English as Medium Instruction (EMI) and Educational Inequality: Perspectives of Students and Teachers at Tertiary Level in Bangladesh

Nushrat Mahjabeen[1*]

[1]State University of Bangladesh, Bangladesh
[*]Corresponding author's email: ishaengdu@gmail.com
[*] https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3592-1039
https://doi.org/10.54855/ijte.25531

ABSTRACT

Though English is considered one of the most prestigious languages, reliance on EMI increases educational gaps. Recent studies have shown that EMI is becoming more widespread in universities, but there is a lot we remain unaware of regarding the challenges students and teachers have when attempting to close this gap in knowledge. The purpose of the study is to investigate the perceptions of students and teachers towards educational inequality in classes. A mixed method was adopted, and a survey of 50 students and an interview with 10 teachers were conducted. This study's findings revealed students' acquaintance with educational disparity in English-led learning and teachers' challenges due to inequality among the students. These findings also suggest the need for a better teaching and learning environment by giving recommendations. This research highlights the need to build inclusive EMI classrooms through interventions and instructional practices to close achievement gaps.

Introduction

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) encompasses the utilization of the English language "to teach academic subjects, other than English itself" (Dafouz & Gray, 2022, p. 163) in contexts where English is considered as a foreign or second language (Pecorari & Malmström 2018: 503). EMI has become a "global, rapidly growing trend" (Marcjanik, 2023, p. 136) because, in multilingual post-colonial societies, the language serves as an "academic lingua franca" (Richards & Pun, 2018, p. 5). The emerging importance of learning English worldwide, particularly for communication, trade and commerce, and the medium of education, has become necessary for personal development and employability (Cickovska, 2015). Learning English is adequately valued as a key to success in commanding all information, which assists people in gaining knowledge (Nashruddin, 2015). Bangladesh is no exception in terms of working, learning, and using English to connect people across cultures and economies (Haque, 2019).

Education in Bangladesh is carefully attached to the construction of a "particular social identity and set of power relations" (Rao & Hossain, 2011, p. 624), where studying the English language is regarded as the crucial step for pursuing higher studies. From a global perspective, "EMI has a strong presence in Bangladesh" (Hamid & Amin, 2022, p. 2). Tertiary level education in this country has become EMI's primary embracer. The colonial control resulted in the establishment of English Medium Instruction (EMI), which is linked to colonialism's objective of educating the populace of the Indian Subcontinent in English. "This colonial legacy has subsequently been reshaped by the forces of globalization, which has established English as a global lingua franca" (Hamid & Amin, 2022, p. 2).

According to the Private University Act of 1992, no instruction has been provided for utilizing the appropriate medium of instruction in the classes. However, "each university has adopted EMI by default" (Hamid & Amin, 2022, p. 6). By employing EMI in the classes, private universities attempted to decrease the flow of Bangladeshi students who wanted to pursue their higher studies in foreign countries. In this process, EMI assists by introducing the "internationalization of higher education in the local context" (Hamid & Amin, 2022, p. 7).

This research aims to address an absence of knowledge by investigating the concerns of private university teachers and students regarding the widespread educational inequity in English-led classrooms. Questionnaires and interview questions have been developed to gain a better understanding of the difficulties encountered by both students and educators, as well as possible answers to these problems. Educational institutions will be able to better address the issue of EMI in the classroom as a result of this research and implement strategies to improve student learning.

Literature Review

Language Planning and Policy in Bangladesh

Language planning refers to deliberate efforts to determine how languages are acquired, applied, used, and structured (Cooper, 1989). Moreover, it belongs to the "body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices to achieve the planned language change in the societies, or system" (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). Ferguson (2006) portrayed four major issues of language planning such as a) preference of medium of instruction at the different levels of the educational system, b) the role of the native tongue in the educational process, c) the collection of a second or foreign language, and d) the selection of a specific language variety as a standard for educational purpose.

In accordance with the Language Policy Act of 1987, Bangla should be used in all domains (Banu & Sussex, 2001). However, English is being used in legislation, administration, and education; for instance, in 1992, English was taught as a compulsory subject starting from Grade 1. Today, the language inherited from British colonial authority is perceived as a symbol of power and social advancement (Erling et al., 2013).

Perceptions of Students' and Teachers' regarding Educational Inequality in Different Contexts

Perception is described as "the interplay of feelings, beliefs, and thoughts about actions" (Rusch & Perry, 1999, p. 291), which emphasizes its complicated nature. Teachers' perceptions are significant in developing an educational system to conduct the learning process (Sherwani, 2017, p. 192), and students' attitudes influence their success in language learning.

Education is considered one of the significant components that offers an individual a new outlook on society and people. However, the privileged and lower class cannot attain equal educational opportunities based on their monthly emolument (Smith et al., 2016). This highlights the prevalence of educational inequality, which refers to "unequal access to higher education" (Alhamami, 2023, p. 1). Primary, secondary, higher secondary, and tertiary levels are the four educational levels in Bangladesh. Bangla is the primary medium of instruction at all levels up to higher secondary education, with English being an indispensable component of the national curriculum for students in grades one to twelve (Hamid, 2011). Less than 2% of institutions use English as the central medium (Hamid, 2006; Hamid & Jahan, 2015). English-medium students get more priority and are given more importance in terms of applying to and attending universities abroad and exploring more career options (Roy, 2024), which generates division between them and Bangla-medium students (Kader & Salam, 2018). However, at the tertiary level, the majority of the students come from Bangla medium, and the sudden change from Bangla to English as a medium of instruction to study any subject constitutes difficulties in coping with the EMI environment since in private universities, English is solely used as a medium of instruction (Hasan, 2022).

Educational inequality emerges from several factors, such as the differences in sufficient EMI training of teachers, the English language competence of both teachers and students, and appropriate teaching quality (Hu & Duan, 2019; Rose et al., 2020a). However, these comparisons are detected in China because professors encourage students to use English to answer questions and receive higher marks (Fang & Hu, 2022). The Chinese government has launched various higher education internationalization initiatives such as 'Project 985' and 'Project 211' and the 'Double First Class program, which seeks to raise the university's worldwide recognition for establishing 'internationalization' in the curriculum. Yuan et al. (2024) conducted a study on tertiary-level students from a university in Guangdong who are enrolled in EMI programs. They preferred the use of L1 in EMI courses and believed in the usefulness of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy due to their limited English proficiency and desire to obtain better grades in their academic subjects.

The power relation between the lower class and middle class in terms of educational opportunities can be found in the work of Bourdieu (1974), whose work was concerned with the dynamics of power in a society, where he claimed that higher-class people get more education credentials than the poor ones and "social inequalities are legitimated by the educational credentials held by those in dominant positions" (Sullivan, 2016, p. 145). This situation is prevalent in Vietnam's education system, where the EMI-based programs were initiated at the postgraduate level, followed by undergraduate programs in the 2000s (Vietnam International Education Department 2016). It is believed that graduates who are proficient in English will have advantages in life and career opportunities. From the study of Tran and Nguyen (2018), it has been found from the teachers' perspectives that EMI programs create a distinct educational division between disadvantaged groups and higher-class groups, who have adequate competency in English and have the ability to afford tuition fees.

Challenges Students and Teachers Face at EMI Classes

A significant rise has been reported in the utilization of EMI programs in European higher education. In keeping with worldwide tendencies, Asian regions have similarly substantially raised their EMI programs (Tam & Chi, 2024). Here, English has been adopted in diverse educational policies, such as launching EMI to support students in gaining English proficiency (Kym & Kym, 2014). For example, in Indonesia, EMI programs were first introduced in schools to teach Mathematics and Science in order to develop students' English skills (Zacharias, 2013)

and employability (Aguilar, 2017; Floris, 2014). However, from the study of Simbolon et al. (2020), it has been found that numerous challenges have been encountered while implementing EMI in classes, such as the need for bilingual instruction, students' dependence on translation, teachers' language proficiency and teachers' insufficient training which leads to poor teaching performance and learning outcomes (Bax, 2010). These challenges have happened because of the existing distinct socio-economic background between upper-class students who have unlimited access to English learning resources and lower-class students who are unable to get those opportunities (Sofyana & Pahamzah, 2022).

In Vietnam, EMI was introduced at universities across both public and private sectors. Students who are from urban areas are usually self-motivated to study English for better job opportunities and pursue informal learning beyond formal learning since students' English proficiency is assuredly affiliated with learner autonomy (Hanh et at, 2024). Phuong and Nguyen (2019) conducted a study on International Business and Information Technology students who confronted various challenges while using EMI in classes, for instance, a lack of vocabulary to exchange ideas, passive learning styles, difficulty in understanding class lectures, and constant dictionary usage to detect the meaning of complicated words. However, Information Technology students believe that for their betterment in life, they are required to use basic terms in the English language and follow procedures or instructions given in English. EMI classes assist them in finding numerous sources of information written in English and provide them with excellent chances to enhance their language skills. Conversely, International Business students prefer bilingual resources to elevate their comprehension ability and apply terms effectively in their future lives.

The strong belief in English "as a powerful cultural capital and resource for social, cultural, and economic mobility" (Sah & Li, 2018, p. 113) has compelled the diminishing of the local languages of Nepal. Sah and Karki (2020) noted that the people of Nepal consider EMI "as a source of capital generation is further perceived to liberate indigenous peoples from poverty and long-standing social marginalization" (p. 30). However, it brings about innumerable troubles for the minoritized students where EMI was ascribed only to socially prestigious people. A large number of citizens of Nepal are incapable of affording high tuition fees to send their children in English medium. Ricento (2015) argues that "access to quality English-medium education in low-income countries like Nepal is mostly restricted to those with sufficient economic means to pay for it" (p. 1).

There is a growing need for English proficiency to provide access to global prospects, and EMI is becoming prominent in universities around the world. Nevertheless, studies on EMI have shown a number of unanswered questions. Several studies have looked at the benefits of EMI for improving language skills and employability (Aguilar, 2017; Floris, 2014). However, both students and teachers face many challenges when using EMI in different settings. Nevertheless, the difficulties of meeting the different requirements of students in settings with limited resources are not taken into account in these studies. Although there is a study on the historical and socio-political origins of EMI in Bangladesh (Hamid & Amin, 2022), there is less data on the dynamics that arise in private universities' classrooms as a result of educational inequality, where EMI is widespread. To fill these gaps, this study surveys the opinions of teachers and students at private institutions in Bangladesh to determine the nature and extent of educational inequality in these settings. In addition, it aims to find practical ways to make these places of learning more accessible and equitable.

This study aims to investigate the strategies and challenges that the teachers and students of private universities encounter due to the existing educational inequity in classrooms, possible answers to these problems, and their perceptions towards EMI.

Research Questions:

1. What are the perceptions of students and teachers regarding educational inequality at EMI classes?
2. What types of challenges do students and teachers face due to existing educational inequality in EMI classes?
3. In what ways can these challenges be addressed to ensure better teaching and learning?

Research Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-method approach was adopted in this research because it provides a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone (Creswell & Clark, 2007). This method was necessary to detect teachers' perceptions regarding educational inequality at EMI classes, teaching challenges, and possible solutions. For this, a semi-structured interview was prepared. Through the questionnaire survey form, students disclosed their perspectives towards educational inequality and their challenges due to existing inequality.

Pilot Study:

Before conducting the research, a pilot study was conducted with 10 students and two teachers from private universities to ensure the questionnaire was easy to understand and use before the full-scale research began.

Participants

Fifty students from different departments from different private universities were randomly selected to complete the questionnaire, and ten teachers from different departments were randomly selected for the interview session.

Tools for Data Collection

Two types of tools (e.g., questionnaire and interview) were selected for collecting data. Some of the questions were modified from Sah and Fang (2023) and Alam (2022)

- *Students Questionnaire*

A questionnaire was created to obtain tertiary-level students' views regarding educational inequality and their challenges because of the existing educational inequality at EMI classes. *Pilot Study Integration:* When finalizing the questionnaire items, the pilot study participants' feedback was considered.

- *Teachers' Interview*

This interview was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the authentic experiences of the teachers of private universities. They were asked about their perceptions of existing educational inequality, their experiences implementing their teaching techniques, and their challenges and possible support for struggling students.

Pilot Study Integration: The feedback from the pilot study participants was considered when finalizing the interview questions.

Instruments

- *Questionnaire Survey Form*

The questionnaire survey form was created on Google Forms. All of the questions were written in English using simple vocabulary. Some of the questions were made on a Likert scale, where the participants were instructed clearly to click on their desired options for each question, and some questions required short answers. All of the questions were mandatory to respond to. On the survey form, the researcher's introduction, study area, and purpose of creating that form were added to inform the participants.

- *Interview Question Form*

To understand the teachers' perspectives, a semi-structured interview question form was created. In it, teachers were asked about their perceptions of educational inequality and the challenges they face when implementing their teaching techniques in class.

Procedure

For the research, the researcher follows a mixed-method approach to explore a number of research questions from different points of view. Firstly, in terms of the qualitative method, the researcher reviews literature from journals, newspaper articles, books, etc.

Some questions for the interview session were made to learn the teachers' perspectives regarding educational inequality and problems caused by it. Researchers took teachers' interviews in person at their convenience, with an introduction given on the researcher's background, study area, and study purpose.

In terms of quantitative methods, questionnaires were created to obtain students' perspectives regarding educational inequality and its challenges. The questionnaire survey was created on Google Forms and distributed to several participants from private universities, who were encouraged to share the form with their friends and fellow classmates.

Ethical Consideration

It is to confirm that the researcher has consciously abided by the ethics of research by keeping the identities of the respondents confidential. No one except the researcher herself will deal with the data.

Limitation

In this study, there are several limitations:

- Though fifty students took part in completing a questionnaire, they did not represent the entire student population of private universities in Bangladesh
- Ten teachers took part in the interview session but did not represent the entire teacher population of private universities.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Students' Questionnaire

It is important to collect data ethically in order to conduct good research. Some questions were asked to the tertiary-level students through a Google form to find out their perceptions of

educational inequality through a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, strongly disagree, etc.) and through some open-ended questions. Additional questions were asked about their challenges due to educational inequality.

➢ *Perceptions of Educational Inequality:*

Different questions were asked to the students regarding their perceptions on whether EMI is an advantage for them, if they face any favoritism by their teachers based on their competency of English, their views on the significance of being an efficient English speaker, whether they feel a need as Bangla as a medium of instruction, their comfort around Bangla speaking individuals, their genuine opinions on appropriate medium of instruction and on the reformation of the education system in Bangladesh.

Figure 1

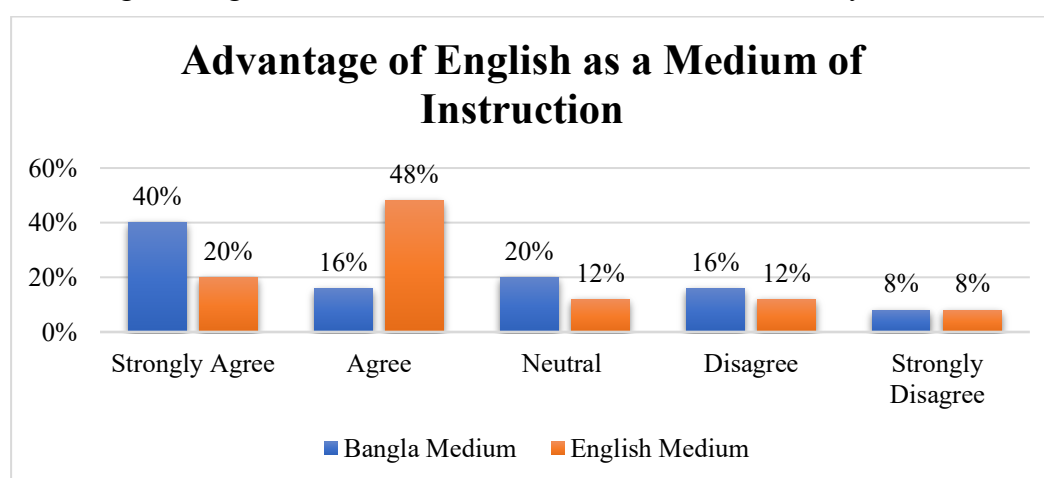Advantage of English as a Medium of Instruction at the University

Figure 1 shows that both Bangla-medium and English-medium students believed that EMI was an advantage for them. Ten (40%) BM students strongly agreed, and four (16%) students agreed with the statement. Moreover, five (20%) EM students strongly agreed, and twelve (48%) students agreed with the statement.

Figure 2

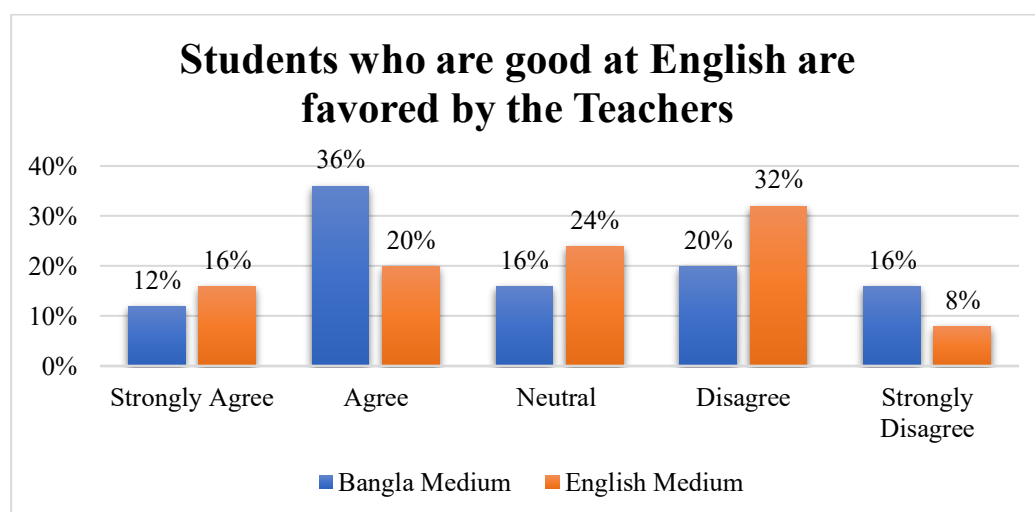Students Who are Good at English are Favored by the Teachers

Figure 2 shows that 3 (12%) BM students strongly agreed and 9 (36%) students agreed that teachers favored those who are English-proficient. However, 8 (32%) EM students disagreed, and 2 (8%) students strongly disagreed with the point. Moreover, 4 (16%) EM students and 5 (20%) EM students agreed with the issue.

Figure 3

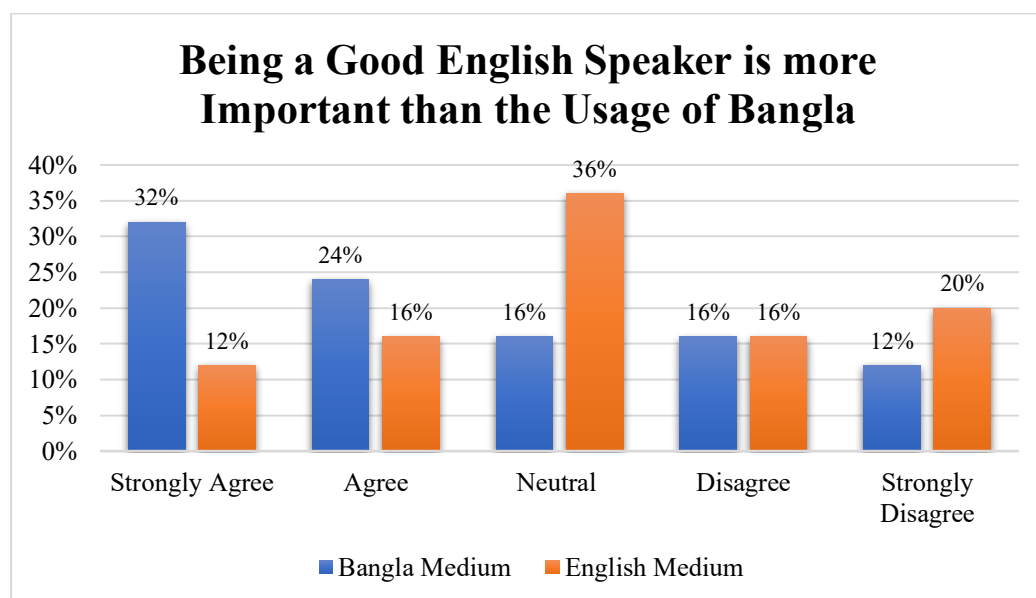Being a Good English Speaker is More Important than the Usage of Bangla

Figure 3 shows that many BM students have come to believe that being a good English speaker is more significant than using Bangla in their day-to-day lives. Eight (32%) BM students strongly agreed, six (24%) BM students agreed with this point, and nine (36%) EM students are neutral in this statement.

Figure 4

Performing Better in Academic Life If Bangla was the Medium of Instruction
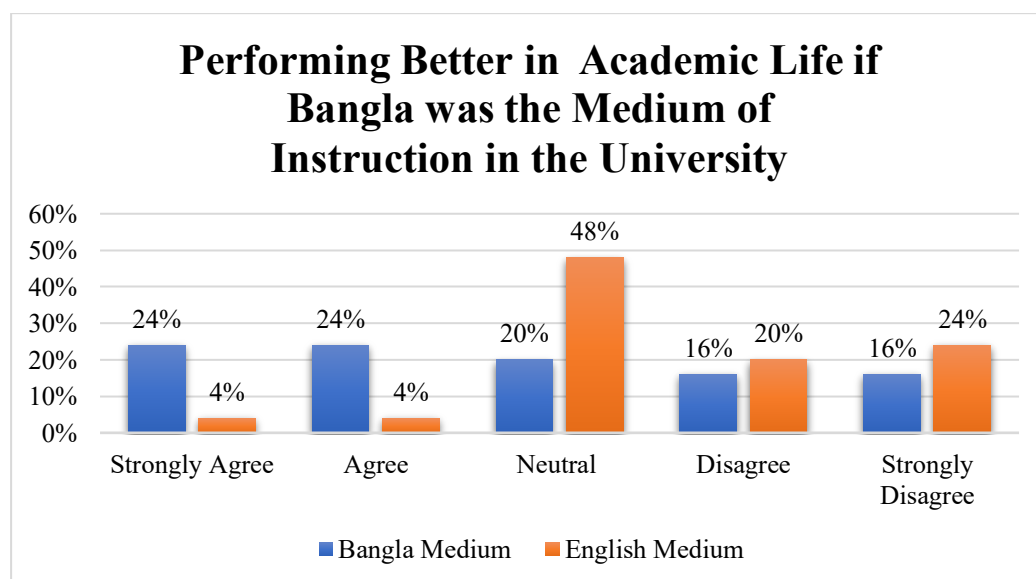
From Figure 4, it has been found that 6 (24%) BM students strongly agreed and 6 (24%) agreed that they would perform better in academic life if Bangla was the medium of instruction, while 4 (16%) BM students disagreed and 2 (16%) students strongly disagreed with the point. However, 12 (48%) EM students are neutral in this statement.

Figure 5

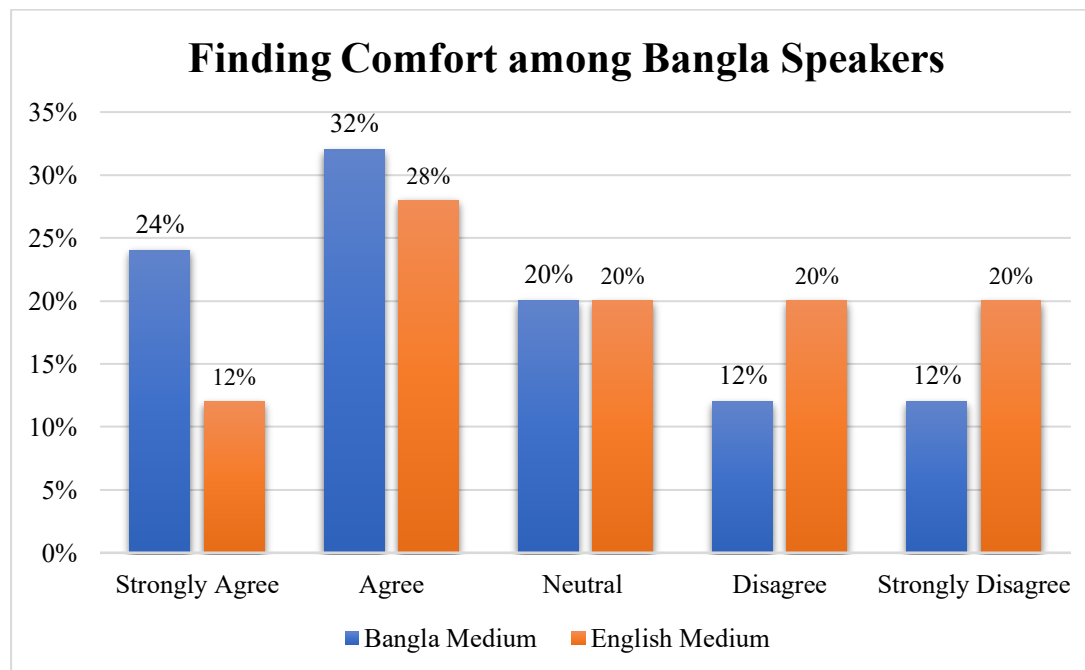Finding Comfort among Bangla Speakers

Figure 5 shows that 6 (24%) BM students strongly agreed and 8 (32%) BM students agreed that they found comfort around people who used Bangla in their conversations. Similarly, 3 (12%) EM students strongly agreed and 7 (28%) EM students agreed on this issue.

Some of the open-ended questions were asked to the students through Google form about their perceptions, where they gave their opinions, such as whether they found appropriate medium of instruction in their university, the reformation of the education system in Bangladesh, what types of support the university gave them to enrich their language skills, and whether the university gave enough exposure to the medium of instruction to give new ideas.

Appropriate medium of instruction at Universities in Bangladesh

Different students have different opinions regarding what the medium of instruction at private universities in Bangladesh could be. The majority of the students (24 students), both from BM and EM backgrounds, wrote that English should be the medium of instruction. One of the students defended why English should be the medium of instruction instead of Bangla by writing this:

> *I believe instruction in English is better than Bangla if we only focus on students' comprehension of the lecture. However, English lectures can be helpful if the students want to study abroad in the future* (Student 12; October 25, 2024).

While few of them gave explanations why both Bangla and English should be the medium of instruction at universities, as one of the students wrote:

> *English is not taught effectively in our earlier academic lives, especially for students in rural areas who have less opportunity to learn English skills. Thus, many students find it*

difficult to understand their lessons as all of the course materials are written in English. If these course materials are written in Bangla and English, they will be easier to understand their lessons easily and excel in their studies (Student 4; October 25, 2024).

Reformation of the education system as far as the medium of instruction is concerned

The students were asked their opinions about reforming the education system in Bangladesh. The majority (17 students) did not give any opinion by stating that they did not think about this issue yet, while some of the students shared their thoughts on this matter, such as one of the students wrote:

I think reformation is not necessary. If we get enough lectures and professors in our respective fields, we may not face the complexities of using any language in class (Student 6; October 25, 2024).

Challenges students face due to existing educational inequality in EMI classes:

Along with students' perceptions, additional questions were asked about some challenges that the students might face due to educational inequality, such as whether they found EMI was comfortable, felt confident speaking in English in classes, struggled to communicate with others in English, experienced ridicule because of lack of English efficiency and whether instructors provided multiple teaching methods for making the class lecture easily comprehensible, etc.

Figure 6

Unable to Speak in the Classroom Due to Less Confidence in English Skills

Unable to speak in the classroom due to less confidence in English skills

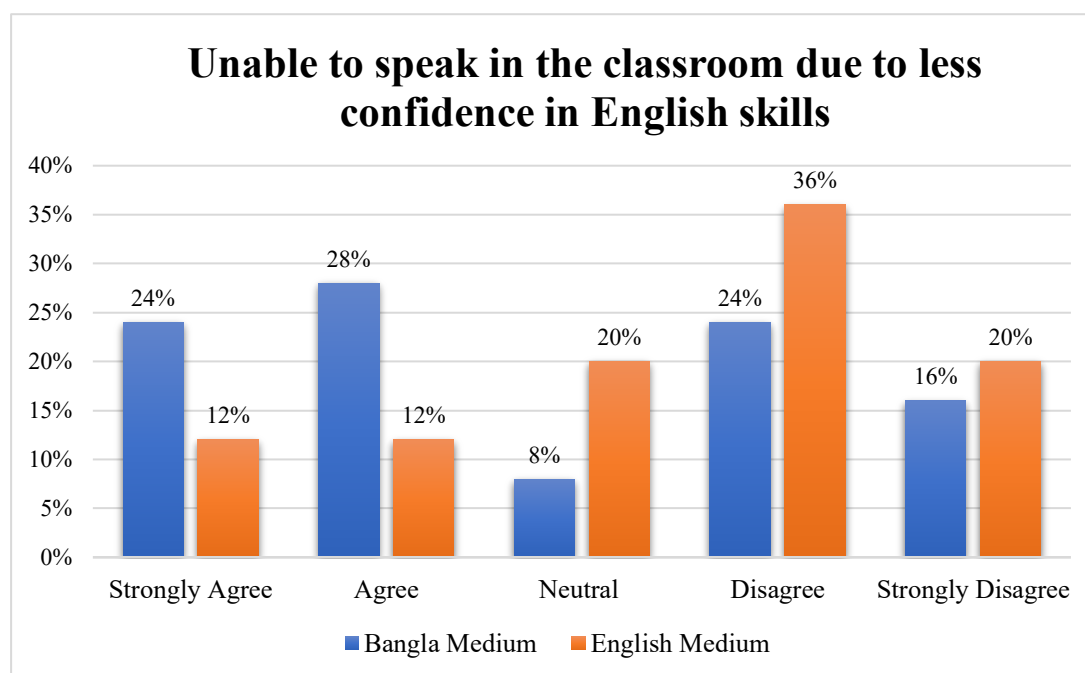|	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Bangla Medium	24%	28%	8%	24%	16%
English Medium	12%	12%	20%	36%	20%

Figure 6 shows that the majority of the students found some challenges while speaking in English because of their lack of self-confidence. For example, 6 (24%) BM students strongly agreed and 7 (28%) BM students agreed that they were unable to speak in the classroom in English, while 9 (36%) EM students disagreed and 5 (20%) strongly disagreed with the point, which meant they were comfortable speaking in English in class.

Figure 7

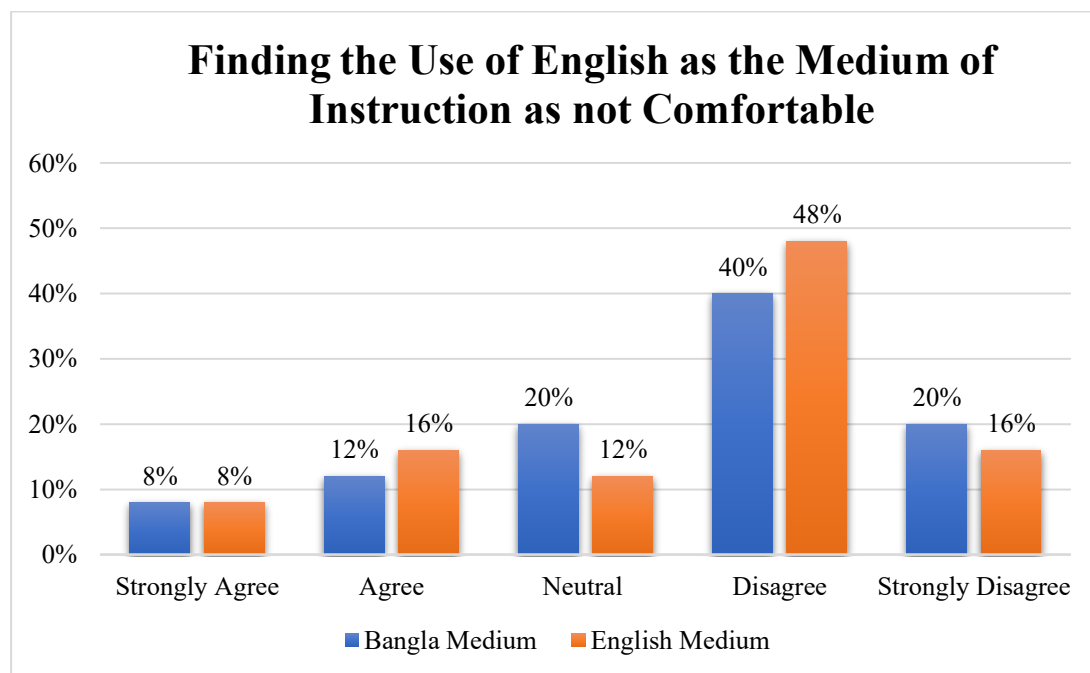Finding the use of English as the Medium of Instruction is not Comfortable

Figure 7 shows that the majority of the BM students disagreed with the point that they did not feel comfortable using English as a medium of instruction. For example, 10 (40%) BM students disagreed and 3 (20%) BM students strongly disagreed, while 12 (48%) EM students disagreed and 4 (16%) strongly disagreed.

Figure 8

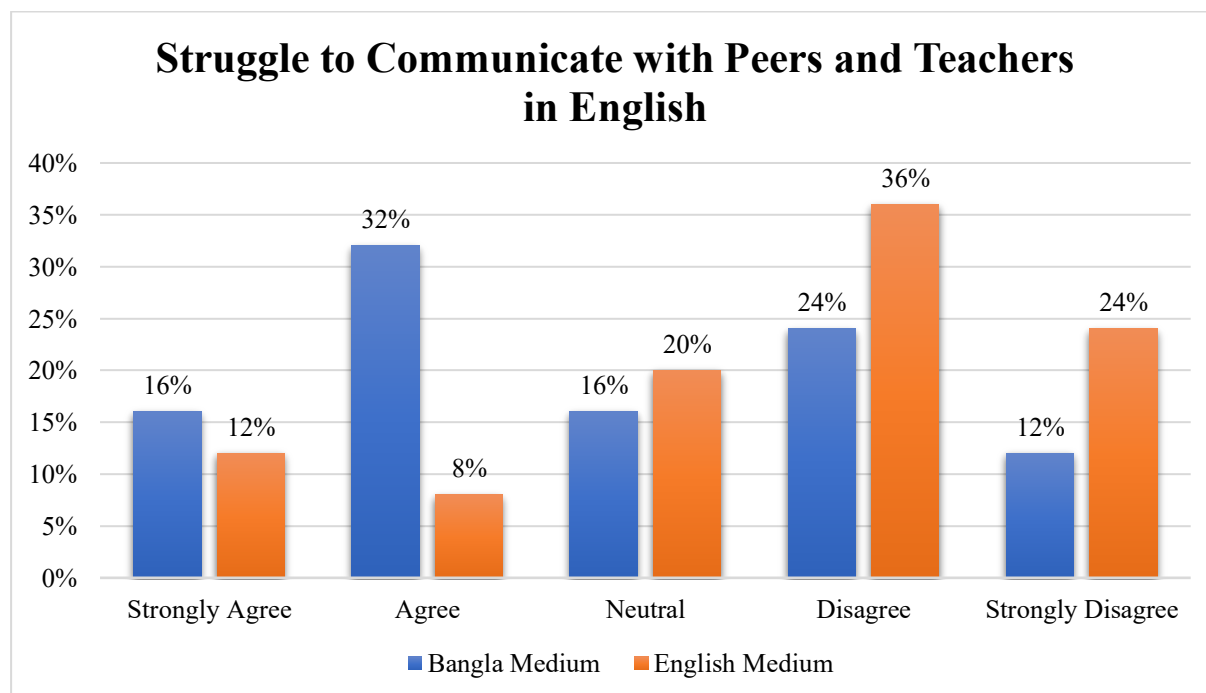Struggle to Communicate with Peers and Teachers

Figure 8 shows that 4 (16%) BM students strongly agreed and 8 (32%) BM students agreed that they found difficulties communicating with their classmates and instructors in English, while 9 (46.67%) EM students disagreed and 6 (26.67%) strongly disagreed with the point.

Figure 9

Difficult to be Friends with Classmates who are Efficient in English
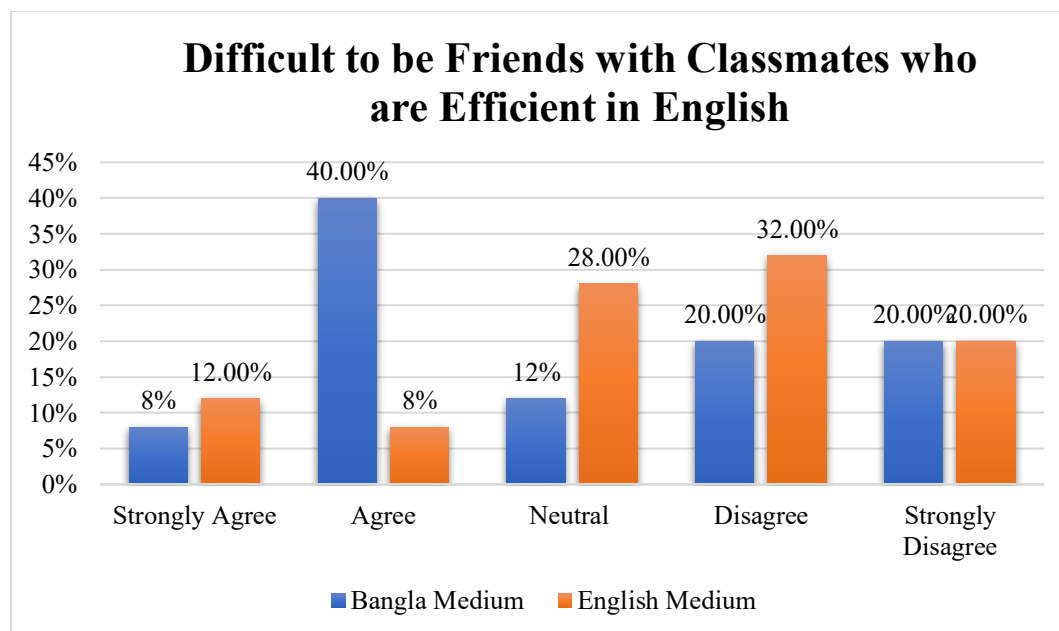

Figure 9 shows that 10 (40%) BM students agreed, 5 (33.33%) BM students disagreed, and 4 (20%) strongly disagreed with the point. In contrast, the majority of the EM students disagreed that they faced any difficulty making friends who were efficient in English, such as 8 (32%) EM students disagreed and 5 (20%) strongly disagreed with the point.

Figure 10

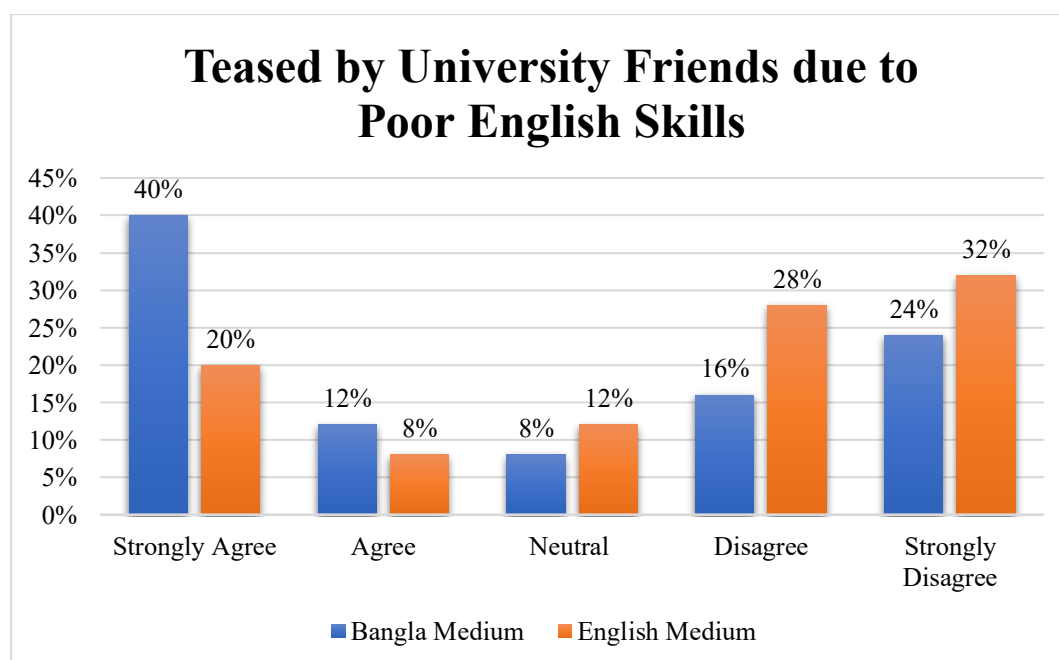Teased by University Friends due to Poor English Skills

Figure 10 shows that 10 (40%) BM students strongly agreed and 3 (12%) BM students agreed that they were teased by their friends in the university because of their poor English language skills. On the other hand, 7 (28%) EM students disagreed and 8 (32%) strongly disagreed with the point that they did not experience this type of situation.

Figure 11

Instructor Provides Multiple Teaching Methods for Making the Lecture Comprehensible for the Different Medium Students
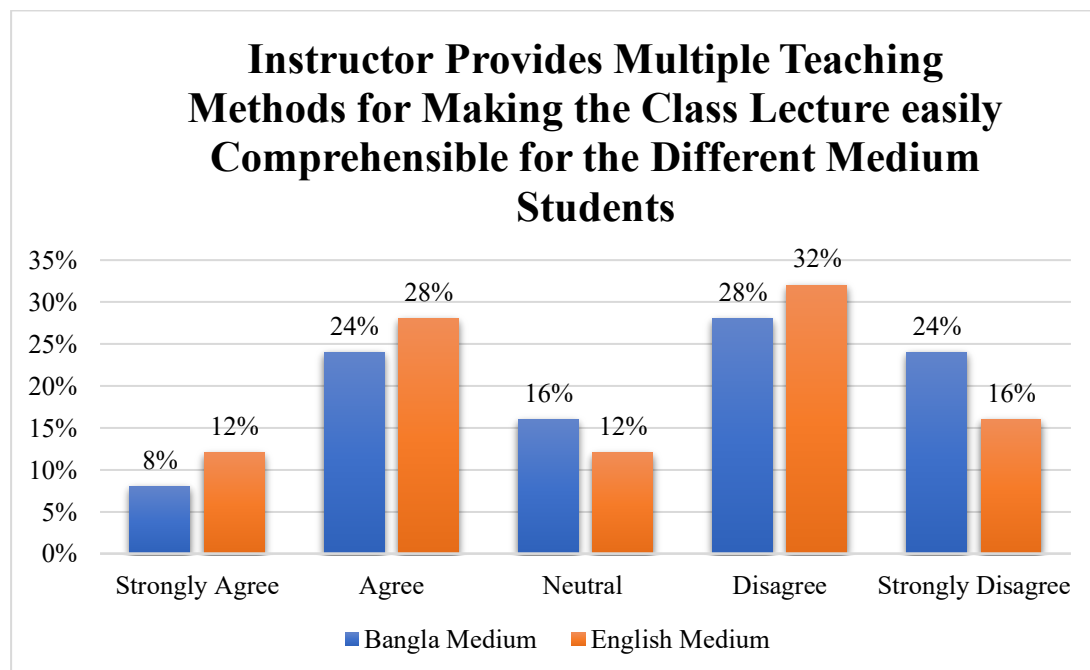

Figure 11 shows that 7 (28%) BM students disagreed and 8 (24%) BM students strongly disagreed that their instructors provide multiple teaching methods to make the lecture comprehendible for the different medium students, while 3 (12%) EM students strongly agreed and 7 (28%) agreed with the point.

Figure 12

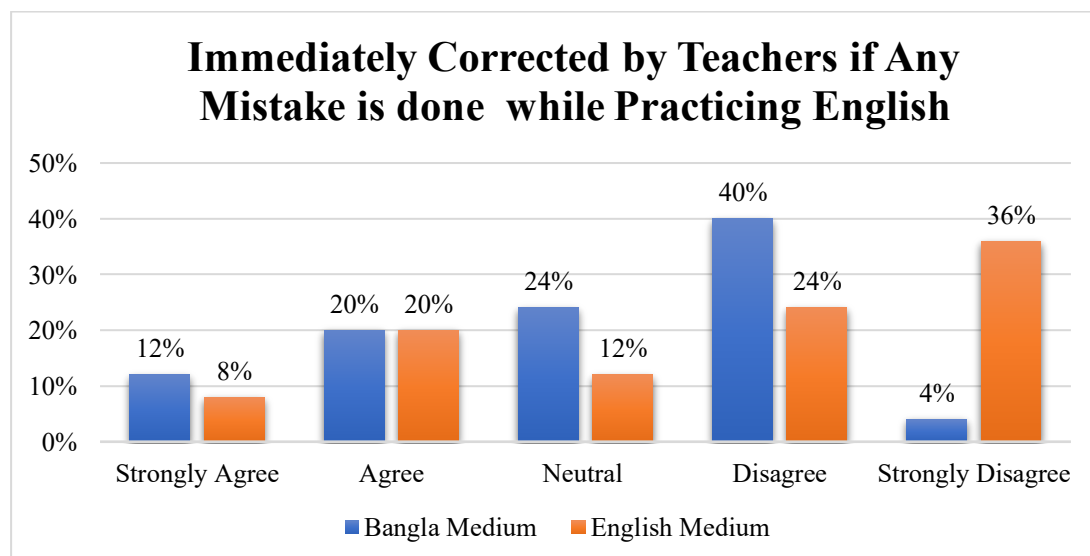Immediately Corrected by Teachers while Practicing English

Figure 12 shows that 10 (40%) BM students disagreed and 1 (6.67%) BM student strongly disagreed that they were immediately corrected by their teachers while practicing English. Similarly, 6 (24%) EM students disagreed, and 9 (36%) strongly disagreed with the point.

Figure 13

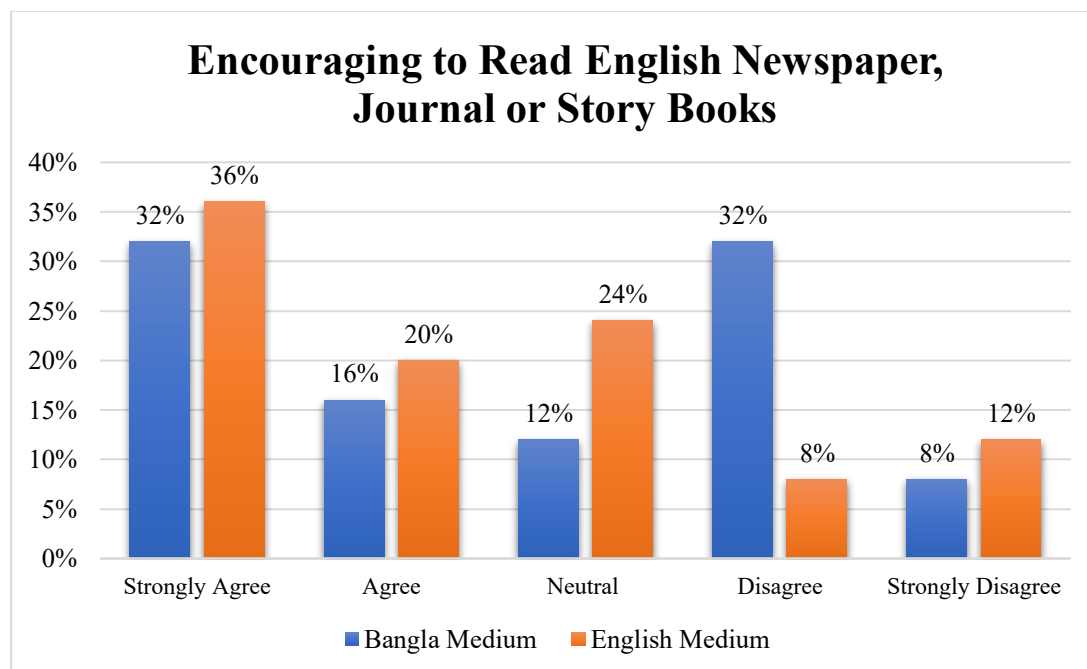Encouraging to Read English Newspaper, Journals, or Story Books

Figure 13 shows that 8 (32%) BM students strongly agreed and 4 (16%) BM students agreed that they were encouraged to read English newspapers, journals, or story books. Similarly, 9 (36%) EM students strongly agreed and 5 (20%) EM students agreed on this point.

Figure 14

Well-Prepared and Organized Course Contents
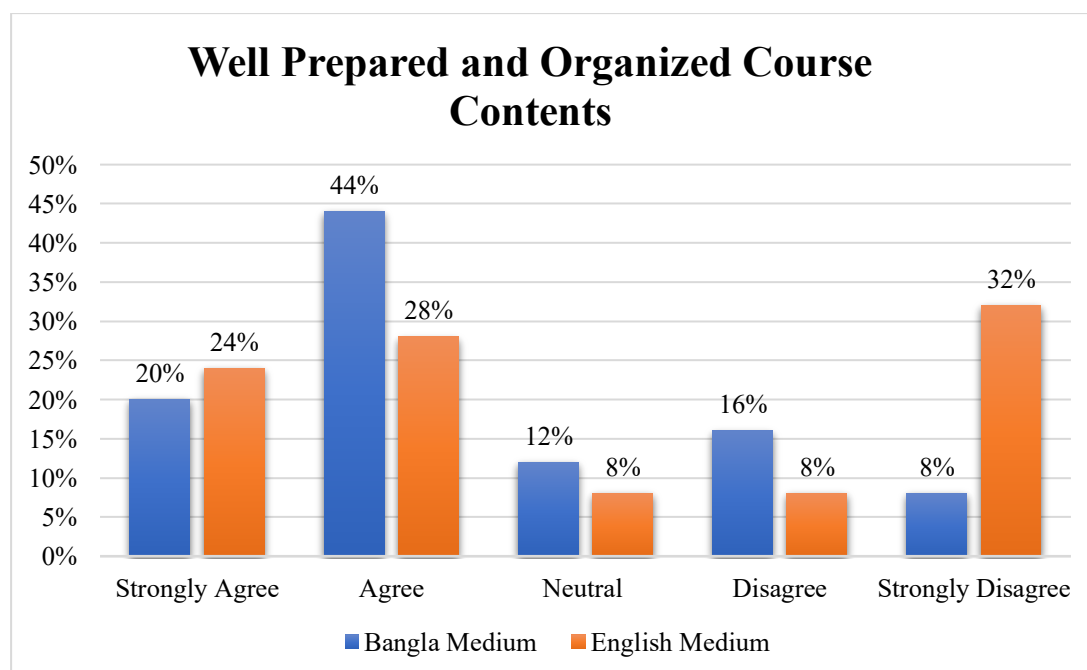
Figure 14 shows that 5 (20%) BM students strongly agreed and 11 (44%) BM students agreed that the course contents were well prepared and organized by the teachers. Moreover, 6 (24%) EM students strongly agreed, and 7 (28%) agreed with the point.

Figure 15

Encouraging in-class Interaction (e.g., Discussion/ Activities)
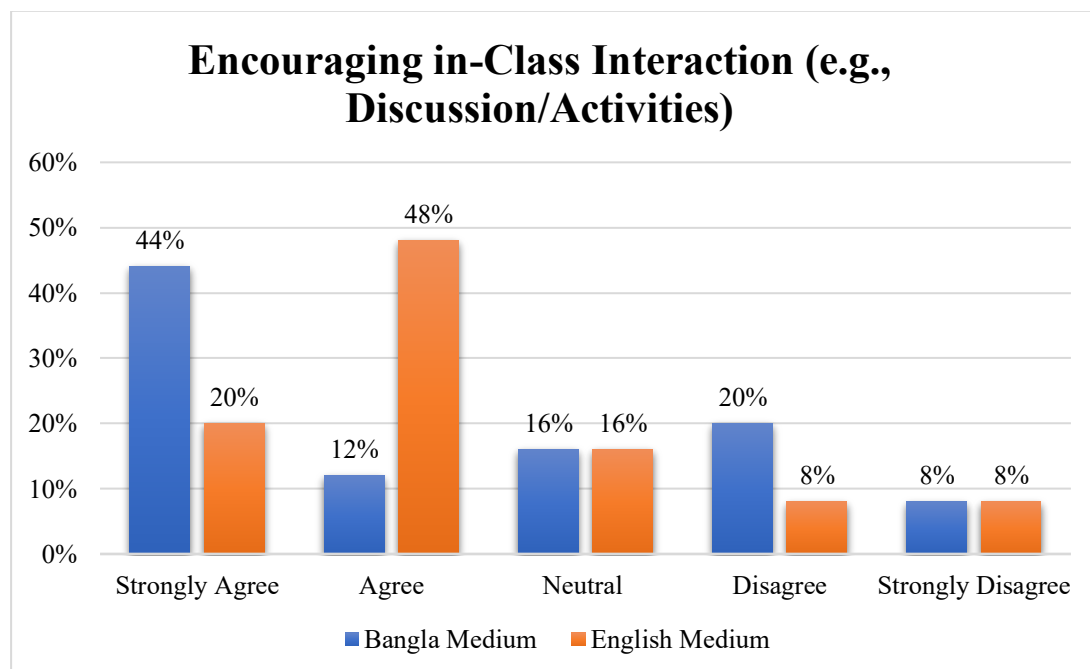
From Figure 15, it has been ascertained that 11 (44%) BM students strongly agreed and 3 (12%) students agreed on this point that their teachers encouraged them in-class interaction, such as making them participate in the discussion or any speaking activities. Moreover, 5 (20%) EM students strongly agreed, and 12 (48%) EM students agreed with the point.

Figure 16

Providing Constructive Feedback
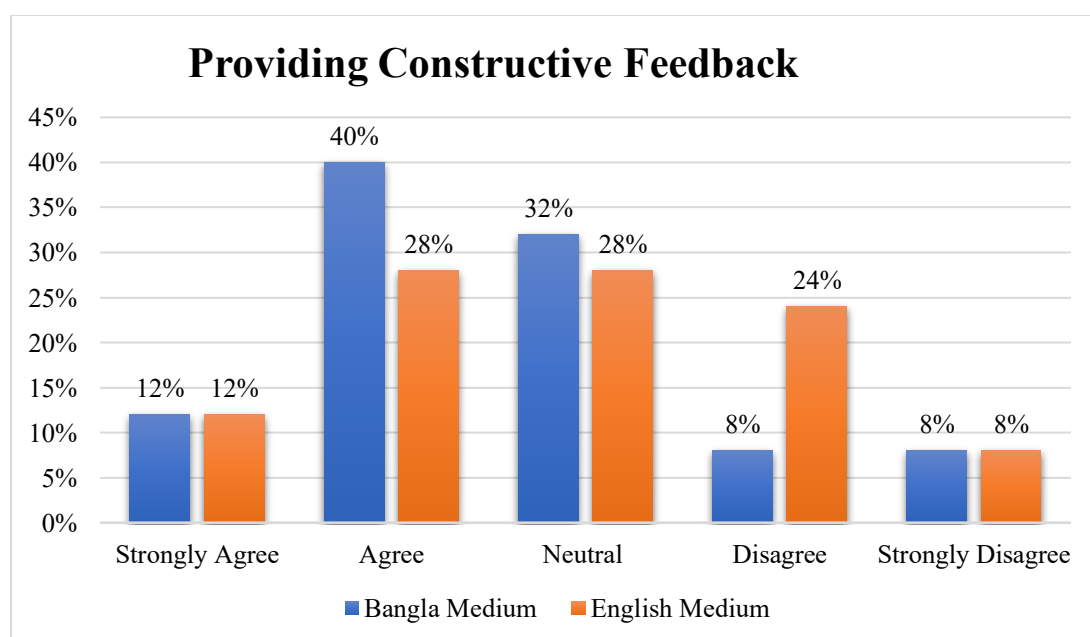
Figure 16 shows that 3 (12%) BM students strongly agreed and 10 (40%) BM students agreed that their instructor provides constructive feedback, while 6 (24%) EM students disagreed and 2 (8%) strongly disagreed with the point.

Figure 17

Instructor uses simple English terms for easier comprehension

Instructor Uses Simple English Terms for Easier Comprehension
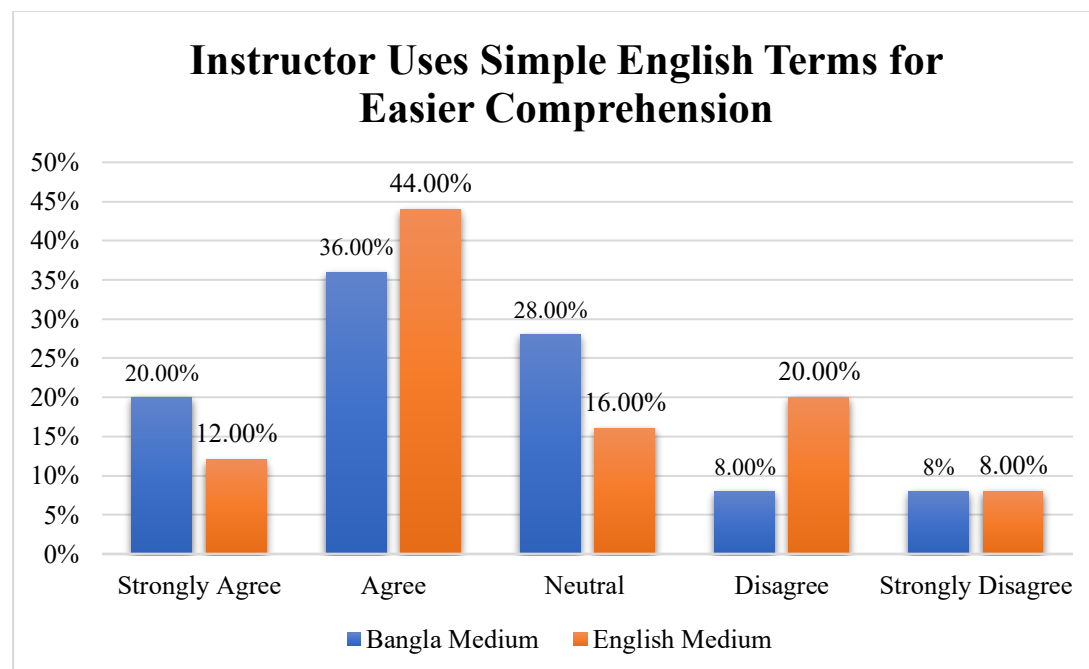
From Figure 17, it has been detected that 5 (20%) BM students strongly agreed, and 9 (36%) BM students agreed that their instructor uses simple English terms for easy comprehension. Similarly, 3 (12%) EM students strongly agreed, and 11 (44%) agreed with the point.

Figure 18

Instructor uses code-switching for greater comprehension

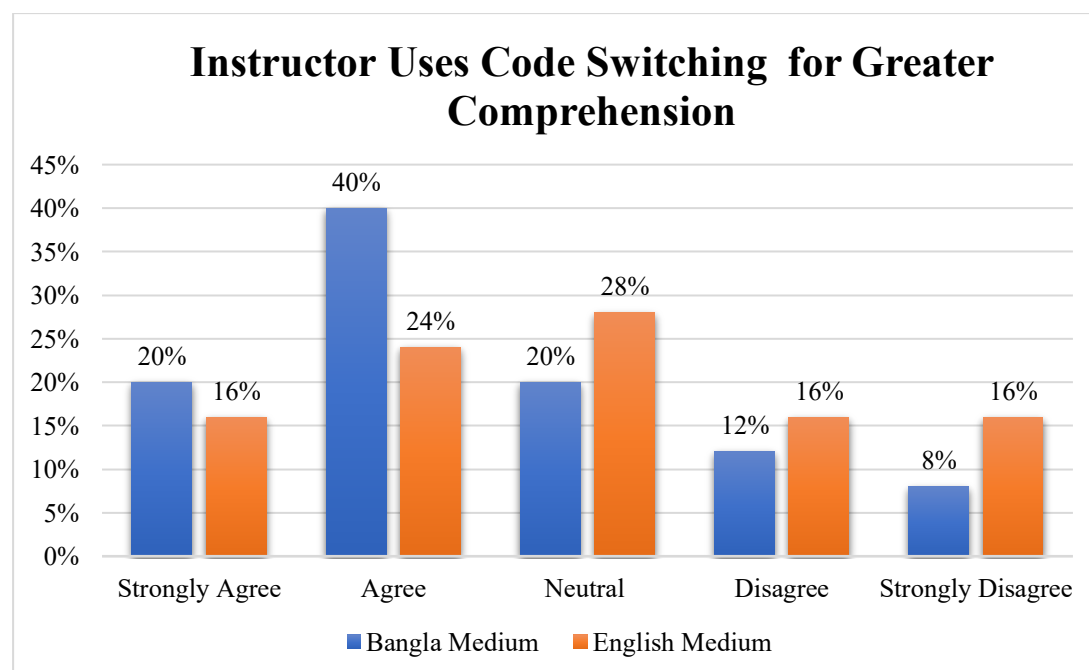**Instructor Uses Code Switching for Greater Comprehension**

Figure 18 shows that 5 (20%) BM students strongly agreed, and 10 (40%) BM students agreed that the instructor uses code-switching for greater comprehension. Similarly, 4 (16%) EM students strongly agreed, and 4 (16%) agreed with the point.

Giving enough support to the university to cope with this medium of instruction and to strengthen English language skills

An open-ended question was asked whether the university gave them enough support to cope with this medium of instruction and to strengthen their English language skills. A majority of the students wrote that the university did not give enough support to strengthen their language skills or to make them feel comfortable to cope with the medium of instruction. Some revealed that they took help from their classmates, and some took help from their family members. Some students exposed that it was their English language teachers who helped them enrich their English language skills:

> *My university does not provide any support for enriching English, but our English teacher is very helpful. She tries to make us comfortable studying in English* (Student 13; October 25, 2024).

Analysis of Teachers' Interview

Teachers of private universities were asked some open-ended, semi-structured questions where they shed light on the conception of inequitable and equitable educational practices, what their students felt about equity and inclusion in the class, the advantages of EMI for students, their experiences of conducting the classroom where both Bangla-medium and English-medium students existed, challenges in the classroom, constructive feedback that they preferred to provide in each class, instructional practices to engage students, strategies to encourage students' achievement if any of their students struggled what types of support they provided in order to cope with the medium of instruction.

- *Definition of Inequitable and Equitable Educational Practices:*

Before starting the interview questions regarding educational inequality in the classes, questions were asked to each of the teachers to determine their notions about inequitable and equitable educational practices. All of the teachers stated descriptive opinions on this question; for example, Salma (pseudonym) gave the appropriate definition of inequality, while Mahbub (pseudonym) asserted what actions he took in each class to address the existing educational inequality.

> *Inequitable educational practices refer to discrimination, bias, or unequal practices in educational institutions based on the students' medium, background, or communities* (Salma; Interview 4; October 28, 2024).

> *Equitable educational practice should be a system where all the students belong to the same level, which would be very challenging to ensure at the tertiary level because students generally tend to have a long history and background regarding their target language exposure. To ensure equitable educational practice, as a teacher, I focus on the need analysis to figure out which student belongs to what level* (Mahbub; Interview 2; October 27, 2024).

- *Students' Ideas about Equity and Inclusion at the University:*

After asking questions about their own views regarding inequality in educational practices, an additional question was asked to find out what they thought about their students' points of view on equity and inclusion at the university. The teachers stated that students of their universities

were satisfied due to the diversity of the classroom, and some explained how students could feel equity in the class.

> *I believe they feel equal in every aspect of the classroom since our classrooms are the place where every student may raise questions until everything is comprehensible, and I make sure there's no discrimination here* (Mahbub; Interview 2; October 27, 2024).

> *So far, I know all my students are happy about it because my university embraces all kinds of diversity. And this university has been practicing equitable educational practices since its inception* (Salma; Interview 4; October 28, 2024).

> *I believe students will feel equal if I give them marks without creating any bias and interact with each individual student* (Tonoy; Interview 8; March 28, 2025).

- *Benefits of Using English as a Medium of Instruction for Students:*

In order to find out what the teachers of the private universities thought about the usage of EMI at class, the question was asked to find out their perceptions regarding whether EMI is salubrious to the students where the majority (4 teachers) believed that learning English skills is important for their academic, professional life while 2 of the teachers gave distinct opinions. In this case, Rahima stated how EMI can be troubling for students and how this difficulty can be optimized:

> *I believe English as the only medium of instruction can be pretty tough for students at the tertiary level, especially if they are not well familiar with the language skills from the very beginning of their academic life. However, if they are taught well at the tertiary level, they can easily use the language for their communication* (Rahima; Interview 1; October 27, 2024).

- *Experiences of Conducting the Classroom where Both Bangla-medium and English-medium Students Exist:*

Since teachers at private universities have to conduct a number of classes each semester and both Bangla-medium and English-medium students may exist in those classes, the question was asked what types of experiences they had while conducting the classes where both Bangla-medium and English-medium students existed. The majority (4 teachers) shared that in those classrooms, they faced difficulties because of the different competency levels of both medium students. For example, Alam (pseudonym) revealed that he chose code-switching to conduct this type of class.

> *In this case, using English throughout the class becomes very difficult because both Bangla and English-medium students do not share the same level of competency and understanding of the learning contents. I believe conducting classes in a bilingual method is effective* (Alam; Interview 3; October 27, 2024).

Two of the teachers stated that if the teachers used appropriate teaching methods based on the students' levels, it would become easy to conduct classes where both mediums of students existed.

> *At our university, we teach mostly in English. However, because some students struggle to grasp the language easily, I try to use simple English terms and teach at a relaxed pace* (Rahima; Interview 1; October 27, 2024).

- *Challenges to Conduct Classes where Both Bangla-medium and English-medium Students Exist:*

Different teachers gave different opinions when asked what types of challenges they faced while conducting classes with both Bangla-medium and English-medium students. Two of the teachers stated that they did not face any significant challenge while conducting classes. However, the majority (4 teachers) revealed that they faced numerous difficulties while conducting classes.

> *Students who are from Bangla-medium schools are usually more shy, threatened, and demotivated than English-medium schools* (Rahima; Interview 1; October 27, 2024).

> *I use both Bangla and English in those classes where I find Bangla-medium students cannot understand the learning contents* (Salma; Interview 4; October 28, 2024).

- *Providing Constructive Feedback to the Students:*

Since the majority of the teachers faced numerous difficulties while conducting classes, I asked them what constructive feedback they provided for the betterment of students' learning. Different teachers followed different approaches while giving feedback; for example, Kona (pseudonym) asked them to check their grammatical errors, two of the teachers suggested reading English books and newspapers at home and practicing as much as they could, and three of the teachers tried to make learning content easy so that they could comprehend the topic easily.

> *I usually provide positive feedback. I appreciate the little improvements of those who work hard. I repeatedly encourage those who do not work hard to be involved in the learning process* (Kona; Interview 6; October 28, 2024).

- *Instructional Practices to Engage Students:*

Different teachers provided different points of view regarding what instructional practices they conducted to engage their students in the classroom. One teacher revealed that he attempted to help students express themselves in conversation. The majority (4 teachers) stated that they provided videos, quizzes, slides, research articles, staging drama, picturizing poetry, etc.

> *I try to use English as much as possible and use authentic materials from the target language. My language usage and course materials are mostly dependent on the students' level and capacity. If students are struggling to understand their content, I simplify the materials and use their mother tongue in a limited manner* (Kona; Interview 6; October 28, 2024).

> *I use a number of activities to encourage them, such as group and pair activities, checking reading comprehension, arranging interesting and contextual activities, etc.* (Gina; Interview 7; March 29, 2025).

- *Strategies to Encourage Student Achievement:*

Different teachers provided different points of view regarding what strategies they applied in order to encourage students to make themselves better. Two of the teachers revealed that they made the classroom setting comfortable so that the students fruitfully learned from the class, another teacher stated that he gave compliments to them when giving correct answers and sometimes provided bonus marks, and three of the teachers explained that they tried their best to motivate the students in the language classroom.

> *In my university, the classroom is organized to promote presentation and discussion. It is like a linear row of chairs where the teacher only discusses and the students only listen. But in my class, I sometimes change the arrangement, like a round shape or a couple shape for group and pair activities* (Rahima; Interview 1; October 27, 2024).

- *Support for the Students Who are Struggled:*

Different teachers provided different points of view regarding what types of support they provided so far if they found out their students were struggling due to poor language competency. Sara (pseudonym) revealed that she was motivated to express her thoughts in any way. Two of the teachers said that they provided synonyms to help them understand, and three of the teachers encouraged them to translate the text if it was comprehensible to them.

> *I take care of the students individually and encourage them to develop proficiency in the target language. If most of the students struggle with their target language, I use their mother tongue, Bangla, in a very limited manner* (Sara; Interview 5; October 28, 2024).

Discussion on Findings

This section provides a detailed analysis with reference to each of the research questions.

The perceptions of teachers and students regarding educational inequality in EMI classes

To address the first research question, teachers' interviews and students' questionnaires collected perceptions regarding educational inequality, and it had been found from the students' questionnaire that the majority of the BM students – (12% of BM students strongly agreed and 36% of students agreed) revealed that teachers were biased who were efficient in English especially those from English-medium. For this reason, (32% of BM students strongly agreed, and 24% agreed) thought that learning Bangla was less important than English. Due to the existing inequality, the majority of them (24% of BM students strongly agreed and 24% agreed)- believed that they would improve if they could use Bangla as the medium of instruction. Moreover, they found comfort among Bangla speakers. However, English-medium students did not encounter similar challenges. In open-ended responses, the majority wrote that EMI should be practiced in the classes. Here, the power relation between the lower class and the middle class in terms of educational opportunities can be easily detected (Bourdieu, 1974), and there are similarities in Nepal, where speaking English is linked to more social and economic opportunities (Sah & Karki, 2020).

According to the teachers' responses, they did not encounter educational inequality among students in the classes. They agreed that when different levels of students studied in the same class, some problems might appear, and they needed to analyze their competency level. They took numerous steps to make their learning comprehensible, such as using Bangla and English in speech, motivating others to raise questions, using simple English vocabulary in-class lectures, etc. Moreover, they approved that all students felt equality in the classroom. Chinese educators modified their methods to get their students more involved in class discussions in English (Fang & Hu, 2022).

Challenges teachers and students face due to educational inequality in EMI classes

This research question investigated the challenges teachers and students faced due to educational inequality in EMI classes. The students' questionnaire found that the majority (16% strongly agreed and 32% agreed) from BM faced challenges while communicating in English; 40% strongly agreed, and 12% agreed that their classmates teased them for their language skills. For that reason, they encountered challenges while making friends with English-proficient classmates. However, the EM students did not face similar kinds of challenges. From both mediums of students, it was found that their teachers did not provide immediate feedback. Moreover, instructors did not provide multiple teaching methods to make the lecture comprehensible for the students in different mediums**.** In an open-ended question, they revealed

that the university did not provide support to enrich their language skills or make them cope with the medium of instruction, so they took help from outside of the university. In a comparable way, Simbolon et al. (2020) found that students in Indonesia had difficulty with translation tools, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Teachers also highlighted a number of challenges while conducting classes, such as the existence of different competency levels of students, deficiency of content comprehension, the discouragement of the students to initiate practice in the classroom, etc. One of the teachers provided a detailed distinction between EM and BM students by stating that BM students are more reserved and demotivated than EM students. Thus, it can be claimed that educational inequality emerges not only from the English language competence of students but also from the insufficient EMI training of teachers and appropriate teaching quality (Hu & Duan, 2019; Rose et al., 2020a).

A number of ways these challenges may be addressed to ensure better teaching and learning

This research question investigated how better teaching and learning can be ensured. In order to ensure students' better learning, teachers revealed they utilized several techniques, such as encouraging them to read English books, newspapers, and journals, providing positive feedback, and practicing English with their classmates. Moreover, they provided videos, research articles, staging drama, picturizing poetry, etc., to enhance their language skills. Though the majority of the teachers used both Bangla and English in their conversation, they inspired them to have conversations in English and offered individual support when any student faced a struggle. By facilitating the use of L1 to improve comprehension, translanguaging was utilized as an educational approach in Vietnam to overcome learners' limited proficiency in English (Yuan et al., 2024).

When the same issues were asked of the students from both mediums, they unveiled similar scenarios, such as teachers encouraging them to read English journals, articles, short stories, etc., they found all the course materials were organized so they could connect themselves in numerous activities, the majority (12% strongly agreed and 40% agreed) of BM students stated that teachers provided constructive feedback. Despite the many challenges they encountered due to the existing educational disparities in the class, they still favor bilingual materials to improve their comprehension (Phuong & Nguyen, 2019). Here, a greater part of respondents from both mediums revealed that teachers used code-switching for their better conception. Moreover, the majority (20% strongly agreed and 36% agreed) of BM students and the majority (12% strongly agreed and 44% strongly agreed) of the EM students stated that teachers used simple vocabulary for easy comprehension.

Conclusion & Further Scope for Research

To meet the challenges of the new century, English language learning has become necessary, and because of the massive importance of English, it has become the compulsory subject in the curriculum at the primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels in Bangladesh and is the medium of instruction, especially at the private universities. One of the important purposes of this study is to find out whether students from different mediums (BM and EM) confront any disparity while using English as their medium of instruction. Since students of Bangladesh do not get opportunities to interact with native English speakers and BM students get restrained opportunities to improve their English language skills at the early levels of their academic lives, English-only instruction at the tertiary level can be troublesome for them. From the discussion above, it has been found that BM students encounter a number of experiences of educational inequality, such as getting teased by their classmates for insufficient language skills, facing

discrimination from their own course teachers, being less confident to speak, being fearful of making friends with English-proficient classmates, etc. These existing challenges hamper the creation of an equitable classroom and discourage students' competency. In this regard, this study also presented some solutions based on the students' and teachers' perspectives, which were taken to improve the student's skills, such as encouraging them to read English materials, practicing with their classmates, providing positive feedback, assisting the lagging behind, applying both Bangla and English language to support. Since BM-background students face more difficulties than others, university authorities should take immediate steps so that the classes will not confront those challenges in the future. To address these problems, pre-university English is offered to students in some countries before they are admitted to those universities (Thorp et al., 2017). Though in our countries, some universities provide this type of opportunity; it is significant for all the universities to consider this program earnestly for the betterment of students' learning. Furthermore, educational institutions may provide EMI training for teachers and peer mentoring programs where EM and BM students work together in the classroom and beyond. Here, these strategies may ensure the incorporation of pedagogical ideas into instruction focused on the learner's needs.

Further Scope for Research

On the basis of the findings of my research, I feel the need for future research studies on the following issues:

- ✓ Because of the time limitation and students' and teachers discomfited attitude towards assisting in the study, the research had not been completed with a large sample size. So, the future research study can be made more valid with a large sample size.
- ✓ In future research, data can be collected from different private universities all around Bangladesh to get a vivid picture of the tertiary education system.

Reference

Aguilar, M. (2017). Engineering lecturers' views on CLIL and EMI. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 20*(6), 722- 735. http://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2015.1073664

Alam, K.C.Z. (2022). English as the medium of instruction in higher education in Bangladesh: A colonial legacy for empowerment or a structure asking for decolonisation? [Master's Thesis, BRAC University]. PQDT Open. http://hdl.handle.net/10361/17607

Alhamami, M. (2023). Inequity, inequality, and language rights in English as a medium of instruction programs. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 99*(C), 1-11. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2023.102297

Banu, R. & Sussex, R. (2001). English in Bangladesh after independence: Dynamics and policy and practice. In B. Moore (Ed.), *Who's Centric Now? The Present State of Post-Colonial Englishes* (pp. 122-147). Oxford University Press.

Bax, S. (2010). *Researching English bilingual education in Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea*. Retrieved February 1, 2015, from https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/publication_2_-_researching_english_bilingual_education.pdf

Bourdieu, P. (1974). The school as a conservative force: Scholastic and cultural inequalities. In Eggleston, J. (Ed.), *Contemporary Research in the Sociology of Education* (pp. 32-46). Methuen.

Cickovska, E. (2015). The importance of learning foreign languages in the higher education of entrepreneurs. *Faculty of Business Economics and Entrepreneurship*, *EEE*(2015), 219-233. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318365756

Cooper, R. L. (1989). *Language Planning and Social Change*. Cambridge University Press.

Creswell, J. W. & Clark, V. L. P. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research.* Sage.

Dafouz, E. & Gray, J. (2022). Rethinking the roles of ELT in English-medium education in multilingual university settings: An introduction. *ELT Journal, 76*(2)*.* 163-171. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccab096

Erling, E. J., Hamid, M. O., & Seargeant, P. (2013). Grassroots attitudes to English as a language for international development in Bangladesh. In Erling, E. J. & Seargeant, P. (Eds.), *English and development*: *Policy and pedagogy* (pp.88-110). https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847699473%E2%80%91008

Fang, F. & Hu, G. (2022). English medium instruction, identity construction, and negotiation of Teochew-speaking learners of English. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development.* Advance Online Publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2022.2051711

Ferguson, G. (2006). *Language planning and education*. Edinburgh University Press.

Floris, F. D. (2014). Learning subject matter through English as the medium of instruction: Students' and teachers' perspectives. *Asian Englishes, 16*(1), 47-59. http://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2014.884879

Hanh, N. T. H., Ngoc, H. T. Duyen, D. T. M. & Thuong, P. T. T. (2024). Factors affecting learner autonomy in EMI studying of English-major students at some economics universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. *International Journal of Language Instruction, 3*(3), 36-53. https://doi.org/10.54855/ijli.24333

Hamid, M. O. (2006). English teachers' choice of language for publication: Qualitative insights from Bangladesh. *Current Issues in Language Planning, 7*(1), 126–140. http://doi.org/10.2167/cilp090.0

Hamid, M. O. (2011). Planning for failure: English and language policy and planning in Bangladesh. In J. A. Fishman & O. Gracía (Eds.), *Handbook of language and ethnic identity: The success-failure continuum in language and ethnic identity efforts* (Volume 2) (pp. 192-203). Oxford University Press.

Hamid, M. O., Nguyen, H. T. M., & Baldauf, R. B. (2013). Medium of instruction in Asia: Context, processes and outcomes. *Current Issues in Language Planning, 14*(1), 1–15. http://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2013.792130

Hamid, O & Amin, A. M. (2022). English as a medium instruction in Bangladeshi higher education: A policy perspective. In Mckinley, J. & Galloway, N. (Eds), *English Medium Instruction Practices in Higher Education: International Perspectives.* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.

Hamid, M, O. & Jahan, I. (2015). Language, identity, and social divides: Medium of instruction debates in Bangladeshi print media. *Comparative Education Review, 59*(1), 75-101. http://doi.org/10.1086/679192

Haque, S. (2019). *An exploratory study of English teaching and learning in three Alia Madrasahs of Bangladesh,* [Master's Thesis, BRAC University]. PQDT Open. http://hdl.handle.net/10361/13669

Hasan, M. K. (2022). A critical investigation of the status of English at the tertiary level education in Bangladesh. *MEXTESOL Journal, 46*(3). http://doi.org/10.61871/mj.v46n3-15

Hu, G. & Duan, Y. (2019). Questioning and responding in the classroom: A cross-disciplinary study of the effects of instructional mediums in academic subjects at a Chinese university. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 22*(3), 303–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1493084

Kader, M. A. & Salam, M. A. (2018). A comprehensive study on service quality and satisfaction level to the English medium education system in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Contemporary Research and Review, 9*(7), 20850- 20866. http://doi.org/10.15520/ijcrr/2018/9/07/541

Kaplan, R. B.; Baldauf, R. B. (1997). *Language planning from practice to theory*. Multilingual Matters.

Kym, I. & Kym, M. H. (2014). Students' perceptions of EMI in higher education in Korea. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 11*(2), 35-61.

Marcjanik, M. (2023). EMI in higher education: Current challenges. *Anglica An International Journal of English Studies, 32*(2), 137-155. http://doi.org/10.7311/0860-5734.32.2.07

Nashruddin, W. (2015). Teaching English as a foreign language at *madrasah ibtidaiyyah*: Facts and challenges. *Dinamika Ilmu*, *15*(1), 67-84. http://doi.org/10.21093/di.v15i1.94

Pecorari, D. & H. Malmström. (2018). At the crossroads of TESOL and English medium instruction. *TESOL Quarterly, 52*(3), 497–515. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.470

Phuong, H. Y. & Nguyen, T. T. (2019). Students' perceptions towards the benefits and drawbacks of EMI classes. *English Language Teaching, 12*(5), 88-100. http://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v12n5p88

Rao, N. & Hossain, M. I. (2011). Confronting poverty and educational inequalities: Madrasas as a strategy for contesting dominant literacy in rural Bangladesh. *International Journal of Educational Development, 31*(6), 623-633. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.01.012

Ricento, T. (2015). Introduction. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *Language Policy and Political Economy: English in a Global Context* (pp. 1–24). Oxford University Press.

Richards, J. & Pun, J. (2022). *Teaching and learning in medium English instruction*. Routledge. http://doi.org/10.4324/9781003191445

Rose, H., Curle, S., Aizawa, I. & Thompson, G. (2019). What drives success in English medium-taught courses? The interplay between language proficiency, academic skills, and motivation. *Studies in Higher Education, 45*(1). 2149–2161. http://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1590690

Roy, R. K. (2024, June 3). English medium schools are increasingly getting popular. *The Daily Sun.* https://www.daily-sun.com/post/751350

Rusch, E. & Perry, E. (1999). Resistance to change: An alternative story. *International Journal of Educational Reform, 8*(3), 285-300.

Sah, P. K. & G. Li. (2018). English medium instruction (EMI) as linguistic capital: Promises and realities. *International Multilingual Research Journal, 12*(2): 109–123. http://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2017.1401448.

Sah, P.K. & Karki, J. (2020). Elite appropriation of English as a medium of instruction policy and epistemic inequalities in Himalayan schools. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 44*(1), 20-34. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2020.1789154

Sherwani, S. H. T. (2017). Teachers' Perspectives of the use of CLT in ELT classrooms: A case of Soran district of Northern Iraq. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, *8*(3), 191-206. https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no3.13

Simbolon, N. E., Oliver, R. & Mercieca, P. (2020). Lecturers' perceptions of English medium instruction (EMI) practice at a university in Indonesia. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities, 28* (2), 1065 – 1081.

Smith, M. C., Elle, F. Grudnoff, L., Haigh, M., Hill, M. & Ludlow, L. (2016). Initial teacher education: What does it take to put equity at the center? *Teaching and Teacher Education, 57*, 67-78. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.03.006

Sofyana, U. & Pahamzah, J. (2022). Social Class and EFL Learning in Indonesia: Listening to Teachers' Perception. *JELTS, 5*(1), 91-101. http://dx.doi.org/10.48181/jelts.v5i1.16182

Sullivan, A. (2016). Bourdieu and education: How useful is Bourdieu's theory for researchers? *The Netherlands Journal of Social Sciences, 38*(2), 144-166.

Tam, D. T. M. & Chi, N. T. M. (2024). Impacts of EMI courses on English language proficiency: Students' voices. *International Journal of Language Instruction, 3*(4), 143-159. https://doi.org/10.54855/ijli.24348

Thorpe, A., Snell, M., Davey-Evans, S., & Talman, R. (2017). Improving the academic performance of non-native English-speaking students: The contribution of pre-sessional English language programmes. *Higher Education Quarterly, 71*(1), 5–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12109

Tran, L. & Nguyen, H. T. (2018). Internationalisation of higher education in Vietnam through English medium instruction (EMI): Practices, tensions and implications for local language policy. In I. Liyanage (Ed.), *Multilingual Education Yearbook* (pp. 92-106). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77655-2_6

Vietnam International Education Department. (2016). *List of approved joint education programs.* Retrieved from https://vied.vn/imgs/2016/09/LKDT/LKDT_1.9.2016.pdf.

Yuan, L., Fang, F. & Hu, G. (2024). Are students prepared and supported for English medium instruction in Chinese higher education to promote educational equality? *System, 125*(2024), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103423

Zacharias, N. T. (2013). Navigating through the English-medium-of-instruction policy: Voices from the field. *Current Issues in Language Planning, 14*(1), 1-16. http://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2013.782797

Biodata

Nushrat Mahjabeen is a Lecturer in English with an MA in TESOL and a BA in ESOL from the University of Dhaka. She has over three years of teaching experience and expertise in English language teaching, syllabus evaluation, and AI in education. She has authored multiple research articles currently under review in esteemed journals.