me as I could muster up the courage to speak, to participate and more importantly to raise questions! From all these personal experiences, it became interesting to me how a language itself is uplifting someone's social status meanwhile, acting as a blockage for others. Furthermore, coping up with a new MOI (Medium of Instruction) in the classroom was quite hard too. Quite visibly as my personal experience had already motivated me about this issue, I started participating in different discussions where this topic had been given importance. One particular seminar was arranged by the Institute of Modern Languages of the University of Dhaka which I had viewed on YouTube- "What will be the medium of education in Tertiary Education in Bangladesh"- sparked my interest to deal with this matter through scholastic work. Most of the participants of this seminar agreed that it should be Bangla. Some of them also advocated a bilingual policy. This whole seminar has been documented by one of the participants and organizers 'Shishir Bhattacharja' in a book called *Shikkhar Maddhom Ki Hobe?* [What will be the medium of instruction?] in the year of 2020. This material will be used extensively throughout this paper.

All of these aforementioned personal experiences motivated me to explore this phenomenon in an academic fashion.

## 1.2 Methodology

Ten students from reputed universities of Dhaka participated in this study. Apart from one participant, the rest of them are from private universities. Four of them are from the mainstream Bangla medium and another four of them are from the English medium students. The other two had English medium education till their 3rd grade and then shifted to Bangla medium.

The interviews were conducted online with the help of google forms. The questionnaire was a semi-structured one consisting of twenty-three (Q1- Q23) multiple choice questions and eight open ended inquiries (Q24- Q31). The participants had the liberty to choose more than one option in the MCQ section and they did that in some rare cases. Similarly, they had the chance of not answering the broad questions if they did not want to.

For the sake of considering both mediums' perspectives, the participants were divided into three groups- Bangla medium, English medium and Hybrid. Bangla medium and English medium both these groups have four members while the Hybrid have two members. It is noteworthy to mention that the Hybrids answered the questions that were prepared for the Bangla medium group because the two participants from the Hybrid groups had spent most of their student life in Bangla medium as they had converted from or at the third grade. Half of the participants are biological males and half of them are females and this distribution stands true for all the three groups.

The questionnaire for all the three groups were exactly the same apart from question no. 9 to question no. 15. These six questions were mirror images of each other. For example, where students from Bangla medium were asked whether they felt alienated because of the dominance of English in the classrooms, the students from English medium were asked whether they were made fun of because of their Bangla skills. This was necessary to grasp and understand the overall scenario because the existence and hegemony of Bangla nationalism cannot be denied.

Most of the participants of this study are recent graduates. The rest were either third or fourth-year students. No parameters were set for identifying their socio-economic group. Whatever class they thought they belonged to was accepted. Five of them identified themselves as the middle class, three as upper middle class, one as lower middle class and the last one as upper class. So, in their own words, most of the participants fall into one of the variants of middle class.

First six questions were designed for gathering general information about the participants. The substantial questions for this study start from question no. 7. While the MCQs try to locate their objective viewpoint on a particular aspect, the open-ended questions try to take a deep dive on similar subject matter. Thus, the research is quantitative one with a qualitative manner.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The research questions are as follows-

1. What are the merits and demerits of using English as the only medium of instruction in higher education in Bangladesh?
2. What are the aspirations of the Bangladeshi undergraduate students? What type of citizens do they want to be? How embedded are the students in their respective community?
3. Is the EMI actually producing graduates who are producing knowledge for the betterment of the state (which English promises due to being “international” in nature) or it persists just because our minds could not break free from our colonial experience?
4. Have we been decolonized yet? Or is decolonization in this regard even necessary?

## **1.4 Thesis Orientation**

1. Chapter 1 provides the motivation behind this study and introduces the topic.
2. In chapter 2, the historical and background context has been discussed using the existing literature and academic discussion.
3. The summary of the collected data has been presented and categorized in chapter no. 3.
4. Chapter 4 discusses and analyzes the collected data using sociological and anthropological theories and narratives.
5. Chapter 5 concludes the study along with mentioning the limits and future scope of it.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Historical and Background Context**

#### **2.1 Education in Ancient India**

As the present-day Bangladesh was a part of colonized India and later part of Pakistan so it would be necessary to take that history into account. National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT] (2011) states that in ancient India, education was based on the religious values (Vedas, Upanishads etc.) and the education system focused on the overall development of an individual's moral, physical, spiritual and intellectual life. Maktabas and Madras flourished during the medieval period. Subsequently, indigenous education was prevalent in the pre-colonial period.

#### **2.2 Colonised Education**

In the colonial era, the education system got colonized as the British introduced education acts that would benefit them to govern India and introducing English as the medium of instruction is only one of the many examples of it. According to Meena (2015), at first the British did not interfere with the education system and let it be for the time being. However, gradually, they felt the need to introduce western education for practical reasons. The first step was making English the official language of India. This initiative was taken by William Bentinck. The need of recruiting English knowing Indian clerks in lower ranked posts was one of the major reasons for spreading English education as recruiting British employees at all levels of administration was expensive and difficult. Moreover, it was also necessary for glorifying British rule. Following the rebellion of 1857 three universities were established but instead of promoting rationality and free thinking, they produced westernized graduates who got alienated from their own culture (Mukherji, 1966 as cited in Meena, 2015). It is no surprise as the intention of the English education was to anglicize the Indians. The reason behind

reforming India's education could be understood from British politician Macaulay's infamous quote which was "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, -a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Macaulay, 1835, para. 34). Furthermore, he also wrote in the same treatise called Minute on Education that "A single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (para. 11). Similarity could be found in the British Malay, where the education system was proposed to be designed in such a way so that the need of vernacular schools would decrease (David, Dumanig & Manan, 2021). So, the intention of colonizing the minds through teaching Victorian morals and values using their language was present without any doubt as the colonized- in our case Indian culture, moral and literature were regarded as inferior to those of Europe. Similar situation could be found in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's account of colonised Kenya. Thiong'o (1986) described how the language of the coloniser- English- started to control and determine how much a child could progress in formal education. Children were forced to use only English in the school premises, and if they got caught using their mother tongue, they would get three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks or made to carry a metal plate hanging around their neck on which "I AM A DONKEY" or "I AM A STUPID" was written.

### **2.3 Education in Postcolonial Period**

After India got divided into two countries, present day Bangladesh (Known as East Pakistan then) became a part of Pakistan. Interestingly, Rahman, Singh & Karim (2020) suggested that even in this newly formed state, the language of their former colonizers was a widely used state language and enjoyed the status of a second language. They also opined that though the British had left in 1947, their cultural hegemony still lingered.

Winning independence from Pakistan, Bangladesh was liberated in 1971 and Bangla was granted the status of state language through constitutional amendment and as using Bangla



was considered prestigious in education, a decline in the proficiency of English was noticeable (Rahman et al., 2020). In the late 1990s, as the dearth of proficiency in English was so alarming that first year public university undergraduate students were obligated to study English according to Hamid and Baldauf (as cited in Rahman et al., 2020). Moreover, in the early 1990s, the demand of pursuing higher education got so high that the limited number of public universities could not cope up with it and this phenomenon opened up the door for private universities to get established in Bangladesh (Rahman et al., 2020). They also opined that these private universities are not worried only about keeping the decrease of English proficiency in check but also producing capable graduates who could compete in both local and global markets. According to Hamid and Baldauf each one of the private universities in Bangladesh identify themselves as English Medium institutions in their websites respectively and none of them teaches any courses in Bangla (as cited in Rahman et al., 2020). Though, in 2018, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has made two courses related to the history of Bangladesh, Bangla language and culture compulsory in all the universities (Ruhani, 2018).

Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of research on the effects of EMI in higher education in Bangladesh (Sultana, 2014; Islam, 2013). The existing literature does recognize that the roots of using English as MOI (medium of instruction) lie in the history of colonialism (Rahman et. al 2019). However, Sultana (2012) opines that English education was not necessarily imposed in the context of India rather a group of Indians led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy played a crucial role in the introduction of English education for the masses as they thought it would be beneficial for the Indians to learn about the scientific and philosophical enlightenment of the West. Also, the motivation of learning English for the majority of the Indian middle class was to get better jobs (Clark, 1956 as cited in Sultana, 2012).

Though the general consensus is that the public universities use BMI (Bangla Medium Instruction) and the private Universities use EMI (Islam, 2013). However, according to Azam

(2018/2020) studying engineering or medical science in Bangla was never an option in Bangladesh. Two decades ago, when he was a student at Dhaka University, the option of writing the answers in exams in Bangla was available but the truth is nobody uses it nowadays. Other than the National University, whether it is a public or a private university- Bangla has not been established as the medium of instruction.

## **2.4 Implementation of EMI**

Karim et. al (2021) pointed out that the reason behind using BMI in public universities is nationalism and EMI has been chosen in the private universities to produce graduates who can communicate effectively in the global platform. Better job opportunities and social value of status generate the priority of EMI in Thai, Chinese, Malaysian, and Bangladeshi higher educational institutions (Ali, 2013; Hengsadeeikul et al., 2014; Hu & Lei, 2014; Rahman & Singh, 2019 as cited in Karim et. al 2021). It is noteworthy to mention that the relation between economic prosperity and being proficient at English is not always synonymous (Rahman, Singh, & Karim, 2018 as cited in Rahman et. al, 2019). Also, could the desired objectives be achieved without properly implementing the policy? The language policy in Bangladesh is not clear and planned (Rahman & Pandian, 2018 as cited in Rahman et. al, 2019). Similarly, in many Asian countries, EMI implementation remains unsuccessful as the language policy in higher education and the national school language policy are not in harmony (Rahman et al., 2018 as cited in Karim et. al 2021).

It should be kept in mind that our Asian neighbours which are first world countries such as Japan and the emerging superpower China use their mother tongue as the medium of instruction in higher education. Though EMI is increasing rapidly in Japan, approximately 40% of universities have adopted it, which serves a minority of students (Brown, 2018). Gu et. al (2019) states that in spite of English taught courses becoming common in Chinese universities, the dominant medium of instruction is still Mandarin. Even European countries put emphasis

on conducting higher education in their native language. Countries such as Denmark and Sweden make use of both their native tongue and international languages (Rahman et al., 2021). Also, most of the teachers in private universities are public university graduates whose MOI was supposedly Bangla. EMI acts as a disadvantage for them too (Karim et. al 2021). Islam (2013) conducted a study on a reputed private university and found out that most of the students faced difficulties in EMI and they opined that it would have been easier for them if the MOI was Bangla. So, because of this incongruent language policy, some students might lose both the language (English) and the subject matters and end up with a cosmetic learning of English (Mohanty et. al, 2010 as cited in Islam, 2013).

## **2.5 Class Conflict**

Sultana (2014) using Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital and habitus, shows that the EMI is creating a class division between the students who are proficient in English and those who are not. The students with less linguistic capital of English are denied participation in the classrooms. They also faced difficulties even outside their classrooms to interact with students who are competent in English. Some of the participants pointed out that they could not get into English medium students filled circles. The English medium students stayed separately and the Bangla medium students also maintained their own separate groups. Moreover, they themselves accepted the supremacy of English medium students and thus rendered themselves inadequate. According to Giroux (1981) as cited in Sultana (2014) it can be called as 'Normalization through consent' and according to Phillipson (1981) as cited in Sultana (2014) it can be labeled as 'warping of mind' caused by linguistic imperialism. In addition to that, Sultana's one of the participants thought that her competency in English decides her overall intellectual capability. The participants seemed to have no more interest in their studies. Thus, the interests of only the already privileged participants who had sufficient linguistic, economic, cultural and symbolic capital were served by the MOI of the universities.

In this way, these participants were successfully colonized by the new colonizers, the elitist universities, teachers and students. Similar results could be found in Islam's (2013) work too. He also showed that the language practices of the teachers and students of that particular private university he was conducting the research on, reproduces the hegemony of English on the basis of English being the way of global communication and the assumed benefits of it in academia.

## **2.6 Language and Decolonisation**

Thus, the existing literature does recognize that English is acting as a blockage for the majority whereas it is privileging minorities- elites to be exact. Sultana (2014) emphasizes on the chasm the EMI is creating and the identity politics it is reproducing. Karim et. al (2021) proposes bilingualism (using both Bangla and English) considering the practicality of this modern era. On the contrary, Islam (2013) opines that as the whole sector has already adopted English and the students also advocate the invisible power of English, a bilingual solution is least likely to be sought. He assumes the EMI policy as inevitable and is more concerned about the implementation. However, the aforementioned scarcity of scholastic works concerning the MOI in Higher education might indirectly indicate that EMI has been taken as granted and thus might imply mind colonization is still there. Also, as class division is perpetuated and the majority of the students are suffering because of EMI, the existing literature does not put much emphasis on the decolonisation of knowledge and thus the cultural rift due to linguistic capital is preserved. Through the framework of the relationship between one's language and his/her culture as described by Fanon (1952/ 2008) a language means assuming a culture and bearing the weight of that civilization, this study will focus on the decolonising aspect of higher education focusing on the MOI. This study will seek to find out are our minds still colonized as far as the MOI in higher education is concerned? If yes, then, ask for a decolonisation of minds. Sharma (2001) describes that through cultural imperialism and cognitive dominance, mind colonization is still at the play. In this phase, the intellectual relationship between two

individuals is that of between a master and a slave. By questioning the dominant ideas of the master, the slave could start a revolution and gradually an equal intellectual relationship could be built where both parties exchange ideas. Why is decolonising the mind necessary? Simply because if the minds remain colonized for quite a long time, the country is surely to become a cultural derivative of the coloniser.

So, in this study my quest would be finding out why English persists as the only acceptable medium of instruction in higher education in Bangladesh. By analyzing the responses from my interlocutors, I will seek to discover whether their views coincide with our former colonizers' wishes. Are their aspirations and wishes etc. the way our colonizers' such as Macaulay wished them to be? Moreover, whether decolonization of education as far as the MOI is concerned is needed or not will be discussed too. Here, I will use Fanon, Thiong'o and Sharma's framework for proposing decolonization. Both Fanon and Thiong'o heavily emphasized on the role of one's language in building his/her identity. They also portrayed how the colonizers undermined and suppressed the use of local languages and thus, established their own languages as the elite languages which obviously produced class conflict. Likewise, Sharma's framework asks for the destruction of the master-slave relationship in academia- blindly following western ideas. So, I will try to examine the contribution of the graduates- the present educational structure is producing- for Bangladesh. As this is small-scale research, diving too deep in this section would not be feasible. I will try to discuss some projects of the government of Bangladesh and through those the contribution of Bangladeshi graduates will be assessed. In this way, I will be seeking to find out whether English as the MOI is actually persisting because of its promised outputs, or it is just there because we are still in a master-slave relationship with the west.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Summarizing the Data**

#### **3.1 The MCQs**

A detailed summary (represented as tables) of the MCQ part will be found in the appendix section.

#### **3.2 Summary of the Open-ended Part**

i) Nine participants out of the total ten opined that English should be the MOI in higher education of Bangladesh. English being the international language, going abroad for higher studies, competing with the international standard of education have been pointed out as the reasons. Two participants did want the presence of Bangla alongside English. Interestingly, one participant from the English Medium said that Bangla should be the MOI as it is the national language.

ii) In the question of their dream jobs they put forward a wide range of professions. However, professions such as Engineer and Government service holder dominated when asked what their parents wanted them to be. Three of the participants showed interest in research works.

iii) Three participants chose not to answer when asked how embedded they think they are in the society. Four said that they are quite engaged in their community. The rest three considered themselves detached from their community. Among the four who said they feel closely connected with their community, only one of them was affiliated with any university/ social clubs. Quite interestingly, one among the participants who deemed themselves as disconnected from the society was a vice president of a university club.

iv) The next question tried to find out whether the participants struggled because of English in Academia and if they did whether their universities provided enough support to

overcome that or not. Understandably, three of the four English Medium students did not answer that. The one who chose to answer clearly pointed out that she did not have to struggle particularly because she is from the English medium background. In her opinion, her university provided her enough support. On the contrary, three students from the Bangla medium said that they do not think their university gave them enough support to strengthen their second language. One of them pointed out that courses were offered and another one said that the courses were not efficient. Only one student from the Bangla Medium thought that the support from her university was good enough. The hybrid group also agreed with that notion of university support being enough. However, one of them said that despite not struggling much, he did have inferiority complex around good English users.

v) When asked if they got comfortable in this new English-speaking environment over time, two of the Bangla medium students said they did not. One chose not to answer and the last one did not get any idea from this radical shift in medium of instruction. One from the hybrid group also did not answer this question and the other one said that he did become comfortable with the span of time. All the students from the English medium said that they were comfortable with the linguistic environment. Interestingly, one pointed out she faced difficulties communicating with her teachers who are from Bangla medium through her academic writing. She said she could not understand what was expected of her.

vi) The second last question was specifically for the English medium group. The aim was finding out their thoughts on whether they think that their university has enriched their knowledge regarding their culture and heritage or not. Two of them said it did not. One of them said that she does not think that the course which was offered for engaging her more to the history and culture of the country could actually do that. The other two said that it did enrich their knowledge by offering some courses.

vii) Lastly, they were asked if they have any opinion regarding reforming our education system as far as the medium of instruction is concerned. Three of the total ten participants did not answer that. The rest pointed out things such as inclusivity needs to be encouraged, dependency on memorization should be discouraged, contents need to be improved, English teaching should be practical and efficient etc. Only one student from the English medium said that the medium of instruction should be a mixture of Bangla and English.

### **3.3 Comfort**

Despite most of the participants saying that EMI was comfortable for them (Table 1,2) and wanting English to be the MOI, a mixed reaction was observed regarding being comfortable in the classroom. Half of the Bangla medium participants agreed that they had struggled to communicate in the classroom because of English and thus, shut themselves down (Table B.1, B.2). On the contrary, most of the students from the English medium thought that they did not find it awkward to communicate with peers and teachers (Q9.E, Table E) though most of them are from the Bangla medium. If that is the case, then it becomes clear that the English medium students are in an advantageous position compared to their Bangla medium counterparts as they are finding the classroom environment more comfortable. The situation of the students from Bangla medium is similar to the findings of Sultana (2014) as she also found out that students could not voice out their thoughts and speak up in the classrooms due to the language barrier created by English. Also, despite finding it hard in the classroom, the students from Bangla medium still want the MOI to be English. Moreover, this strong desire of English resonated with Islam's (2013) findings where he opined that the students were driven by the assumed benefits of English and were not even ready to give Bangla a chance though the benefits of using Bangla were experiential and explicable.



### **3.4 Position Inside and Outside the Classroom**

Majority from the Bangla Medium and the Hybrid group thought that good English speakers are favoured more by the teachers (Table B.3). They were not mocked in the classrooms due to their skills of English (Table B.4). Though the majority disagreed that it was hard becoming friends with the students from the English medium (Table B.4), they agreed that they feel comfortable around people who rely on Bangla more. On the other hand, the students from English medium also did not find it difficult to be friends with the students from the Bangla medium, they were comfortable with people using Bangla more (Q11.E, Q12.E- Table E). They did not think that good Bangla users got any extra attention from the teachers (Q10.E- Table E). Interestingly, the majority chose to be neutrals when asked if they faced any discrimination because of their Bangla skills or not. The sharp contrast between the positions of Bangla medium students and the English medium students is that the Bangla medium students have to negotiate more to feel comfortable and desired inside and outside the classroom.

### **3.5 Language of Personal Sphere vs. Language of Academia**

Almost all the participants considered themselves as Banglish users (Table 3). However, from Table B.7 it can be understood that a mixed response was extracted regarding their tentative performance in Academia if the MOI was Bangla. The majority of the Bangla medium and Hybrid group did not have any opinion in that regard. Only one participant thought that she would have performed better. On the contrary, the majority of the English medium students thought that their performance would not have been the same had Bangla been used as the MOI (Q15.E- Table E).

Moreover, most of the Bangla medium students did not find the support provided by their respective universities for strengthening their English enough. A total of three participants

from the Bangla medium and the Hybrid group thought the support was enough. Having said that, one of these three students stated that he had to deal with inferiority complex when found someone who was a better English user than him.

### **3.6 Leaving the Country**

Apart from one, all of the participants want to go abroad and majority of them want to live there permanently (Table 4.5). So, the wish of leaving the country is strongly present in my population.

### **3.7 Identity**

The data from Table 6- Table 10 shows that despite not aspiring to be like westerners, half of the students from the Bangla medium prioritized learning English over Bangla. In addition to that, they do not think that mixing English words with Bangla makes them cooler but they cannot help doing it anyways. Similar responses have been observed in the Hybrid group too. However, they did not think that being a good English user is more important than learning and using Bangla. On the other hand, mixed responses consisting of disagreement and choosing to be neutral have been observed in the answers of the English medium group. Half of them disagreed and the rest chose neutrality when asked about prioritizing learning English over Bangla and about their aspirations of following westerners. One of the participants opined that using English more or mixing English with Bangla is cool. Again, mixed responses can be seen when asked is it actually cool or if this process has been normalized to such an extent that we keep doing it unconsciously? Half of them strongly agreed and the rest chose not to choose anything.

### **3.8 Community Engagement**

The data have already depicted that regardless of the medium, most of my participants do not feel engaged within their community. Here, the quest was to find out how much they

are involved in social or community-based works. Moreover, half of the participants from the English medium group did not think that their universities did much to enrich their knowledge about the culture and heritage. However, the other half thought their universities did enrich them in this regard.

From my personal experience, I would like to add that I do not think my university particularly enriched my knowledge regarding the local culture and history. Yes, some courses were offered but the contents were known to me as most of them are covered in the Bangla Medium curriculum. Interestingly, some of my classmates from English Medium said that some of these topics were unfamiliar to them. In addition to that, the environment- both inside and outside the classroom- was filled with students and teachers who used English even in casual non- academic conversation and a particular touch of Western morals and etiquette such as greetings (Hey bro, what's up, nice to meet you etc.), British formal attire, speaking Bangla in English accent etc. were present that made me feel that this was another world where I do not belong.

## Chapter 4

### Analysis and Proposals

Language is not a depoliticized entity rather it is used to categorize, judge and assign social values to people (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014). Though the students from English medium do not struggle to verbalize their ideas in the classroom, the students from Bangla medium are silenced by English (Sultana, 2014). Moreover, competent Bangla users were not favoured by teachers yet skilled English users were. In addition to that, the English medium students chose neutrality when inquiring whether they felt any discrimination because of their Bangla skills which indicates the possibility of the presence of actual insults. So, due to the EMI, some students got an upper hand over the others and also a chasm was built among them. As previously discussed, only a handful of students attend English medium schools, the EMI of the universities in Bangladesh is serving the interests of privileged participants who possess enough symbolic capital and not serving the masses (Sultana, 2014). This is an example of the state specifically protecting the interests of the elite. This nature of the state has been pointed out by Marx (1842/ 1975) in his article on the assembly debate regarding the thefts of wood where he showed that despite wood gathering being a natural process, the state criminalizes it and make no distinction between theft and gathering and thus, protect the interests of forest owners- the bourgeoisie. The EMI of Bangladeshi universities exactly serves the same purpose by crippling the majority of the students that attend higher education.

According to my participants, EMI provides the opportunity to acquire global standard education and thus compete in the global market. However, an assessment to some degree of the success of such promises will be provided in the later part.

Most of the participants do not feel engaged in their society. Their social life and activity are limited. They talked about wanting various kinds of jobs and only a few were interested in work related to academia. Also, most of them want to settle abroad permanently.

Thiong'o (1982) defined education as a system for integrating the youth into the entire system of production, exchange and distribution of subsistence and into the organization of the wealth of a state. Thus, the question needs to be asked if EMI is indeed producing globally competent students, then why does the state of Bangladesh rely heavily upon foreign professionals when launching mega projects such as the Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project and the Dhaka Metro Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) project? Both of these projects are managed by foreign companies and officials from China, Japan etc. (The Daily Star, 2017; RAILWAY TECHNOLOGY, 2019; PADMA MULTIPURPOSE BRIDGE PROJECT, n.d.) countries. As previously discussed, China and Japan themselves do not rely on EMI. Yet, Bangladesh- a country which is supposedly providing global standard education through EMI- needs to hire officials from these countries. In this regard, Azam (2018/2020) stated that the education system of Bangladesh does not produce such individuals who possess the knowledge of running the state. So, it is conspicuous that though EMI has been around in Bangladesh for quite a long time, still it does not produce citizens who are capable of running their own state, the state relies on foreign knowledge. On the contrary, both Japan and China put emphasis on local knowledge production through research works. Karim et. al (2021) showed that as Japan follows the German academic model where research shapes academic activities and preferences, Japan was able to integrate the local workforce into the production of local knowledge. Japan produces original texts in their own language and translates them for foreign students (Hashimoto, 2013 as cited in Karim et. al, 2021). In similar fashion, Jacob (2009) pointed out that ideological training and a narrowly focused technical training was prevalent in Chinese education for establishing socialism. Also, traditional features such as the teachings of Confucius is still highly revered and followed in China. In addition to that, Education is not regarded as a non-political endeavour in China. Thus, it is closely connected to the governing of the state. Sadly, the education system of Bangladesh does not possess these attributes for

this study specifically for this study, the focus should be on the production of local knowledge. All the universities rely heavily on western study materials- local texts do not dominate our academic practices and aspirations.

Azam (2019) opined that the immense popularity of English due to the scope of going abroad and living there permanently. My dataset strongly supports his claim. So, the question remains, the students we are producing, how much of a help they will be for the state itself?

The participants from Bangla medium did not think that they got enough support from their universities to strengthen their English skills. However, it is expected of them to speak, write and engage in all sorts of academic activities using English. It needs to be kept in mind that most of the participants from all three groups said that in their day-to-day life conversations, they use Banglish more. So, the situation imposed by the English medium Universities is that the students can speak in their native language in personal space but whenever they enter into the campus, they need to shift completely to using only English. Sultana (2012) regarded this notion of compartmentalizing languages unrealistic and idealistic.

According to the Whorfian hypothesis, Language shapes the perception of human beings (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014). Fanon's notion of language took this assumption even further by implying that speaking a language embodies the weight of a culture. Thiong'o (1986) enriched it further saying that language dictates how people perceive themselves and how they perceive themselves affect their views on their own culture, economy, politics, social production of wealth. So, when the language of education gets separated from the language of culture- a sharp rift is created. According to Thiong'o the colonial education was taking them away from their own culture to the culture of their colonial masters'.

Despite getting silenced by English, the students of Bangla medium still wanted English to be the MOI of Higher Education. Majority from all the three groups did not aspire to be like westerners yet, half of the Bangla medium students wanted to prioritize learning and using

English over Bangla. Learning and using Bangla was not a matter of importance for them. Though half of the English medium students disagreed in this regard, the other half chose neutrality. So, an immense wish of adopting English is prevalent. As language is not just a means of communication, by learning and prioritizing English- the western morals, values and intellect get prioritized too- just as Macaulay wished. By assimilating the western culture, the subjects get closer to becoming the westerners (Fanon, 1952/ 2008). Thing'o (1986) said that without cultural control, economic and political control would not have been possible. Hence, colonisation relies heavily on its tool of cultural control. It makes someone regard his/her own culture as inferior and the culture of the master as the superior one. Thus, the cultural bomb act as a deadly weapon for imperialism which destroys peoples' beliefs in their own language, culture etc. My data show that half of the students from the English medium did not think that their university has enriched their knowledge about their culture and heritage. So, the possibility of glorifying the culture of the neo colonisers- the imperialists cannot be denied. In addition to that, according to Khan (2018/2020), the English medium education system of Bangladesh wants to make the students forget their mother tongue. As previously discussed, a portion of the students from Bangla medium did lose hope about their language and wanted to prioritize the language of their former colonisers. Thus, the possibility of an ongoing colonisation persists.

Thing'o (1982) opined that one of the aims of colonialism is to produce native elites who would assimilate the culture of the imperialists and keep the process going during the neo colonial era. In this neo- colonial era, the role of education becomes even more crucial. The petty bourgeois transmit the values of the imperialists to the younger generation. This class wants recognition from their colonisers by the standard of how much they have assimilated. The moment imperialists' definition of progress, development etc. have been internalized, the

neo colonisers win as progress and stability for them is nothing but the continuation of colonialism with a cosmetic set of reforms.

As the promises of EMI are not fulfilled rather it is creating a class division between the students of different mediums by making someone advantageous over others yet still being desired by those who are getting discriminated themselves, it becomes certain that it is happening due to the colonial past which has associated symbolic capital with the language and thus making it a ladder of reaching elitedom.

For the progress of the state, decolonisation is a must. To decolonize this heavily colonized state, the frameworks proposed by Sharma (2001) and Thiong'o (1982) would be useful. According to Sharma, the relation of master and slave in the academia needs to be abolished by questioning master's postulates. So, rather than blindly bowing down before the hegemony of English language, trying to produce knowledge from the local lived experience would be a useful tool- in our own language of course. In addition to that, Thiong'o proposed the polytechnic rubric of Marx. According to him, knowing and perceiving someone's own art, history, literature from the point of view of the majority- workers and peasants- would lead the way to local realizations. Everyone needs to be nurtured in such a way so that they become capable of taking part in production- academic production in case of this study.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Conclusion**

English as the MOI of Higher education in Bangladesh provides little but takes away a lot. It is working as an advantage for a class that has accumulated the linguistic capital approved by the westerners and acting as a blockage for the majority. The symbolic capital associated with it makes it so powerful that despite all the aforementioned adversities, still it stays as something revered and desired. The students do not feel engaged in their community and most of them want to live abroad. The present education system is not producing the desired labour force who would be responsible for running the state. EMI in the higher education of Bangladesh is prolonging its former colonial rule and sustaining the neo-colonial motives of the global elites. Without decolonisation, the subjects will continue to suffer from inferiority complex and hence, fail to produce knowledge that could be generated from the local lived experiences. It is absolutely necessary to consider the process of decolonisation in terms of education, if we wish to produce an intelligent workforce through which the state would function in all sorts of domains without relying on foreign knowledge.

#### **5.2 Limitation and Scope of Future Study**

The dataset that has been used in this study is very small. It is not feasible to reach a conclusion from the responses of such a small group of participants. The study needs to be done on a large scale in future. Also, a viable rubric of decolonisation needs to be produced. Lastly, the ultimate endeavour would be to decide what should be the MOI of higher education in Bangladesh.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

1. Please write down your name.  
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2. Please let us know the name of your university.  
-----
3. Which department (study programme) do you belong to?  
-----
4. Which semester/ year are you in currently?  
-----
5. Which background are you from? (Till 12th Grade)  
-----
6. What socio-economic class do you think you belong to-  
i) Lower class ii) Lower middle class iii) Middle class iv) Upper middle-class v)  
Upper class
7. Which language is comfortable for you in academia?  
i) English ii) Bangla
8. Was the use of English as the medium of instruction in your university comfortable  
for you?  
i) Yes ii)No

#### For Bangla Medium

9. I have struggled to communicate with my peers and teachers in English  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree
10. I could not speak up in the classroom and had shut myself down as I was not  
confident about my English skills  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree

11. Students who are good at English are favoured more by the teachers.  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree
12. It was hard to be friends with students who are good at English.  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree
13. I feel comfortable around people who use Bangla more.  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree
14. I was made fun of in the university by my peers or teachers due to my English skills  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree
15. I would have performed better in my academic life if Bangla was the medium of instruction in my university.  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree

**For English Medium (Q9 - Q15)**

9. I have felt immense pressure to connect with my peers and teachers as most of the students and teachers were from Bangla medium and used Bangla more.  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree
10. Students who are good at Bangla are favoured more by the teachers.  
i) Strong Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree
11. It was hard to be friends with Bangla medium students.  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree
12. I feel comfortable around people who use English more.  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree
13. English medium education at my university has acted as an advantage for me.  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree
14. I was made fun of in the university by my peers or teachers due to my Bangla skills.  
i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree

15. My performance in academia will stay the same even if the medium of instruction of my university shifts to Bangla.

i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree

**(General Questions Resumes)**

16. Which language do you use in your daily life more?

i) English ii) Bangla iii) Banglish

17. Do you want to go abroad for higher education?

i) Yes ii) No

18. Do you want to live there permanently?

i) Yes ii) No

19. Being a good English user is more important than learning and using Bangla.

i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree

20. I find Westerners way cooler than us.

i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree

21. I aspire to be like a Westerner.

i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree

22. Using English more or mixing English words with Banga in day-to-day life conversations is cool.

i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree

23. Using English or mixing English with Bangla is not necessarily cool but I can't help doing it anyways

i) Strongly Agree ii) Agree iii) Neutral iv) Disagree v) Strongly Disagree



## Open ended part

24. In your opinion what should be the medium of Higher Education in Bangladesh? And why?
25. What do you want to be? What is your dream job? What do your parents want you to be?
26. How closely are you connected with your society? Are you engaged with any social community (e.g. clubs, projects etc.)? How embedded do you think you are in your society? Please give us an overview about your social life.
27. If you are affiliated with any club, please tell us about the club and your role in that club in short.
28. If you struggled because of English, do you think your university gave you enough support to help and cope with this medium of instruction? Were courses offered to strengthen your English?
29. If courses were offered, were they sufficient? Did you become comfortable over time, with practice and exposure? Did this radical shift in medium of instruction give you any new ideas? If yes, please share.
30. If you are from the English medium background, did the university do more to enrich you in your culture and heritage? In what ways? Give examples
31. If you have any opinion regarding reforming our education system as far as the medium of instruction is concerned, please feel free to share.

Any remarks?

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### Summarizing the MCQs

For the purpose of accommodating all the data properly in the data tables, following abbreviations have been used.

S.A. = Strongly Agree

A.= Agree

N.= Neutral

D.= Disagree

S.D.= Strongly Disagree

Table 1

Q 7. Which language is comfortable for you in academia?					
Bangla Medium		English Medium		Hybrid	
Bangla	English	Bangla	English	Bangla	English
1	3	0	4	1	2

Table 2

Q 8. Was the use of English as the medium of instruction in your university comfortable for you?					
Bangla Medium		English Medium		Hybrid	
No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

1	3	0	4	0	1
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Table 3

Q16. Which language do you use in your daily life more?								
Bangla Medium			English Medium			Hybrid		
Bangla	English	Banglish	Bangla	English	Banglish	Bangla	English	Banglish
1	0	3	1	1	4	1	0	2

Table 4

Q17. Do you want to go abroad for higher education?					
Bangla Medium		English Medium		Hybrid	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
3	1	4	0	2	0

Table 5

Q18. Do you want to live there permanently?					
Bangla Medium		English Medium		Hybrid	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
3	1	2	2	2	1

Table 6

Q19. Being a good English user is more important than learning and using Bangla.														
Bangla Medium					English Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.	A.				D.
1	1		1	1			2		2				1	1

Table 7

Q20. I find Westerners way cooler than us.														
Bangla Medium					English Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.	A.				D.
		1	2	1			1	2	1				1	1

Table 8

Q21. I aspire to be like a Westerner.														
Bangla Medium					English Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.	A.				D.
		2		2			2		2				1	1

Table 9

Q22. Using English more or mixing English words with Bangla in day-to-day life conversations is cool.														
Bangla Medium					English Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.	A.				D.
			4			1	1		2				1	1

Table 10

Q23. Using English or mixing English with Bangla is not necessarily cool but I can't help doing it anyways.														
Bangla Medium					English Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.	A.				D.
1	2	1			1	1	2			1	1			

## Specific Questions for Bangla Medium

Table B.1

Q9.B. I have struggled to communicate with my peers and teachers in English.									
Bangla Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.
1	1	1	1				1	1	

Table B.2

Q10.B. I could not speak up in the classroom and had shut myself down as I was not confident about my English skills.									
Bangla Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.

1	1		2				1	1	
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Table B.3

Q11.B. Students who are good at English are favoured more by the teachers.									
Bangla Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.
	2	1	1			2			

Table B.4

Q12.B. It was hard to be friends with students who are good at English.									
Bangla Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.
	1	1	2			1			1



Table B.5

Q13.B. I feel comfortable around people who use Bangla more.									
Bangla Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.
	3	1				1			1

Table B.6

Q14.B. I was made fun of in the university by my peers or teachers due to my English skills.									
Bangla Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.
		1	3					1	1

Table B.7

Q15.B. I would have performed better in my academic life if Bangla was the medium of instruction in my university.									
Bangla Medium					Hybrid				
S.	A.	N.	D.	S.	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
A.				D.	A.				D.
1		2	1				1	1	

**Specific Questions for English Medium**

Table E

Question	S.	A.	N.	D.	S.
	A.				D.
Q9.E. I have felt immense pressure to connect with my peers and teachers as most of the students and teachers were from Bangla medium and used Bangla more.			1	2	1

Q10.E. Students who are good at Bangla are favoured more by the teachers.			1		3
Q11.E. It was hard to be friends with Bangla medium students.			1		3
Q12.E. I feel comfortable around people who use English more.	1		1	1	1
Q13.E. English medium education at my university has acted as an advantage for me.	2	2			
Q14.E. I was made fun of in the university by my peers or teachers due to my Bangla skills.			3		1
Q15.E. My performance in academia will stay the same even if the medium of instruction of my university shifts to Bangla.				1	3