

Challenges in the Language Shift: EMI Implementation in Public Universities of Bangladesh

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Abstract

The study focuses on investigating the challenges that students face when shifting to English Medium Instruction (EMI) from Bangla or any other medium of instruction (MOI), the reasons behind these challenges, and the impact it has on students. The study was conducted using a mixed-method design, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. The data was collected from 180 students and 8 teachers of the EMI program. The study found that a majority of the students coming to the EMI program came from Bangla-medium schools and colleges, and as a result, they face simultaneous challenges of mastering academic content as well as adapting to a new instruction language. While they show greater proficiency in receptive skills (listening and reading), they exhibit lower proficiency in productive skills, especially when it comes to oral communication using English. The study identified reasons like lack of preparatory language support, insufficient teacher training, failure to address students' fear of being judged, and the absence of clear policy guidelines for EMI as key impediments to successful EMI implementation. The study suggested developing a comprehensive EMI framework and enhancing language support mechanisms, to ensure a supportive and interactive classroom to facilitate a smooth transition for the students coming from non-English medium backgrounds.

Keywords

English Medium Instruction (EMI), challenges, public university, Bangladesh

Introduction

English, a member of the Indo-European language family, is now the most widely spoken language in the world, with approximately 1.5 billion speakers. Originating in England, this language started to spread its roots during the 17th century through colonialism. Since then, even after the end of colonialism, it has retained its status in many countries it once ruled and gained the status of an official language in many of the countries it ruled once. Even in countries where English is not an official language, it is often regarded as the primary choice for a foreign language. In developing countries like Bangladesh, it is still considered as the language of the elites. Proficiency in English opens doors to a lot of opportunities. Hence, significant emphasis is placed on learning this language.

The growing importance of English as a global language has created a socio-cultural, educational, and political impact (Phillipson, 2004). Tsuda (1994) described it as a medium for internationalization, globalization, academia, and scientific advancement. This reputation of English has given rise to the expansion of English Medium Instruction (EMI) all around the world (Dearden, 2014; Macaro, 2018). English as an MOI aligns with globalization, as English proficiency opens up a gateway for high-skilled job sectors and international mobility (Gibbins, 2023).

The medium of instruction (MOI) refers to the language teachers use for teaching. It significantly influences students' academic performance and plays an important role in their linguistic and cultural identity, particularly in multilingual settings (Evans & Morrison, 2011). English as an MOI refers to using English as the medium for transmitting academic knowledge, irrespective of the first language of students or teachers, to simultaneously improve linguistic and academic competencies (Aguilar & Muñoz, 2014). English Medium Instruction (EMI) has gained prominence in recent years because of globalization, as educational institutions aim to prepare students with the language and academic skills needed to engage in an increasingly interconnected world (Macaro, 2015).

In Bangladesh, a nation where Bangla is the national language, English has historically maintained a prestigious status, partly due to its colonial past and its role as a language of opportunity (Ahmed & Islam, 2019). EMI was introduced in Bangladeshi tertiary education after the enactment of the 1992 Private University Act (Kabir & Webb, 2018). EMI is currently being used in several public and private universities in Bangladesh. However, Bangladesh does not have a defined language policy (LP) or even a language in education policy (Faquire, 2019). As a result, the implementation of EMI is now completely unregulated in Bangladesh. Most students and teachers who enroll in these universities are from colleges and schools that use the Bangla language as their medium of instruction.

This paper focuses on the University of Chittagong, one of the leading public universities in Bangladesh. In this university, Bangla is the predominant medium of instruction. It has implemented EMI in some departments and institutions in response to globalization and the increasing demand for English proficiency. However, there is no specific formal

policy guideline for the implementation of EMI that has been developed centrally. Moreover, there is no specific assessment to evaluate students' English proficiency, which can help teachers plan their curriculum according to students' overall proficiency and comprehension. Also, most of the teachers come from non-English backgrounds, which further complicates the situation. The core issue addressed herein is the array of significant difficulties encountered by students, the majority of whom transition from Bangla-medium secondary and higher secondary education, and by their teachers within this evolving EMI landscape.

Public universities in Bangladesh primarily serve a student population from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, predominantly educated through the Bangla medium. This situation creates an inherent tension: the drive for global competitiveness through English clashes with the linguistic and educational realities of the student body. Consequently, students entering these public university EMI programs often face what Graddol (2010) termed as a "double burden": the simultaneous pressure of mastering complex academic content and adapting to a new language of instruction, frequently without adequate prior linguistic preparation.

This study aims to comprehensively investigate and analyze the challenges faced by students in shifting from Bangla medium to EMI at the University of Chittagong. The primary research question guiding this paper is, what challenges do students face in an EMI environment at the University of Chittagong?

This study is significant as it focuses on a typical public university in Bangladesh, a setting that is still underrepresented in the larger body of EMI work. By closely examining the difficulties faced by EMI teachers and students, this study aims to offer insightful information that can assist policymakers in implementing improved EMI guidelines.

Literature Review

English Medium Instruction (EMI) is the use of English to teach academic content in countries where the first language (L1) is not English (Dearden, 2014). The primary goal is the transmission of academic content, with language development often considered an incidental outcome (Taguchi, 2014). Due to globalization and the influence of economic, social, and academic perspectives, EMI has become an essential strategy for the global education system (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In the current global order of languages, the role of the English language is very significant (Zhang, 2017). EMI prepares students for a globalized workforce and attracts international students to higher education institutions (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). That is why universities around the world are adopting EMI to enhance students' English proficiency, improve global competitiveness, and meet the demand for a globalized educational landscape (Dearden, 2014; Macaro, 2018).

While the global expansion of EMI is driven by perceived benefits such as internationalization and enhanced graduate employability (Macaro, 2018), its implementation is fraught with challenges.

Students, especially those with lower English proficiency, often encounter significant difficulties in engaging with course material, understanding lectures, and completing assignments (Hung & Lan, 2017). In multilingual settings, students from diverse linguistic backgrounds may face compounded challenges, potentially leading to inequalities where those with stronger English skills gain an advantage (Akter & Mitul, 2020). Psychological barriers are also prominent, with students frequently reporting anxiety, a fear of judgment when speaking English, and reluctance to participate (Sarkar et al., 2021; Rahman & Kaur, 2018). This often places students under a 'double' burden,' mastering both subject content and the language of instruction simultaneously (Graddol, 2010; Macaro, 2017).

Teachers, too, face considerable challenges. Many may lack specific pedagogical skills for teaching content through a second language, or their own English proficiency may be insufficient (Macaro & Han, 2020). The additional pressure of creating or adapting teaching materials in English can increase workload (Bradford, 2016). Consequently, teachers may resort to code-switching, using the students' L1 to explain difficult concepts, which can reflect gaps in language support policy (Rahman et al., 2019).

Institutional challenges include instructional materials often imported from Anglophone contexts that may be culturally irrelevant (Akter & Mitul, 2020). Preparatory English language courses are often criticized for their insufficiency (Pham, 2023). Many EMI programs lack rigorous language assessment procedures and institutional support for teacher professional development (Macaro, Akincioglu & Han, 2019; Pham, 2023). A critical issue, particularly in contexts like Bangladesh, is the disconnect between EMI policy and implementation, often due to the absence of a clear national language-in-education policy (Faquire, 2019; Rahman et al., 2019).

These challenges are often amplified in public universities in developing countries like Bangladesh. Pre-existing limitations, including an emphasis on examination scores rather than foundational language skills in schools, result in many students entering higher education with weaker English proficiency. While students and teachers often recognize the value of English proficiency, perceptions of EMI are mixed (Airey, 2011).

Methodology

A mixed-methods research design was employed for this study (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This approach allows for the integration of quantitative data, offering breadth, with qualitative data, providing depth (Dörnyei, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Sampling and Participants

Stratified random sampling was utilized to select student participants, ensuring representation across disciplines, academic years, and prior educational mediums (Som, 1996). Purposive sampling was used for faculty members in EMI programs.

The study involved 180 student participants from the University of Chittagong: Arts (n=115), Business (n=35), and Science (n=30). Academic years: Masters (n=61), 4th Year

(n=27), 3rd Year (n=30), 2nd Year (n=42), and 1st Year (n=20). Gender: 92 male and 88 female. Crucially, 92.2% (n=166) transitioned from a Bangla medium background. Eight EMI teachers also participated. Table 1 summarizes participant demographics.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Category Sub-Category	Student Participants (N=180)	Teacher Participants (N=8)
Academic Discipline		
Arts	115 (63.9%)	Varied
Business	35 (19.4%)	
Science	30 (16.7%)	
Academic Year		
1st Year	20 (11.1%)	N/A
2nd Year	42 (23.3%)	
3rd Year	30 (16.7%)	
4th Year	27 (15.0%)	
Masters	61 (33.9%)	
Gender		
Male	92 (51.1%)	3
Female	88 (48.9%)	
Prior Medium of Instruction		
Bangla Medium	166 (92.2%)	
English Medium	10 (5.6%)	
Arabic Medium	4 (2.2%)	
Years Teaching in EMI (Teachers)		
Range	N/A	2.5 to 20 years

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data was collected using structured questionnaires and classroom observations. Two questionnaires were developed: one for students (28 items) and one for teachers (13 items), combining closed ended (Likert scales) and open-ended questions (Bryman, 2012; Dörnyei, 2007). Classroom observations (eight classes, ~45 minutes each) focused on language of instruction, teaching methods, student engagement, and classroom environment (Cohen et al., 2007). Student questionnaires were administered via Google Forms, and teachers were interviewed offline. Field notes were taken during observations.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (Excel) and inferential statistics (SPSS, version 25). Cronbach's alpha for Likert-scale items was 0.85 (calculated via Python), indicating strong reliability (Cohen et al., 2007). Qualitative data from open-ended responses and observation notes were subjected to thematic analysis (manual and NVivo, version 15).

Ethical Procedures

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Data were anonymized and used solely for academic research. The survey data is stored in a password-protected Google Drive account, accessible only to the researcher.

Results

Student-Level Challenges

Impact of Prior Education

The research methodology already provides a general overview of the participant's demographic. We have categorized students' demographics based on their current discipline, academic year, and gender to have an inclusive and fair result. To understand how students view English and the influence of their educational background, we also gathered their geographic information data, that is, the type of area where they completed their SSC and HSC.

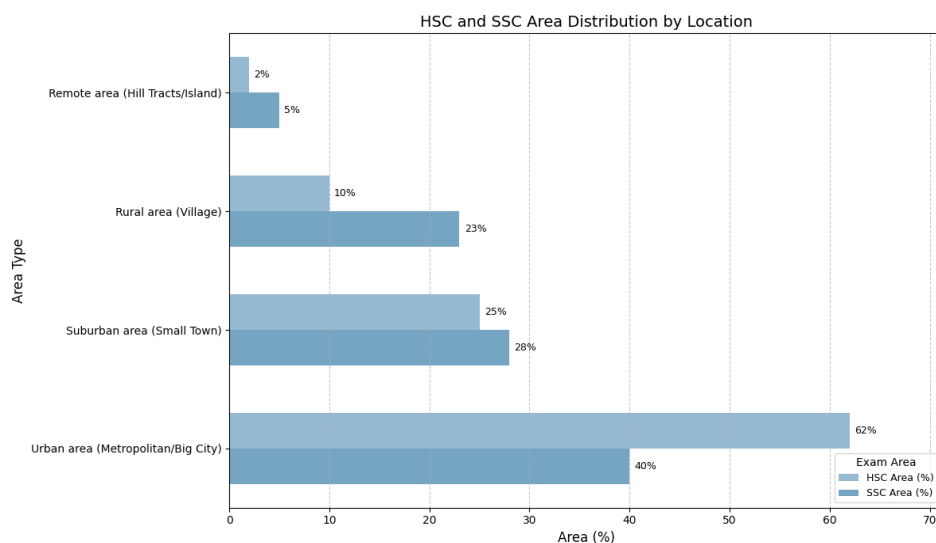


Figure 1. Geographic distribution of students

Among our participants, 5% of SSC students and 2% of HSC students come from remote areas. At the SSC level, 28% and 26% of HSC students come from suburban areas. At the SSC level, 43% and 63% of HSC students come from urban areas. This data tells us that a significant number of students move to urban areas after completing their SSC, possibly due to facilities like quality education and academic opportunities.

The background of students' prior education impacts their tertiary education. The percentage of students coming from non-English backgrounds is 92.2% (Bangla Medium: 89.78%, Arabic Medium: 2.15%), whereas just 5.6% (n=10) of students come from English backgrounds at The University of Chittagong.

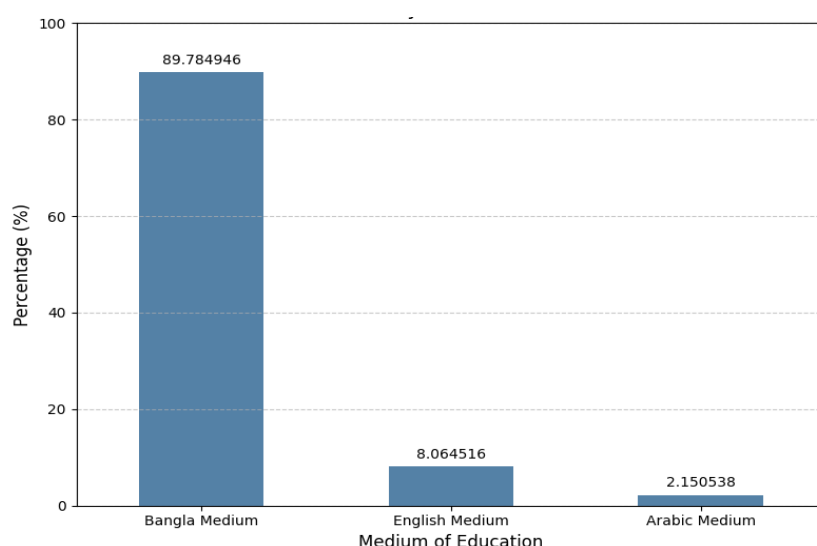


Figure 2. Students' prior medium of instructions

This finding suggests that most EMI students at the University of Chittagong come from non-English backgrounds.

Gaps in English Language Proficiency and Resultant Classroom Anxiety

Statistical analysis was conducted using the Likert scale data to measure students' English language proficiency. Students were asked to self-assess their skills in listening, reading, writing, and speaking on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Table 2. Self-rated language proficiency

Skill	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Listening Skill	3.44	0.77	1	4
Reading Skill	3.22	0.85	1	4
Writing Skill	3.00	0.85	1	4
Speaking Skill	2.20	1.08	1	4

The questionnaire for listening skills ("I can comfortably follow and understand lectures delivered entirely in English") had a mean score of 3.44, indicating general confidence. For reading skills ("I can read and understand academic texts written in English without significant difficulty"), the mean was 3.22, suggesting above-average comprehension. For writing skills ("I feel confident expressing my ideas in written English for assignments and reports"), the mean of 3.00 indicated moderate confidence. Speaking skills ("I can actively participate in class discussions and presentations in English without feeling overly hesitant") had the lowest mean of 2.20, suggesting significant challenges. The standard deviation of 1.08 for speaking implies high variability. These findings suggest students are stronger in receptive skills (listening, reading) but struggle with productive skills (speaking, writing), particularly speaking.

These findings of the students' lack of English speaking skills were compared with students' classroom anxiety levels. Students' level of anxiety was assessed through the statement, "During class, I feel anxious when asked to express my ideas or if I need to ask questions in English." A Spearman's rank correlation was performed.

Table 3. Spearman's Correlation Table

Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
Speaking Skill	1.000	
Classroom Anxiety	-0.743**	0.000

Note: *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A substantial 70.9% of students reported feeling anxious when required to express their ideas or ask questions in English during class (mean 3.24 on a 4-point Likert scale for anxiety). Moreover, there is a strong negative correlation ($r=-0.743$) between students' speaking skills and anxiety levels. This suggests that as students' English speaking skills improve, their anxiety levels decrease significantly. The significant p-value ($p<0.01$) confirms this correlation is statistically significant. These findings suggest that the University of Chittagong's EMI program may need to include targeted language support to improve students' English-speaking skills.

Current EMI Situation

To check the current EMI situation at the University of Chittagong regarding language use in the classroom, how teachers teach, how engaged students are in class, and how students think their lessons should be taken is analyzed.

Language Use in the Classroom

Students were asked, "How do your teachers conduct your class?" to evaluate the language their teachers use.

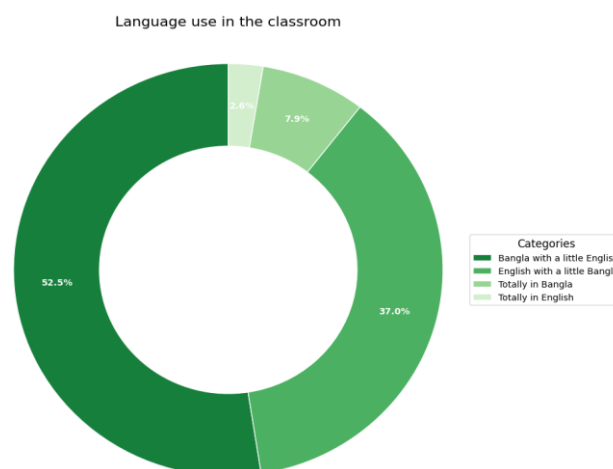


Figure 3. Classroom language usage

In response, 52.4% of students reported teachers using mostly Bangla with a little English, 37% reported teachers using mostly English with a little Bangla, 7.94% reported teachers using only Bangla, and only 2.65% reported teachers using only English. Thus, 89.42% reported code-mixing.

Class observations confirmed this finding; most teachers primarily used Bangla, using English mainly when reading from books. In eight observed classes, only two teachers were seen mostly taking their entire class in Bangla. Our mixed-method study reveals that code-mixing is mainly used in the classroom, and Bangla is teachers' preferred language of instruction. Observations also found that the majority of teachers used mostly English with Bangla while practicing traditional reading and translation methods, reading from textbooks and then translating and explaining in Bangla. Classes seemed less engaging, with teachers relying on prescribed books or pre-prepared slides. Due to less interaction, students generally didn't have scope to develop their speaking skills, hindering EMI's objectives.

Challenges in Conducting Lectures in English: Students' Perspectives

Opinions were asked of the students to find out why their teachers did not take their entire English class. Five key themes emerged from their responses: Student Comprehension and Comfort (nearly 30% thought this was the reason, e.g., STD8: "As most of the students are not from English medium & have a little proficiency in English, it becomes difficult to understand..."), Teacher Fluency and Comfort (students perceived teachers' own proficiency as a factor, e.g., STD40: "Teachers lack the skill... as most of them come from Bangla medium instruction."), Easier Understanding in Bangla (students believed teachers use Bangla for effective explanation of complex topics, e.g., STD35: "I guess it's convenient to express complex ideas in a simpler way when conveyed in Bangla..."), Exam-Oriented Curriculum (some felt teachers focus on GPAs over language practice, e.g., STD100: "teachers think students' academic results are enough..."), and Mixed Method for Effectiveness (some thought code-mixing helps gradual development, e.g., STD105: "mixing English with Bangla can help us understand context better...").

Students' Classroom Language Preference

A statistical analysis was performed to determine students' language preferences. Here, 60.8% of students want teachers to use mainly English with minimal Bangla for complex topics, 26.5% want classes entirely in English, 11.6% want mainly Bangla with little English, and 1.1% want classes entirely in Bangla. This finding highlights that most students are positive about more English use.

When asked if their English skills and subject understanding would be better if teachers took full classes in English, around 80% (50.79% Strongly Agree + 29.10% Agree) feel their understanding would be much better. The mean value of 3.269 indicates a majority feel the necessity of an English-immersed classroom.

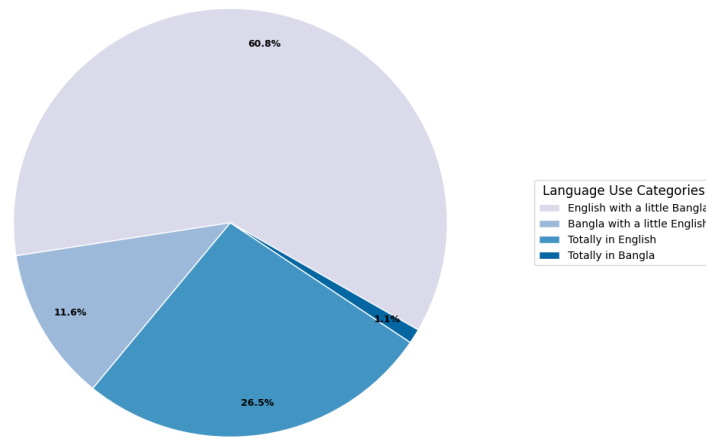


Figure 5. Students' classroom language preference

Table 4. Distribution of responses for full lessons in English

Category	Percentage
Strongly Agree (4)	50.79
Agree (3)	29.10
Disagree (2)	16.40
Strongly Disagree (1)	3.70
Statistic	Value
Mean	3.2698
Standard Deviation	0.8667
Min	1
Max	4

Institutional Support: Preparatory Language Course

To help students with their English, the university provides a GED functional English course. Although the goal of this preparatory language course is to help students adjust to the new EMI environment, many students believe that it is insufficient for them at their current level, raising serious concerns about the course's usefulness. A Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree) was used for "I believe the GED (English) course is sufficient for building English skills."

Table 5. GED course sufficiency survey

Statistic	Value
Average (Mean)	1.69
Standard Deviation	0.857
Minimum Score	1
Maximum Score	4

The mean score of 1.69 indicates strong disagreement; students find the GED insufficient. STD110 expressed, "no way the GED course is adequate to develop our English skills, Even HSC English has better syllabus than this." This highlights dissatisfaction and calls for more robust preparatory courses.

Challenges in EMI: Students' Perception

EMI Classroom Practice and Challenges

Students responded to questionnaires about challenges. Most mentioned classroom anxiety and fear of being judged. For the statement "During class, I feel anxious when asked to express my ideas or if I need to ask questions in English," 70.90% strongly agreed or agreed. The mean value of 3.24 confirms the majority experience anxiety.

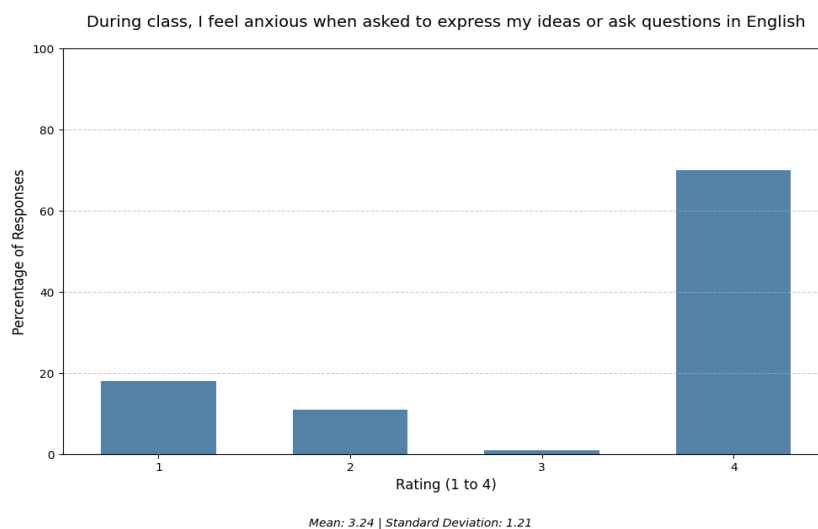


Figure 6. Students' Classroom anxiety

Figure 6 shows a high percentage for agree/strongly agree regarding anxiety. This suggests a lack of an engaging, safe environment. Students reported teachers criticizing pronunciation. STD81: "Teachers should remember that the purpose of a language should be to convey thoughts properly, not pronunciation like that of a native." STD75 recounted being interrupted for mispronunciation, which "made me feel nervous." This aligns with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, where high affective filters (teacher criticism, judgment) hinder language acquisition.

When asked, "Which class activity do you fear most?" (Among Assignment, Presentation, Class Test), 85.2% of students feared presentations most. This showcases lack of confidence and fear of speaking in English, possibly from limited vocabulary and critical feedback, as noted by STD65: "During my presentation, when I can't represent the topic beautifully for lack of sufficient English words, it feels demotivating... when teacher criticizes me harshly for my pronunciation."

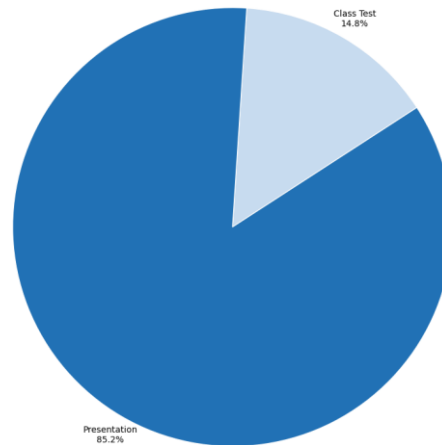


Figure 7. Classroom activity that students fear most.

Challenges in Exams

Due to their prior Bangla-medium education, students struggle on exams in their first year, which results in poor grades. Students in their second, third, fourth, or master's years from various batches provided their first-year GPAs.

Table 6. Students' first-year final exam results (GPA)

Study Year	Mean	σ
1st year	2.988	0.155
2nd Year	2.973	0.145
3rd Year	3.008	0.331
4th Year	2.987	0.261
Masters	3.001	0.275
Avg. Total	2.991	

Students from all academic years had an average first-year GPA of 2.99 out of 4.00, validating the hypothesis of poor initial GPAs. STD29 responded: "I get really frustrated in the exam hall when I know the answer, but I cannot write it properly because I think of the answer in Bangla but I've to write it in English." This highlights the influence of prior education and lack of vocabulary. To cope, students rely on rote memorization, as expressed by STD30: "In the first year, I took the exam by memorizing the previous year's question answers."

Reviewing past ten years of exam questions showed ~80% repetition. When asked about the following previous years' questions, almost 97.8% reported that they follow previous years' questions; 19% totally depend on them. This negatively impacts students' learning attitudes and writing skills.

Students also reported needing time to understand questions in English. STD37: "I had to read very carefully... It took a lot of time. But from the second year, it gradually became easier."

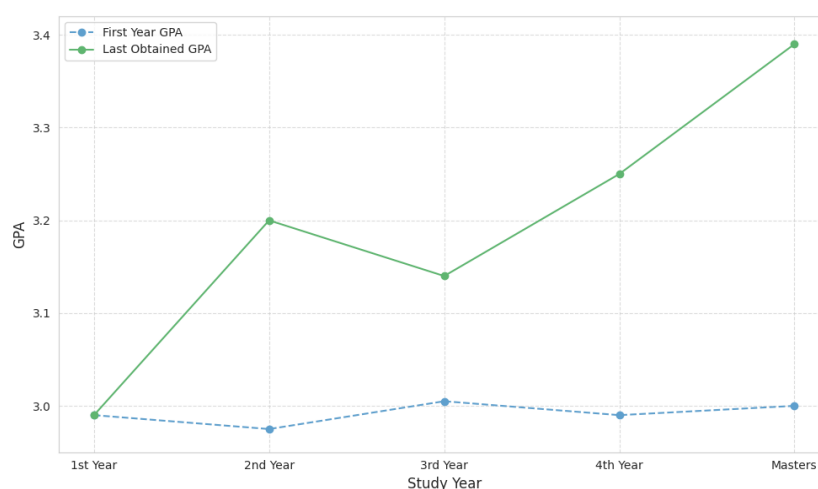


Figure 8. Students' Academic Improvement Over Time

Blue dotted line (first-year GPA) starts low, green solid line (last GPA) shows noticeable improvement from second year, peaking at master's level (average almost 3.4). However, some students fail and drop out due to the dual pressure, as reported by STD133: "We study in arts discipline where subjects are easier than STEM subjects so students of arts faculty generally pass the exam just by reading two nights before the exam but when it comes to our subject run by EMI, it's very hard to deal with new language and we need to give extra effort, when I was in my first year six of my friends failed in the exam and had to continue with other batch, later I heard that two of them was dropped out from university, another two also failed in the second year. So, I think departments can provide extra classes for the students who are weak in English so that they can get a good result."

To understand factors behind GPA improvement, students were asked about exam preparation.

Table 7. Students' tactics for exam preparation

Statement	Mean	SD
I rely on memorizing questions and suggestions for exams	2.94	0.51
I focus on understanding and writing answers using my own ideas	1.91	0.97
I think studying the previous year's questions can help one gain a decent result	2.57	0.89

Note: Min=1, Max=4.

Students rated 2.94/4 for reliance on rote memorization and 1.91/4 for understanding the topic, suggesting a tendency to memorize. The average of 2.57 for "studying the previous year's questions can help one gain a decent result" suggests agreement. High reliance on internet, YouTube, and AI for exam preparation was also noted. STD90: "Since

our medium of instruction is English, we had to learn English from several sources... department or faculties have no contribution in this."

Students' Perceptions About EMI

Students' perceptions regarding English-medium instructions vary from individual to individual. Students coming from English curricula find EMI easier than those with a Bangla curriculum background. STD35 expressed that STD35 (English version background): "It has been easier for me compared to someone who transitioned from Bangla medium".

Table 8. Students' Perceptions About EMI

Statement	Mean	SD
Metric	Mean	SD
Overall Experience with EMI	3.36	0.76
Impact on Academic Performance	3.21	1
Improvement in Communication Skills	3.10	0.97

Most students have a positive overall experience (mean 3.36). STD75 shared a positive experience where teacher encouragement boosted confidence. Positive impact on academic performance (mean 3.21) and improvement in communication skills (mean 3.10) was reported. STD41: "EMI has significantly impacted my performance... improved my language proficiency and comprehension skills." However, confidence in seeking job opportunities requiring English was moderate (mean 2.69). STD62: "Though I haven't yet completely become proficient... the hesitancy and reluctance have dwindled to an extent." This indicates variability and that some are less confident.

Teacher-Level Challenges

Teachers' Demographics and Classroom Practices

Eight teachers participated, with 2.5 to 20 years of EMI experience. Among them five out of eight teachers had a Bangla-medium undergraduate background; three had English-medium. Most teachers use code-mixing, primarily Bangla. None conduct classes entirely in English.

When asked why not entirely in English, the responses varied. Some mentioned they avoided full English instruction to help students understand better. However, most pointed to their own limitations in English fluency. These limitations were linked to factors like their educational background, lack of regular practice, and discomfort with the language.

Teachers T03 and T04 noted that most teachers are native Bangla speakers and lack proper training in EMI. The education system emphasizes reading and writing over speaking, leaving teachers unprepared for fully English-based teaching. They also mentioned the need to adapt to students from diverse language backgrounds. Teacher

T02, who has two decades of EMI experience, added that apart from students' comprehension issues and teachers' limited fluency, using English throughout a class increases cognitive load for both teachers and students. To reduce this mental burden, they prefer code-mixing. T03 also pointed out other difficulties, such as large class sizes, students' varied fluency levels, and their attitudes towards English, which make teaching in English more challenging.

In some cases, students themselves ask teachers to switch to Bangla, especially when dealing with difficult technical terms. Teacher T02 explained that many students struggle to understand textbook language and connect it with lectures. They suggested that instead of switching languages, simplified handouts in English could help bridge this gap.

Pedagogical Training and Institutional Support

When asked about EMI training, only one teacher out of eight reported receiving EMI training. Given most teachers' Bangla medium background, pedagogical training is important but largely absent. T04 advocated for proper training, regular practice, options to promote speaking skills, and using technology (ChatGPT, YouTube). T01, T02, T08 suggested the inclusion of visual aids and multimedia.

Discussion

Student's Prior Background and its Impact on EMI Experience

The results obtained from descriptive statistic analysis reflect an inclusive demographic of the students. The results highlight that most of the students (92.2%) in the EMI program of The University of Chittagong come from a non-English-medium background. A good portion of these students come from remote and rural areas of Bangladesh, where the quality of education is below average. Most of the schools and colleges with Bangla-medium instruction, especially in nonurban areas, do not have facilities that provide comprehensive language teaching for English subjects, which can help students build a good foundation in English. Thus, the students lack comprehensive input for language acquisition. According to the Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1985), due to a lack of such input, students from such backgrounds often find themselves in a disadvantaged situation with a poor foundation in English. This creates inequality among students in their EMI classroom, which confirms the findings by Macaro (2018) on inequalities in multilingual EMI classrooms.

Students' Self-Assessed Language Proficiency

To use language professionally and academically, an individual needs to have four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills allow an individual to fully comprehend and express themselves. The students' self-assessment revealed an inconsistency in proficiency in the four language skills. The results indicate that students generally demonstrate strong performance in listening and reading. A mean score of 3.44 for listening and 3.22 for reading indicates that most students have a good

comprehension level. So, if their class is taken in English, they will have good proficiency in understanding their academic texts. A mean score of 3.00 indicates that students have moderate proficiency in their writing, which means students have the ability to express their ideas in text. However, opinions collected from the students tell us that apart from English as a subject, they are not used to giving answers in the English exams before the EMI program; thus, they generally face challenges in their initial year of the EMI program. Students' speaking skills were identified as the weakest skills, with a mean score of 2.20. This indicated that students felt less confident in expressing their ideas and thoughts. The significant negative correlations between students' speaking skills and classroom anxiety indicate that students tend to be afraid of making mistakes, which hinders their speaking skills in the classroom. This can be associated with the monitor hypothesis by Krashen (1988), which suggests that students often become self-aware while speaking a second language (L2) due to their emphasis on grammatical structure. Thus, they fear making mistakes. This fear affects their spontaneous speaking in the classroom. Rahman & Kaur (2018) identified this psychological barrier as a significant obstacle to language development and classroom engagement. So, we wanted to check if there are more reasons behind students' weakest skills among all language skills.

Psychological Barriers to Classroom Engagement

About 70.9% of students said they feel anxious when expressing their thoughts and ideas in English. Students also expressed their anxiety about giving presentations that require speaking in front of others. This anxiety comes from the fear of being judged by others and teachers' criticism of students' pronunciation and grammar accuracy. This creates feelings of anxiety and a lack of motivation, which acts like a "filter" that makes it hard for students to speak spontaneously. The affective filter hypothesis by Krashen (1982) suggests that when a student's affective filter is high, it can hinder a student's language acquisition process. To help reduce anxiety when speaking, EMI teachers should encourage students to minimize focusing on grammar use. They should also let students speak without interruptions, even if mistakes happen. Institutions should create an environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves without worrying about making mistakes or being judged.

Teachers' Classroom Practices

Teachers heavily rely on code-switching while conducting the classroom. Most students reported that 52.4% of the teachers generally use Bangla with a little English while conducting the class, and 37% conduct their class mainly using English and a little Bangla to explain the complex subject matter. The reason many teachers tend to use mostly Bangla could be linked to their backgrounds, as a significant number of them come from a Bangla Medium background. Students and teachers both agree that two main reasons behind teachers not taking entire classes in English are due to teachers' limited fluency in English and some students' lack of comprehension level due to their unequal starting points. When students were asked about their classroom language preference, 60.8% of the students expected their teachers to take their entire classes using English with a little Bangla to explain complex subject matters. 26.5% of the students expressed that the institute should facilitate a fully English immersion method for teaching. 79.89% of the

students are positive that their English skills and understanding of Subject matter would be better if teachers took their entire classes in English. Classroom observation also highlights fewer engaging classrooms due to most teachers using traditional text-centered teaching, where teachers read from a book or pre-prepared slides or ask students to read. Then, they translate and explain the content in Bangla. Interactions between teachers and students are infrequent. Because there was less interaction, students usually don't have much chance to improve their speaking skills, which made it hard to achieve the goal of EMI, which is to improve students' English skills along with subject matters.

Lack of Preparatory English Language Course

To help students adapt to a new language as a medium of instruction, many researchers of EMI have advocated for preparatory language courses to improve students' language skills. The University of Chittagong includes a (GED) functional language course for students, but most of the students feel that it is totally insufficient to meet their needs. Apart from that, currently, there aren't any dedicated language courses included to aid students' specific language skills.

Insufficient Training for Teachers

Most teachers from EMI programs at The University of Chittagong reported not receiving any pedagogical training before starting teaching at the university. The findings of our study reveal that most teachers in EMI programs at the University of Chittagong completed their undergraduate studies in Bangla-medium instruction. This background makes it difficult for them to adapt to EMI classrooms without prior training. The institution also doesn't facilitate post-pedagogical support for teachers to aid them in teaching in EMI classrooms efficiently. This results in teachers highly resorting to code-switching, which compromises the objectives of EMI. Most teachers expressed the necessity of pedagogical training to overcome their teaching challenges.

Trends in Academic Performance and Coping Mechanism

Academic performance is crucial to judge students' success. Analysis of students' GPAS indicates that students generally struggle with lower GPAs in their initial year, with an average GPA of 2.99 out of 4.00. The reason behind this can be linked to their unfamiliarity with English questions, as they struggle with their writing skills. They have to tackle their low English language skills and understand complex subject matter. Students reported their struggle with their insufficient vocabulary; they needed to think in Bangla first, and then they had to translate them in the exam hall. This finding aligns with the findings of Graddol (2010), where they suggested that EMI can be a double burden as students must simultaneously struggle with language and academic challenges. However, from their second year, students' academic performance tends to develop as they get familiar with EMI and English writing. The coping mechanisms that students develop to improve their GPAs include getting help from YouTube videos, ChatGPT, and other online materials. Many students said that instead of really understanding the subject and then writing in the exam, they rely on rote memorization.

They reported that teachers often repeat questions instead of coming up with more creative ones. A lot of students think that reviewing last year's exams can help improve their GPA. Even though this coping mechanism helps students achieve good GPAs, it has long-term drawbacks. In a country like Bangladesh, where there is a shortage of jobs, most students focus on gaining good academic results instead of getting a good understanding of subjects. Institutions should focus on crafting more creative and unique exam questions so that students focus on understanding subjects more. As Macaro (2017) cautions, such a strategy might compromise deeper learning and critical thinking. This strategy will ultimately prevent students from developing strong writing skills in English. To tackle this, the institute must design creative questions for students instead of repeating questions.

EMI Perception and Long-Term Perceived Benefits

Students have different experiences with English Medium Instruction (EMI). Some students, especially those who studied in English-medium schools, find it easier. For example, STD35 said, "Since I've studied in the English version, I would say it has been easier for me compared to someone who transitioned from Bangla medium." Many students shared that EMI helped them improve their English and academic performance. The average score for students' overall EMI experience was 3.36, and for communication skills, the mean was 3.1 out of 4, which suggests students' positive perception towards EMI and an improvement in their English communication skills after joining the program. For example, students mentioned challenges, especially at the beginning of the EMI program, such as anxiety about speaking English or fear of being judged by others, which, over the course of four years, some of them can overcome. STD75 noted, "At first I was anxious about the shift to English Medium from Bangla medium. Later, I adapted by continuously practicing speaking in English in both inside and outside of class." Teachers' encouragement also helped students feel more confident, as noted by STD75: "My lecturer encouraged me to speak without stopping or correcting me midway. That made a huge difference." However, when we tried to find out how EMI programs at The University of Chittagong were doing in terms of preparing students for global competition and participation in international academic and professional networks, the analysis found that students felt less confident about their ability to pursue job opportunities that require English, as evidenced by their lower score of 2.69 out of 4. This result shows that institutions need to implement proper guidelines and modern facilities to help prepare students for the global market. The overall findings show that while a lot of students benefit from EMI, some still find it tough, especially those coming from Bangla-medium backgrounds.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study explored the academic impact and language challenges students and teachers face with the EMI program at the University of Chittagong. Despite short-term challenges, students appreciated EMI's long-term advantages. Students generally

experience a positive impact on academic performance and English skills over time, though initial years are tough for those from non-English backgrounds who face a "double burden". Listening and reading skills improve significantly; writing moderately but speaking remains the weakest.

Students experience anxiety in classroom interaction when they are asked to express their opinions in English or give a presentation due to fear of judgment, self-monitoring, and interruptions by teachers for their pronunciation. Students also expressed challenges in writing in English in exams as they struggle to find proper vocabulary and need extra time to think in Bangla and then translate their ideas into English. In a country like Bangladesh, where there is a shortage of jobs, most students focus on gaining good academic results instead of getting a good understanding of the subject matter. So, they heavily rely on memorizing previous years' questions with the help of ChatGPT and other online resources. Which hinders their critical thinking ability and deeper understanding of the subject matter. Teachers tend to repeat exams questions by following a pattern in designing exam questions, typically omitting questions from the most recent year while reusing questions from earlier years. To ensure EMI's success, this practice of teachers needs to be revised and restructured to prioritize critical thinking and conceptual understanding over rote learning for gaining good GPAS. The findings also highlight that even after completing, students of the EMI program may still lack full confidence in seeking global job opportunities that require strong English proficiency.

Teachers generally face challenges in taking their classes entirely in English as most of their MOI in bachelor's was Bangla. So, students and teachers both reported that due to teachers' insufficient language skills in taking their entire classes in English, most teachers tend to teach students mostly in Bangla, while reading the book in English. Some teachers also mentioned that they use mostly Bangla in the classroom because they think that students lack sufficient comprehension of the English language. Most of the students expect their teachers to take their classes using English with occasional Bangla if students ask them to. Due to teachers' lack of sufficient proficiency in English and their Bangla background, instead of extemporaneous lectures, they rely on traditional text-centered teaching, where teachers read from a book or pre-prepared slides or ask students to read. Then, they translate and explain the content in Bangla. This results in a lack of interaction in the EMI classroom, which makes it hard for students to engage and improve their English-speaking skills.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Develop a Centralized EMI Policy Framework

Establish a comprehensive EMI policy with guidelines for student admission (language assessment), teacher requirements (proficiency, training), phased language immersion, and regulated code-switching.

2. Invest in Teacher Training and Professional Development

Implement compulsory, ongoing professional development focusing on academic English proficiency, EMI pedagogies, assessment, and student-centered environments.

3. Enhance Preparatory English Language Support

Revise the GED course or introduce new, compulsory preparatory courses tailored to academic English skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing).

4. Implement a Phased Language Immersion Strategy

Adopt a gradual approach, allowing principled bilingual support initially, with systematic reduction in L1 reliance.

5. Reform Examination and Assessment Practices

Reduce exam question repetition. Design assessments promoting critical thinking and application of knowledge in English (case studies, problem-solving).

6. Create a Supportive and Interactive Classroom Environment (For Teachers)

Minimize anxiety, encourage participation, provide constructive feedback, and use interactive strategies.

7. Establish Language and Academic Support Co-Curricular Activities (For Student Support Systems)

Organize workshops (public speaking, academic writing), language clubs, debate societies, writing labs, and peer tutoring (STS initiatives).

***This study presents a condensed version of the findings; for a more comprehensive exploration of the topic, readers may refer to the author's original thesis (Abir, 2024).*

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