

# **Experiences of Bangla Medium Students in an English Medium Environment: Language, Psychology, and Adaptation**

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## **Abstract**

The paper examines the linguistic and academic life of Bangla-background learners at English-medium institutions in Bangladesh. As English-medium education becomes more popular, many students with a Bangla-speaking background face difficulties in a second-language academic setting. The research focuses on how these students handle language barriers, cultural differences and negotiation of identity in classrooms and social contexts. A qualitative methodology is used, and four Bangla-background students enrolled in different English-medium institutions in Dhaka are interviewed using a semi-structured format. Brief narrations provide information about language use, classroom participation and learning strategies. Thematic analysis identifies common difficulties and coping styles. Findings show that while most students can acquire functional English knowledge, they often struggle with confidence, self-expression, and cultural connection in class. Memorization is widely used due to language gaps; students tend to memorize lessons rather than fully understand them. Peer and teacher support plays an important role in academic achievement. The study highlights the sociolinguistic reality of Bangla-background students in English-medium settings, which is more complex than often assumed. The research suggests the need for more inclusive teaching approaches and policies that consider cultural and linguistic diversity and promote open and supportive language learning environments.

**Keywords:** Bangla medium, English medium, adaptation, bilingual education, Bangladesh

## **Introduction**

### **Overview**

In Bangladesh, many students grow up speaking Bangla at home and start their education in Bangla medium schools. However, when they move to English medium institutions, they face new challenges because all subjects are taught in English. This study explores how Bangla background students experience, negotiate and adapt to the linguistic, psychological and cultural challenges of studying in an English medium environment.

### **Background**

English medium education has gained widespread popularity in Bangladesh as it is associated with better education and better job opportunities. The reason for the choice of these institutions is that the parents want their child to learn English better and become competitive internationally. However, this shift from Bangla medium to the English medium is not as smooth as it can be for all students.

From a social perspective, English medium schools are often associated with urban middle or upper class families while Bangla medium schools are dominated by the majority. This creates a divide, the children who move from Bangla to English medium, their social and cultural transition comes with a linguistic adjustment. They need to adjust to new groups of peers, classroom practices and expectations, which may differ from what they experienced in previous schools. Sometimes they struggle with many things in the new environment.

There is also a research gap in this area. While many researches have focused on English language learning in general, very few specifically investigate the lived experiences of students who shift from Bangla medium to English medium institutions. Their actual voices, lived experiences, their struggles and coping strategies still remain underexplored. This study aims to address that gap by focusing on how these students deal with this transition and what factors help or hinder their adaptation.

## **Methodology**

### **Overview**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the experiences, negotiations and adaptation of the Bangla background students within the linguistic, psychological and cultural contexts of learning in English medium institutions set-up. Using phenomenological research design, I interviewed students from Bangla medium background but currently studying in English medium institutions to get a personal perspective and adaptation methods of these students. This section includes the following: research design, a central research question, participants, data collection, data analysis, ethical consideration and summary.

### **Research Design**

In this research, a qualitative approach study was selected since it assists in comprehending the experiences of the students with the Bangla background in the English medium institutions in depth. A qualitative method lets the researcher find out about the problem in depth, record emotions and difficulties and establish significant relationships with the participants. A qualitative method is best suited as the emphasis is on personal experiences of language, culture and identity.

The research design employed in this study was phenomenological research design that is focused on pursuing and describing the lived experiences of a group of people. Phenomenology enables the researcher to find out how the participants in a given setting make sense of their everyday hardship and coping mechanisms. It tries to make experiences as they are experienced without assumptions to unveil their meaning. In this research, this approach is appropriate to highlight the authentic perspectives of students and how they adapt to an English medium environment.

In particular, transcendental phenomenology was used as it is based on subjective experience of participants. This format enabled me to place my personal opinions aside

and concentrate on what the students said and gave them the space to express themselves and show their opinions.

This study employed semi-structured questions where in-depth interviews with students were carried out. This approach provided the balance between instructing the discussion and letting the participants tell their thoughts freely. Interviews gave a free zone in which participants were allowed to narrate their emotions, challenges, and strategies to deal with them without any form of coercion. This process assisted in capturing the meanings that life experiences have on the interviewees. A phenomenological design was thus the best option to learn about the difficulties that Bangla background students have to deal with and how they negotiate their identities in English medium institutions.

### **Research Question**

How do Bangla background students experience, negotiate and adapt to the linguistic, psychological and cultural challenges of studying in an English medium environment?

### **Participants**

This study considered the participants as students of Bangla background that recently transferred to English medium institutions. I selected 4 students between the ages of 21 and 24. The participants are all bilingual and have gone through the experience of moving from Bangla medium institutions to English medium institutions. Their families belong to different social and economic strata.

Purposive sampling was used to choose the participants so that the participants were able to give useful information about the issues of studying in the English medium institutions. I took permission from them and they were made aware of the reason why the study was being conducted, how the interviews would be conducted and what steps were being implemented to ensure that their confidentiality was not compromised. Only those students, who willingly cooperated were considered.

The participants enabled me to understand the actual experiences of the Bangla background students in the process of adapting to the English medium education and the linguistic, psychological and cultural problems they face and how they cope with those problems.

### **Data Collection**

The data in this study was collected to explore the experiences of Bangla-background students in English-medium institutions. Semi-structured interviews were the main method. These interviews allowed students to share their experiences, difficulties, and strategies in their own words. The conversation followed some set questions, but students were free to talk about anything important to them.

The interviews were done face to face and recorded with the students' consent to make sure the data was accurate. The questions focused on their first experience in English-medium institutions, problems in learning and speaking English, feelings about the institution, and ways they try to overcome difficulties.

The interviews were designed to get detailed and personal experiences from each student. This helped to find common themes among different students. It allowed a better understanding not just of the challenges but also of the strategies students use to adjust to studying in English-medium settings.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the interviews was carefully studied to find common ideas and patterns. First, the recordings were listened to several times, and the students' responses were read repeatedly. Important statements were noted. For example, one student said, "I feel nervous when I have to speak in English due to fear of making mistakes," and another said, "It is hard to understand science lessons in English because the words are new to me." These statements helped identify the main difficulties and coping strategies of the students.

Then I applied coding to label these important ideas with short meaningful phrases that describe their meaning. For example, the statement was coded as “anxiety speaking English” and the second as “difficulty understanding subject vocabulary”. These codes were used to show patterns across various responses of students. Following a coding process, I grouped similar codes together to create main themes, such as language difficulties, psychological stress and strategies of adaptation.

Lastly, I explained these themes to understand how Bangla background students negotiate and adapt to the linguistic, psychological and cultural barriers of studying in an environment of English medium. The process allowed me to observe the challenges encountered by the students as well as the strategies they use to overcome them.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before collecting any data, the consent was obtained directly from the students. The study included only those students who volunteered to participate and would have the option to drop-out. To ensure privacy of the participants, pseudonyms (fake names) were used for all students. Any written records, recording or transcripts were safely saved in password-protected electronic files and any documents on paper were stored in a locked cabinet.

Participants were fully informed about the research including the topic of the research, the method of interview and how the data would be used. They were encouraged to tell their experiences in detail. To minimize bias, I limited sharing personal experiences and paid attention to what students said. The following ethical steps were taken to assure that the privacy of the participants was protected, their participation was voluntary and their experiences were accurately represented.

## **Literature Review**

### **Policy and Practice Gap in EMI**

In Bangladesh, English medium instruction (EMI) has brought many changes to the education system. But the change has not been smooth for many students because most of them studied in Bangla medium schools before. When they enter EMI classrooms, they face both language problems and mental stress. These days many universities try to teach mainly in English, but most of the overall education system in Bangladesh still uses Bangla. Because of this, there is a clear gap between the policy that promotes English and what really happens inside classrooms (Nur, 2021; Hamid & Amin, 2022). Recent technological studies also show how language processing and learning can benefit from modern AI and NLP-based tools, especially in Bangla context (Faieaz et al., 2025).

### **Language Difficulties**

Research shows that Bangla medium students often face problems with English when they move into EMI classrooms. They usually do a bit better in reading and listening because they get English from books or sometimes from TV or online content. But speaking and writing are harder. Many students cannot express themselves well in these areas. Because they do not practice enough, they find it tough to join in class talks, finish written work, or do well in exams (Mridula & Ahsan, 2025; Sarkar et al., 2021). This makes them feel less confident and sometimes they cannot share their ideas clearly. AI-based systems are being used in education to make learning more effective and personalized, which can also help students overcome such challenges (Kasedullah et al., 2025).

### **Academic Writing Challenges**

Writing in English becomes one of the biggest problems for them. Switching from Bangla to English leaves a gap. Students know the ideas, but they cannot always put them into correct English sentences (Mridula & Ahsan, 2025). Because of this, their results often drop and they feel extra pressure in their studies (Sarkar et al., 2021).

## **Psychological Barriers**

Another issue is the mental pressure of using English in class. Many students feel nervous or stressed when they have to speak in English, especially during group work or presentations (Rahman & Kaur, 2018). They fear making mistakes or being judged (Sarkar et al., 2021). This fear lowers their confidence and keeps them quiet in class. As a result, they struggle more to follow and understand hard lessons (Mridula & Ahsan, 2025).

## **Code-Mixing in Classrooms**

Another problem is code-mixing, where students and teachers switch between Bangla and English in the classroom. This is sometimes a useful way to help students grasp difficult topics but slows down their ability to learn proper academic English as well. Mixing both languages could make the students feel comfortable in the short term but it is not an appropriate method for learning a strong English language that is required for writing, debates or even for advanced learning (Sultana, 2023; Sarkar et al., 2021).

## **Assessment Practices**

Assessment practices in Bangladesh add to the challenge too. Exams tend to prioritize memorization over critical thinking (Al Mamun et al., 2025). Students are encouraged to memorize their answers and not to think deeply into the subject. In EMI classrooms, this practice shuts off their potential for developing their problem-solving and independent writing. For Bangla medium students who are already struggling in English, this system makes it even difficult for them to learn (Mridula & Ahsan, 2025).

## **Teacher Preparation**

Teacher preparation is another important issue. Many teachers of Bangladesh have low training about EMI teaching methods (Bradford, 2016). They often adopt traditional, lecture-based methods that do not encourage students to speak or interact. This makes it more difficult for Bangla medium students who need more practice in speaking and writing English. Without the use of interactive methods, students are not given the opportunity to gain confidence in the English language. There is a need for proper



teacher training programs in EMI as it could pave the way towards a more supportive classroom (Sultana, 2023).

### **Social and Economic Inequality**

Social and economic inequality plays a role too. In Bangladesh, English is perceived to be the language of prestige and better opportunities (Hossain & Tollefson, 2007; Akter & Mitul, 2020). Sometimes students from wealthier families or urban areas have better access to coaching, books in English or at better schools. In comparison, students from poorer areas or villages do not have these resources and thus make it very difficult to be successful with EMI. This results in an unfair system in which only privileged students benefit (Rahman et al., 2019).

### **Implementation Challenges**

Finally, there is a gap between national policies and what actually transpires in classrooms (Nur, 2021; Evans & Morrison, 2011). Although EMI is promoted in higher education, the way it is applied in the classrooms is inconsistent. Some universities have made progress but many have problems because of poor planning, lack of training and local challenges. The lack of alignment between policy and practice makes it challenging for the Bangla medium students to resettle themselves and succeed (Hamid, 2011).

In short, while the policy of English medium education brings opportunities for students of Bangladesh, it also creates many problems for students from Bangla mediums. These include low levels of English confidence, anxiety, code-mixing, rote learning, weak teacher preparation, inequality and gaps in policy (Sarkar et al., 2021; Mridula & Ahsan, 2025). To make EMI more effective and fair, there is a need for better teacher training, good policies and systems for support (Nur, 2021; Rahman et al., 2019; Faieaz et al., 2025).

## **Result and Findings**

This section presents the results of interviews conducted with four students from Bangla background who are now studying in English medium institutions. The participants are Rafi, Farzana, Nabila and Hasan. They all are university students. Their answers have been analyzed thematically and several codes have been made to understand the way they experience, negotiate and adapt to the challenges of studying in English medium institutions.

### **Struggle with Language**

All four participants have discussed language as their greatest challenge. Rafi opens up and declares that he is hesitant to participate in class as he is not sure about grammar and sentence structure properly. He adds that he always constructs the answer in Bangla first in his mind and then tries hard to convert it to English. Farzana admits that she feels nervous during presentations and has a tendency not to ask questions even if she does not understand something. She adds, "I know the answer in Bangla but when I try to say it in English, it comes out broken."

Nabila also states that it's very difficult for her to write academically. She explains that when she reads lecture slides, she would be able to understand but when she tries to write an assignment, she cannot organize her thoughts properly in English. She also says that she needs extra tuition because she does not understand some science terms in English. Hasan says that he has a lot of words stuck in his head but can't know their use in sentences. He admits, "When I speak English, sometimes my friends laugh because of my accent and so I remain quiet."

These accounts indicate that speaking and writing are the weakest areas of the participants. Reading and listening are comparatively easier for them but the productive skills are under-developed as far as their fluency is concerned.

## **Psychological Pressure**

The participants draw attention also to psychological barriers. Nabila has said that she feels anxious at the time when she has to speak in front of others. She says that when she even knows the answer, she worries about making mistakes. This fear causes her stress as she is unable to participate fully in the class. Rafi acknowledges that he feels inferior when he compares himself with the students who have been in English medium since their childhood. He says, "I always get the feeling that my English is not good enough when I compare to them."

Farzana has explained that she often feels under pressure because the teachers expect everyone to perform equally. She thinks this is unfair because the English medium students receive more exposure from the beginning while she has to work more hard to catch up to the rest. Hasan also says he feels the pressure on exams because he cannot write as smoothly as others. He says that because of this lack of confidence his motivation is low.

These experiences suggest that psychological factors such as low self-esteem, comparison with others, performance anxiety are strongly related to their struggles in English medium education.

## **Cultural and Identity Conflict**

All of the participants tend to have some sort of cultural conflict. At home, they use Bangla for communication but in the university, they are expected to use English. Nabila explains that in these two environments she sometimes feels like "two different people." At home she's free and confident whereas in class she's restricted.

Hasan mentions that his Bangla accent becomes noticeable when he speaks in English. He opens up that some of his classmates make fun of how he says something and makes him feel excluded. Farzana recalls that in her first semester in English medium she felt "out of place" because her cultural background was different from other students who had grown up in an English-speaking environment. Rafi also agrees with her.

These reflections show how language also shapes identity. The constant switch between Bangla at home and English in university creates tension for the students who feel they are negotiating with two cultures at once.

### **Coping and Adaptation**

Despite the problems, all the participants have evolved strategies of coping. During the interview, I asked them about their adjustment techniques. Farzana has shared that she always watches English movies with sub-titles to improve her listening skill and vocabulary. She also has a notebook for herself in which she records new words and attempts to use them in sentences. Rafi explains that he drafts his notes in Bangla first and then converts them into English which helps him prepare for the exam. Hasan practices English with a small group of friends who are facing similar problems. He says, "We try to speak in English even if we make mistakes, so that we can learn." Nabila practices using social media by writing brief posts or captions in English and asking her peers to correct it. These strategies show that even though the transition is hard, the students take an active role in creating methods to overcome their barriers.

### **Suggestions from Participants**

In the interview period, I asked them about some suggestions such as what things are needed to improve their situation. The participants have also provided suggestions for better support. All of them agree that teachers should give more encouragement and should not judge students harshly for making mistakes. Farzana says that teachers should give some space so that students can talk to them freely without any fear to share their problems. Rafi says, "teachers should explain some of the difficult topics in Bangla so that I can understand them easily." Hasan believes that universities should make additional English support classes for those students who are from Bangla background. Nabila adds that teachers should employ interactive activities instead of only lecture-based methods so that students can gain confidence in speaking. She also says that teachers should be more caring of Bangla-medium students.

The result reveals that Bangla background students in the English medium institutions are challenged with the problem of fluency of language, psychological adjustment and cultural identity. At the same time, they have coping strategies and expect more supportive teaching practices. These results suggest that a combination of personal effort and institutional help is needed for helping students succeed in English medium education.

### **Discussion**

An examination of how Bangla medium students handle English medium instruction in Bangladesh shows many challenges. Language, psychological pressure, and identity conflicts appear as main problems. At the same time, students try to find ways to cope. Comparing these findings with previous studies shows some similarities and some new insights.

Language is the biggest hurdle. Speaking and writing in English is very hard for many students. Understanding reading or listening is often easier, but producing English causes hesitation and nervousness. This agrees with Rahman and Kaur (2018), who note that productive skills like speaking and writing are weaker than receptive skills. This also explains why students sometimes stay quiet in class or do not ask questions. Confidence is low, as Mridula and Ahsan (2025) also point out.

Psychological stress is another major problem. Students feel anxious, compare themselves to peers from English medium schools, and have low confidence. Fear of being judged or laughed at, as noted by Sarkar et al. (2021), makes students avoid participation. This creates a cycle where fear reduces practice, and weak skills increase stress.

Cultural and identity conflict also appears. Students feel stuck between Bangla at home and English at university. Constant switching creates discomfort or embarrassment. Some report classmates mocking their accent, which hurts confidence and causes feelings of exclusion. This matches Evans & Morrison (2011), who note that language connects to identity. While previous research mostly discusses policy gaps, this study shows culture and identity affect language learning.

Despite these problems, students try to cope. Many watch English movies, practice with friends, or use mobile apps to improve skills, as Mridula and Ahsan (2025) also observe. Translation tools are also common. These methods are not perfect but show effort and resilience. Research often focuses on problems, but students actively try to find solutions.

Teaching methods matter too. Students want more encouragement from teachers, some help in Bangla when needed, and interactive classes instead of only lectures. Literature shows that many teachers are not well-prepared for EMI. Better training and engaging teaching could give students more practice and confidence. Extra support classes for Bangla medium students seem practical.

Assessment is another issue. Exams often focus on memorization, not critical thinking. Bangla medium students struggle more under this system. Earlier research also shows that rote learning hinders creativity and understanding.

Inequality affects learning as well. Students from richer families or urban areas usually have more resources to learn English. Students from poorer or rural areas often lack support, as Simbolon et al. (2020) note. This creates an unfair situation where only privileged students get full benefits. This study confirms the same problem.

In summary, Bangla medium students face challenges in speaking and writing, psychological stress, cultural conflicts, unprepared teachers, memorization-focused exams, and social inequality. Still, students try to cope using self-practice or translation tools. The problem is not only with students but also with the education system. Change is needed from all sides. Teacher training, fairer assessment, supportive classrooms, and student-centered policies can make EMI more effective and fair for everyone.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has discussed the experience of the Bangla medium students in terms of their language issues, psychological stress, cultural identity crisis and adaptation strategies. The findings ensure that the difficulty of speaking and writing are the most challenging issues to them as well as the manner in which they develop the feeling of anxiety, loss of self confidence and cultural estrangement. Meanwhile, the research demonstrates the way students learn their coping mechanisms to address such issues such as practice, peer support and translation.

The findings also indicate the significant contribution of the teachers and institutions. Supportive teaching, interactive learning and other help to be fluent in English are necessary for the students in order to create a more equal learning environment. In addition, inequality issues and gaps between policies and practice continue to affect students to EMI.

Future research can compare experiences across contexts, focusing on a larger number of students from different regions of Bangladesh. It can also investigate how long term EMI exposure shapes identity, confidence and career opportunities. By addressing such areas, it may be possible for researchers and educators to gain a better understanding of how to make EMI more inclusive, supportive and effective for all learners.

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