

# Striking a Balance: Challenges and Strategies in Implementing English Medium Instruction (EMI) in a Non-Anglophone Higher Education Context

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**Abstract:** Universities in many non-Anglophone countries have adopted English Medium Instruction (EMI) for tertiary education due to the global demand for English proficiency. Bangladesh is no exception, with the push for EMI driven by two main objectives: achieving economic growth and developing a proficient workforce. As a result, many higher education institutions are transitioning to EMI policies. While EMI offers students and teachers international exposure and access to the global academic environment, it also presents significant challenges, including potential language barriers and reduced comprehension. This study conducts a comprehensive analysis of academic articles and peer-reviewed journals to identify and evaluate the challenges faced by teachers and students in Bangladeshi higher education due to EMI. It examines key aspects, including the historical development of English in Bangladesh, its importance before and after independence, and the current difficulties in integrating EMI into tertiary education. The study provides a nuanced understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of EMI in the Bangladeshi context. The research concludes with insightful recommendations for policymakers aimed at enhancing the status of English in Bangladesh. These recommendations include strategies for improving teacher training, enhancing curriculum design, and providing additional support for students struggling with EMI. Ultimately, this paper offers a strategic framework to address the multifaceted issues associated with EMI in higher education, aiming to improve both educational outcomes and economic prospects in Bangladesh. By implementing these recommendations, policymakers can better support the integration of EMI and help students and teachers navigate its challenges effectively.

**Keywords:** *English medium instruction (EMI); tertiary education; academic performance; implementation challenges; non-anglophone context*

## Introduction

In recent years, the global landscape has increasingly emphasized the critical role of English language proficiency in driving economic and professional success. This trend is particularly significant for the countries like Bangladesh, which has recently achieved lower-middle-income status following a notable 7.2% increase in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (World Economics,2022; Milon & Ali, 2023).

This economic milestone underscores the imperative to nurture a skilled workforce capable of sustaining and accelerating ongoing economic growth. English proficiency is pivotal in equipping this workforce to navigate global markets and advance national development goals. Scholars such as Milon (2016) and Islam (2015) have highlighted widespread concerns about English language proficiency within Bangladesh's educational system, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

Acknowledging the profound impact of English on economic development, the Bangladeshi government has intensified efforts to enhance English education across all educational levels. Furthermore, beyond its borders, Bangladesh heavily relies on English proficiency for global engagement in commerce, trade, and diplomacy, as extensively documented in scholarly literature (Yasmin et al., 2024; Kirkwood, 2013; Milon & Ali, 2023), underscoring its multifaceted importance. As a result, English proficiency has become a critical criterion for evaluating the Bangladeshi workforce, essential for employment across economic, industrial, and governmental sectors (Erling, 2017).

Despite Bangla being spoken by 98% of the population and recognized as the official language (Hasan et al., 2019; Milon et al., 2023; Al Nahar et al., 2024), English retains significant influence in specific domains. Hossain and Tollefson (2007) report that only 3% of Bangladesh's population considers English essential for governance, media, and educational functions. Within Bangladesh's universities, the linguistic landscape varies significantly: while private universities predominantly adopt English as the medium of instruction, government institutions typically employ a bilingual approach, utilizing both Bengali and English in classroom interactions. This disparity presents challenges for students in public universities accustomed to bilingual instruction, potentially affecting their employability relative to graduates from English-medium private institutions.

Therefore, conducting a thorough investigation is imperative to systematically explore the perspectives of educators and students—the primary stakeholders—to fully grasp the challenges associated with implementing English Medium Instruction (EMI) and its implications for learning outcomes. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the state of English language teaching and the challenges in implementing EMI at tertiary institutions in Bangladesh, encompassing both public and private universities. By examining the historical evolution of English in Bangladesh, its role pre- and post-independence, and its current function as a medium of instruction in higher education, this research seeks to provide nuanced insights into the complexities of the contemporary linguistic landscape and propose actionable recommendations for policy and practice.

### **English Language History Preceding Bangladesh's Independence**

The historical evolution of language in Bangladesh reflects a complex interplay of cultural dynamics shaped by significant historical events. With 98% of its population identifying as Bangalee (Milon & Ali, 2023), Bangladesh has historically upheld Bangla, or Bengali, as a cornerstone of its national identity, particularly evident in the pre- and post-independence eras. Following the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, which led to the establishment of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), the imposition of Urdu as Pakistan's national language sparked vehement protests among East Pakistani students and intellectuals. This linguistic imposition culminated in the 1952 Language Movement, a pivotal moment marked by protests at Dhaka University, where demonstrators were met with severe repression, resulting in numerous casualties. This movement catalyzed a collective assertion of linguistic rights and fostered a sense of national identity among Bangalees, ultimately contributing to Bangladesh's independence in 1971 (Milon, 2016).

Post-independence, Bangla continued to serve as a potent symbol of national unity and resilience, transforming from a contentious issue to an emblem of Bangladesh's struggles and aspirations. The linguistic landscape of Bangladesh also bears the imprint of colonialism, particularly British rule, which significantly influenced educational and administrative practices. English, introduced during British colonial rule, became entrenched in tertiary education and governmental communications, primarily aimed at grooming compliant Indian bureaucrats under Lord Macaulay's 1835 educational policy (Al Nahar et al., 2024; Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Milon, 2016; Milon & Ali, 2023). Throughout colonial governance, English persisted as the language of administration and higher education, maintaining its prominence even after India's independence in 1947.

In the context of Pakistan, which emerged from the partition, English retained its status as a state and secondary language despite reforms aligning educational policies with Islamic principles (Rahman et al., 2010; Milon & Ali, 2023). The 1956 Pakistani constitution further institutionalized English as the official language for two decades, reflecting its enduring legacy in educational, administrative, and governmental spheres (Khatun, 1992). This continuity underscores the persistent influence of English stemming from colonial legacies, shaping educational policies and language dynamics well into the post-independence era. The ongoing relevance of English in Bangladesh's educational framework and bureaucratic practices underscores its entrenched position and enduring legacy inherited from colonial rule. This historical trajectory not only informs contemporary language policies but also highlights the intricate relationship between language, governance, and national identity in Bangladesh's socio-political landscape.

### **English in Post-Independence Era of Bangladesh**

After Bangladesh gained independence in 1971, language policies, particularly regarding Bangla, underwent significant transformations to reflect the nation's aspirations and identity. A pivotal constitutional amendment in 1972 established Bangla as the national language and mandated its use as the "official language" in all government-run schools (Banu & Sussex, 2001; Milon & Ali, 2023; Rahman, 2010). This legislative move aimed to underscore Bangladesh's linguistic identity by promoting Bangla in governmental, social, and educational domains, thereby fostering linguistic and cultural unity across the nation (Milon & Ali, 2023).

The Bangladeshi government took proactive steps to shape its educational landscape post-independence, with successive education commissioners formulating comprehensive educational policies (Milon & Ali, 2023). However, scholars like Chowdhury & Kabir (2014) argue that the evolving role of English necessitated ongoing scrutiny and adjustment in national language policies. Hamid (2011) observed that Bangladesh's post-independence policies may have inadvertently sparked a competition between Bangla and English, potentially marginalizing one language at the expense of the other. Responding to the imperatives of globalization and technological advancement, Bangladesh mandated English instruction from grade 1 through 12 and in various higher education disciplines starting in 1989 (Milon & Ali, 2023). This policy underscored the necessity of English proficiency for engaging with global technologies and participating in international discourse amid evolving global dynamics.

English language instruction thus became integral throughout students' academic journeys, supported by Bangladesh's National Constitution of 1992, which institutionalized English as an essential component of education. The widespread use of English-language textbooks, often impractical to

translate into Bangla, further solidified its endorsement in educational practices (Choudhury, 2001; Milon & Ali, 2023). In higher education, English supplanted Bangla as the primary medium of instruction, reflecting its prestige, influence, and pivotal role in international communication (Hoque, 2008). While Bengali instruction remained intertwined with national identity, proficiency in English became indispensable for accessing international education, employment opportunities, and cultural exchanges.

Bangladesh's dual commitment to Bangla and English, each with its distinct significance, epitomizes a delicate balance between preserving national identity and embracing global engagement through language instruction. This dual-language approach continues to navigate complexities inherent in balancing local cultural values with the demands of a globalized world, shaping educational policies and societal norms in contemporary Bangladesh (Milon & Ali, 2023).

### **Study Rationale**

English serves as a vital medium of instruction in Bangladeshi schools, crucially contributing to the development of graduates equipped with essential skills and knowledge (Milon & Ali, 2023; Milon et al., 2024). However, public universities in Bangladesh face a significant challenge in enhancing English proficiency while accommodating the diverse linguistic backgrounds of their students, shaped by the country's rich historical and cultural context (Milon & Ali, 2023; Milon et al., 2023). Following Bangladesh's independence in 1971, the reintroduction of remedial English courses in established public universities underscored the language's pivotal role in higher education (Hasan, 2022). This initiative reflects a recognition of the necessity for students to communicate effectively in English to navigate the demands of today's globalized and competitive job market.

Despite these efforts, the linguistic dynamics within Bangladesh's public universities remain intricate. Lecturers often employ a hybrid approach, blending Bangla and English during lectures to accommodate the diverse linguistic competencies of students and ensure comprehensive understanding of the curriculum. In contrast, English serves as the primary medium of instruction across all academic disciplines in private universities, highlighting a distinct linguistic environment in higher education institutions (Milon & Ali, 2023). This disparity in language instruction between public and private sectors significantly influences the employability prospects of graduates, with those from English-medium private institutions often enjoying better job opportunities due to their proficiency in English, which is highly valued by businesses and government agencies.

However, public universities in Bangladesh have been less proactive in promoting English fluency among students, despite its evident benefits for academic and career advancement. Various factors, including concerns over cultural preservation, linguistic diversity, and educational philosophies, may contribute to this stance. Recognizing the challenges faced by students and educators in navigating this complex linguistic landscape, and the imperative for university faculty to effectively manage linguistic diversity, motivates this study. The study aims to illuminate these challenges by examining the factors influencing language policies and practices at Bangladeshi institutions, both public and private. This research seeks to contribute insights that inform evidence-based strategies for enhancing English language proficiency in higher education settings in Bangladesh, fostering a more inclusive and competitive academic environment aligned with global standards and local realities.

### **Research Methodology**

This review article presents a thorough examination of the challenges inherent in implementing English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education institutions in Bangladesh, drawing from a comprehensive array of secondary sources. The researchers employed a rigorous methodology, beginning with an extensive search across two prominent databases, ERIC and PsycINFO, to gather pertinent scholarly articles and studies. This initial step was complemented by a meticulous analysis of literature, encompassing diverse academic perspectives and insights. To ensure a comprehensive review, Google Scholar was also utilized, employing targeted search terms such as "English language in tertiary education in Bangladesh," "English as a medium of instruction in higher education in Bangladesh," and "Challenges of implementing EMI in Bangladesh." These strategic keywords facilitated the systematic retrieval of relevant data, enhancing the understanding of English language dynamics within Bangladesh's higher education landscape.

In addition to database searches, the researchers consulted various online platforms including Google Books, Academia.edu, and Semantic Scholar to enrich their findings with a wide range of scholarly perspectives. This integrative approach combined contemporary insights from peer-reviewed articles with historical and in-depth analyses from scholarly books, aiming to provide a nuanced and comprehensive examination of the subject matter. By rigorously citing secondary sources, the researchers ensured transparency and academic rigor, enabling readers to verify and authenticate the information presented in the review paper. The conclusions drawn in this review article are grounded in the methodological rigor of data collection, which encompassed multiple reputable databases and sources. This meticulous approach not only enhances the reliability and validity of the findings but also underscores the thoroughness of the study in addressing the complexities of English language implementation in Bangladesh's higher education sector. The use of diverse sources and comprehensive search strategies contributes to a robust analysis of the challenges and implications of EMI, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in language education and educational policy in Bangladesh.

## Discussion

### *Emerging practices of EMI in higher education*

The globalization of higher education has accelerated the adoption of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. The 1999 Bologna Declaration represented a watershed moment in this evolution, advocating for a standardized system of academic degrees and quality assurance mechanisms across European higher education systems (Walkinshaw et al., 2017). This declaration not only promoted academic mobility and the comparability of qualifications but also set a precedent for the internationalization of higher education through EMI. Since then, EMI has not only spread across Europe but has also gained prominence in regions where English is not the native language, such as Asia and parts of Africa (Lourie & Schmidt, 2020; Milon & Ali, 2023). This shift has been driven by the increasing mobility of students and faculty, globalization of labor markets, and the perceived competitive advantage of English proficiency in the global economy (Yuan et al., 2020).

The transition from native languages to English as the primary medium of instruction in educational systems is gaining momentum globally (Shimauchi, 2018). This shift is driven by escalating student demand worldwide, prompting a proliferation of English-taught courses and programs at universities internationally (Yuan et al., 2020). In non-Anglophone countries, the adoption of EMI has become a

significant focal point within the academic community (Galloway, 2020). Consequently, EMI is rapidly expanding in higher education across diverse non-native English-speaking nations (Rahman, 2020).

Initially prominent in Europe, EMI has transcended borders into regions where English is not the official language, including several Asian countries such as South Korea, Bangladesh, China, and Malaysia (Lourie & Schmidt, 2020; Milon & Ali, 2023). While existing research on EMI predominantly originates from European contexts, Asian universities are increasingly integrating EMI into their higher education frameworks (Milon & Ali, 2023). This expansion reflects a strategic response to global educational trends and the growing demand for English proficiency in academic and professional domains.

Despite the acknowledged benefits, concerns regarding the widespread adoption of EMI persist. Research conducted by Dearden and Macaro (2016) in Poland, Austria, and Italy underscores a significant gap in awareness regarding the challenges and potential negative impacts associated with EMI, complicating efforts to address its implications effectively. Challenges may encompass maintaining educational quality, ensuring faculty effectiveness, and optimizing student learning outcomes, particularly in countries like Bangladesh where Bengali remains the official language (Rahman, 2020). Additionally, the socio-cultural implications of EMI adoption, including its impact on local languages and cultural identities, require careful consideration in policy-making and educational planning (Al Hakim, 2021).

Since English became the preferred language in private universities in Bangladesh in the early 1990s, these institutions have progressively adopted EMI across undergraduate and graduate programs, aligning with the National Education Policy-2010's emphasis on English as an Additional Medium of Instruction (Nur et al., 2020; Milon & Ali, 2023). Despite Bengali's status as the national language and medium of instruction in public schools, all private universities in Bangladesh now position themselves as English-medium institutions (Milon & Ali, 2023). This shift reflects a broader educational strategy aimed at enhancing international competitiveness and accommodating the linguistic preferences of a globally mobile student body.

The Bologna process and globalization have solidified English as the lingua franca of academia worldwide (Macaro, 2015). Gimaraes and Kremer (2020) aptly liken this transformative trend to an "unstoppable train," highlighting its irreversible impact on higher education dynamics. However, as highlighted by Dearden and Macaro (2016), challenges associated with EMI may complicate quality assurance and potentially impact university outcomes, particularly in non-Anglophone contexts. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced approach that balances the benefits of EMI with strategies to mitigate its potential drawbacks, ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students irrespective of linguistic backgrounds.

### ***Hurdles in adopting EMI in higher education settings***

In the landscape of higher education in Bangladesh, where Bengali traditionally serves as the medium of instruction in pre-university education (Milon & Ali, 2023), private universities have notably shifted towards adopting English as the predominant language of instruction since the early 1990s, aligning with the global trend of English Medium Instruction (EMI) (Rahman, 2020; Dearden & Macaro, 2016). This transition reflects a broader international movement towards EMI, driven by the recognition of English as indispensable for academic and professional success. Hung and Lan (2017) conducted a study on EMI classes at a public institution in Vietnam's Mekong Delta, identifying significant

challenges such as language barriers among instructors, students' insufficient English proficiency, difficulties in participating in class discussions, limited time for lecture preparation, and inadequate instructional materials. Further insights into the challenges of EMI come from Gimaraes & Kremer's (2020) research in Brazil and Belgium, which examines the linguistic barriers encountered by immigrant students in English-speaking countries exposed to English-medium instruction. Hasan and Ibrahim (2017) note that while students may comprehend professors' English during lectures, they often require supplementary materials from digital sources. Bradford (2016) underscores the persistent issue of insufficiently trained support staff to ensure effective academic engagement and inclusive participation in EMI environments.

Teaching specific courses in tertiary education programs through the medium of English is increasingly valued by governments and educational institutions in many non-English speaking countries, as it is perceived to benefit both local students seeking enhanced global competitiveness and international participants seeking diverse educational opportunities (Bradford, 2016). This paradigm shift necessitates meticulous consideration of several critical factors by stakeholders involved in the implementation of English Medium Instruction (EMI). Firstly, it requires careful integration of English language proficiency across the curriculum to ensure students' proficiency aligns with academic requirements (Bradford, 2016). Secondly, it demands a commitment to maintaining high-quality teaching and learning experiences, ensuring that instructors are proficient in delivering content effectively in English and that students can actively engage in class discussions and assignments without language barriers. Lastly, it entails effectively incorporating English-medium courses and programs into existing institutional frameworks, ensuring seamless transition and alignment with educational goals and standards (Bradford, 2016).

However, the adoption of EMI policies in Asian non-Anglophone countries raises concerns about potential impacts on the advancement of higher education knowledge and the uncertainty regarding educational outcomes (Milon, 2016). Sarkar et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study involving interviews with students and lecturers at private universities in Bangladesh, revealing significant challenges associated with the adoption of EMI. Both higher education recipients and faculty members attempting to integrate EMI into their teaching face substantial barriers that hinder effective implementation and impact educational practices. These challenges include students' struggle with English proficiency impacting their academic performance and instructors' difficulties in adjusting their teaching methodologies to accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds and ensure inclusive learning environments (Sarkar et al., 2021). Addressing these challenges requires strategic planning, ongoing support for faculty development in English language instruction, and robust institutional policies to facilitate successful EMI integration while preserving educational quality and equity across diverse student populations.

Additionally, Sultana (2018) conducted an ethnographic study at a private university in Bangladesh, examining the impact of English Medium Instruction (EMI) on students' identities and learning experiences. She observed that students often feel demoralized and struggle to assimilate course content and actively participate in class discussions and activities. These challenges have reportedly contributed to a perceived decline in the quality of higher education at private universities in Bangladesh, as highlighted in Sarkar et al.'s (2021) study. The country has encountered significant difficulties in effectively implementing EMI practices, further underscored by Sarker et al. (2021), who noted stakeholders' inadequate perception and execution of language management strategies,

resulting in subpar pedagogical practices. Moreover, Milon & Ali (2023) pointed out the scant attention paid to stakeholders' day-to-day experiences at the micro-level within the realm of higher education. They highlighted the dearth of research on faculty and student perspectives regarding EMI implementation in Bangladeshi universities, as discussed in Milon et al.'s (2018a) study. This research illuminated the challenges faced by both educators and learners, including cognitive load issues among instructors and students' difficulties with note-taking, report-writing, question-and-answer sessions, group work, and overall subject comprehension, all of which potentially impair academic performance.

### ***Detrimental impacts of EMI in tertiary institutions***

English Medium Instruction (EMI) has gained prominence globally as universities in non-Anglophone countries adopt it to attract international students and enhance global competitiveness (Alam et al., 2021; Macaro et al., 2019; Macaro & Han, 2020). Despite its perceived benefits, EMI implementation poses significant challenges, as evidenced by studies conducted across various educational systems. Studies in Saudi Arabia (Zumor, 2019), Japan (Aizawa and Rose, 2019), Thailand (Hengadeekul et al., 2014), Bangladesh (Rahman, 2020), and the United Kingdom (Sultana, 2014) have identified notable negative outcomes associated with EMI, including difficulties in content comprehension, varying classroom language use, code-switching, instructional motivation, speaking anxiety, campus socialization, and self-image among students.

Researchers such as Macaro et al. (2018), Macaro (2018), Akingcioglu & Hu (2019), Lina & Murata (2016), Walkinshaw et al. (2017), Toh (2020), Pulcini & Camoagna (2015), Splender (2016), Dimova (2020), Cao & Yuan (2020), Macaro & Han (2020), Fernández-Costales (2017), Zenkova & Khamitova (2017), and Bradford (2016) have separately documented these complexities and negative consequences in higher education settings across diverse non-Anglophone countries. In their study focused on China, Macaro & Han (2020) highlighted significant challenges within EMI environments, noting that many academic programs are taught by instructors whose first language is not English, resulting in significant language-related struggles for both students and educators. This departure from traditional Taiwanese classroom norms may initially discomfort some students and instructors (Hung, 2020), impacting academic optimism (Zhihao & Mustaha, 2021). Therefore, teachers' competence to effectively deliver instruction in EMI settings depends crucially on their pedagogical knowledge, understanding of students' linguistic challenges, and proficiency in English (Alam et al., 2018; Macaro et al., 2019).

Another significant critique against the use of English Medium Instruction (EMI) is the insufficient English proficiency among students (Dafouz et al., 2016). Moreover, research has highlighted the prevalence of simplification, scaffolding, and translanguaging in EMI classrooms, which affect the educational experience (Dimova, 2020; Ducker, 2018). Cao and Yuan (2020) underscored these challenges in their study on meeting students' cognitive and affective needs in EMI classrooms within international business education, noting widespread student frustration with class participation and assignments, particularly among those with lower English proficiency levels. Methodological innovation and effective EMI implementation are hindered by factors such as inadequate English proficiency levels, insufficient teaching materials, conservative attitudes, low motivation among students and teachers, and faculty members' lack of preparedness in English language use (Zenkova & Khamitova, 2017). Similarly, Zenkova et al. (2017) emphasized the negative impact of low language proficiency levels among instructors and students, necessitating simplified course materials that



potentially lower educational standards. They also highlighted English proficiency as the primary obstacle to successful EMI implementation at the university level.

Macaro et al. (2017) explored the challenges faced by students transitioning from secondary school to university-level academic courses under EMI, focusing on the impact on content learning. Scholars like Galloway (2020) and Resnik (2021) have documented ongoing difficulties among EMI participants in comprehending Western-style classroom practices. Rahman (2020) observed prevalent code-switching in tertiary education settings in Asia due to restricted English usage. Additionally, research by Zumor and Qasem (2019) in the Middle East revealed significant adverse effects across various academic disciplines due to EMI implementation. Furthermore, educators and students in non-English speaking contexts encounter significant linguistic challenges, such as difficulty in notetaking from context-reduced academic texts (Milon et al., 2018b). These challenges contribute to decreased program quality and undermine faculty confidence in instructional efficacy (Bradford, 2016). The body of research focusing on EMI in micro-level education underscores its detrimental impact on non-English languages in countries where English is not the native language.

### ***Contrasting effects of EMI in university settings***

The deployment of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education has yielded varied outcomes, as evidenced by several studies. Hung (2020) advocates for promoting EMI at the university level to enhance instructors' confidence and improve students' language proficiency, content comprehension, and intercultural awareness. Similarly, Fernández-Costales (2017) found that students at the University of Oviedo in Spain generally expressed satisfaction with EMI, attributing this to the global demand for English skills and the perceived benefits of international mobility. Furthermore, Zenkova & Khamitova's (2017) study in Kazakhstan highlights positive impacts of EMI on teaching effectiveness, academic mobility, and career opportunities for educators. These studies underscore global educational policy's emphasis on English and widespread support for EMI adoption in universities worldwide.

In non-Anglophone university settings, research on transitioning from native languages to EMI has yielded mixed results. Studies by Cao & Yuan (2020), Guimarães & Kremer (2020), Zenkova & Khamitova (2017), and Koksai & Tercan (2019) have explored various facets of EMI's impact, alongside previous research. Some studies (Hu & Duan, 2019; Manan, 2019; Milon et al., 2017) suggest minimal effects of EMI on students' academic performance and learning outcomes. Contrarily, research in Taiwan (Hung, 2020) found no significant difference in academic performance between EMI and non-EMI students, challenging assumptions about EMI's educational benefits. Zenkova and Khamitova (2017), however, highlight concerns about potential content simplification in EMI due to increased workload. Conversely, studies by Koksai & Tercan (2019) argue in favor of EMI, citing benefits such as enhanced cultural exposure, improved speaking skills, and better comprehension of English texts. Despite these findings, Galloway (2020) calls for further longitudinal research to comprehensively assess the efficacy of EMI in enhancing subject learning and advocates for more effective implementation strategies.

### ***Issues encountered in implementing EMI in Bangladeshi tertiary education***

The global demand for English-medium academic programs has driven the implementation of English Medium Instruction (EMI) across higher education, prominently seen in Bangladesh where private universities now offer entire degree programs in English (Milon & Ali, 2023). While EMI studies have

predominantly focused on European contexts, Alam et al. (2022a) highlight the enthusiastic adoption of EMI by Asian universities, presenting challenges such as ensuring educational quality and potential impacts on STEM learning outcomes in Bangladesh (Alam et al., 2024). Micro-level stakeholders, including students and educators, have shown varying levels of engagement and interpretation regarding EMI's integration into the higher education system (Alam et al., 2021).

Rahman's (2020) depiction of the EMI landscape in Asian countries underscores how private universities in Bangladesh have embraced English as the primary medium of instruction, diverging from the mother-tongue-based education prevalent in pre-university levels where Bengali predominates (Milon et al., 2024). This shift has positioned private universities to cater to global educational trends and local development aspirations, aligning with national policies like the National Education Policy (NEP)-2010, which emphasizes English language proficiency to enhance workforce competitiveness (Nur et al., 2020). However, the exclusion of Bengali language courses from private university curricula underscores a broader societal shift towards English proficiency in academic and professional contexts (Milon & Ali, 2023). Notably, in Bangladesh, all 108 private universities operate as English-medium institutions, reflecting a strategic alignment with global educational standards and economic imperatives (Yasmin et al., 2024). Despite this widespread adoption, there remains a gap in understanding the perspectives of faculty and students regarding EMI implementation and its implications for educational coherence and efficacy (Milon et al., 2018a). Research from Gulf countries by Belhiah and Eelhami (2015) provides critical insights into the practical challenges associated with current EMI policies, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches to address educational disparities and optimize learning outcomes.

Milon and Ali (2023) highlight the generally positive perception of English Medium Instruction (EMI) among faculty and students in higher education, acknowledging its alignment with global educational trends. However, despite this optimism, the practical implementation of EMI in Bangladesh faces significant challenges. These include the wide variability in students' language proficiency levels, diverse learning styles, critical pedagogical issues, and a shortage of essential resources such as English-language textbooks. The disparity in student competencies poses a formidable barrier to the effective adoption of EMI (Kirkpatrick, 2014; Milon et al., 2023).

In Bangladesh, where the majority of students have been educated in Bengali-medium schools, transitioning to an EMI environment proves particularly challenging. Despite high pass rates in national pre-university exams (Nur et al., 2020), students often struggle to think critically and articulate complex ideas proficiently in English. This challenge is underscored by Choi and Lantolf's (2008) research, which draws on Vygotsky's (1987) theory of inner speech to highlight the cognitive hurdles students face when expressing themselves in a second language. The inability to effectively convey ideas can hinder academic performance and limit students' ability to fully engage in higher education contexts. Addressing these complexities requires a strategic overhaul of English language education policies in Bangladesh, emphasizing context-specific and comprehensive approaches (Nur et al., 2020; Milon, 2020). Milon and Ali (2023) further stress the disconnect between policy intent and practical implementation of EMI in Bangladeshi universities. Teachers are compelled to invest additional effort in preparing EMI lectures, often supplementing them with Bengali-language materials to accommodate students' educational backgrounds. This bilingual approach compromises the efficacy of EMI, impacting both teaching quality and student learning outcomes (Milon and Ali, 2023).

### Concluding remarks with recommended policies

The reviews of existing literature reveal varied findings regarding the impact of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education. While some studies highlight positive effects, others report unfavorable outcomes, indicating a mixed reception among academic communities worldwide. This variability underscores the need for further research to comprehensively understand stakeholder experiences related to English language proficiency, the challenges of EMI implementation, and the diverse academic outcomes observed at the university level.

As evidenced in the literature, the implementation of EMI in higher education is influenced by competing interests and varied educational contexts (Hung, 2020). However, existing research often neglects classroom dynamics and lacks thorough investigation into the instructional and learning implications of EMI (Chen et al., 2020). Issues such as reading comprehension, writing proficiency, oral communication, and the overall efficacy of teaching methods and student engagement in EMI settings remain underexplored. Despite these challenges, the impact of EMI on academic performance for both faculty and students is undeniable in programs utilizing EMI, underscoring the persistent role of English in academic settings.

Alam et al. (2022a) assert that students face significant difficulties in understanding course material in their second language, which can adversely affect their academic achievements. Further research is crucial to elucidate how EMI influences information assimilation from lectures and textbooks, note-taking, report writing, class participation, group work effectiveness, and independent study time allocation. Teachers similarly encounter challenges in communication, content delivery, workload management, and lecture preparation in EMI environments.

Highlighting the primary goal of higher education as disciplinary understanding rather than language acquisition, Milon and Ali (2023) caution that EMI may potentially hinder educational outcomes. Nevertheless, if implemented effectively, EMI has the potential to reshape national educational landscapes (Alam et al., 2022b). Given the scarcity of qualitative studies on the perceptions of faculty and students regarding EMI in Bangladesh (Alam et al., 2022a), additional research is imperative to comprehensively explore the complexities and challenges of EMI implementation in Bangladeshi universities (Milon and Ali, 2023). Addressing these gaps through comprehensive studies that capture diverse perspectives will provide valuable insights into optimizing EMI practices in higher education.

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