International Journal of Research in English Education

Is the Universal English Education from the Primary Level in Bangladesh Necessary? A Domain Wise Study

Md Khaled Bin Chowdhury

Department of English, BGC Trust University, Bangladesh

E-mail: khaledchowdhury70@gmail.com

Received: July 13, 2017 Accepted: September 9, 2017 Online Published: December 20, 2017

Abstract

Bangladesh is a monolingual country where Bangla is the official language for education, administration, media, literature, and cultural activities. The constitution of Bangladesh in 1972 recognized the undisputed status of Bangla as the state language of Bangladesh. Various measures have been taken by successive governments to ensure the widespread use of Bangla in all spheres of national life. In Parallel, English is being taught as a compulsory subject from class 1 throughout class 12. But the introduction of English as a compulsory subject from class 1 in the primary level has been condemned as an unnecessary burden on the infantile psyche which is already burdened with the stress of learning other subjects. The question thus raised is whether we need to teach all our population English compulsorily or selectively on the basis of needs analysis. I will try to find an answer to this question through the analysis of the use of English and Bangla in various domains of national life. This paper suggests that instead of teaching English compulsorily from primary education onward, a need-based English language teaching policy should be planned.

Keywords: Bangla, English, bilingualism, monolingualism, domains

1. Introduction

In Bangladesh, majority of people use Bangla in almost all the domains of their life. Before 1971, in the united Pakistan, the people of the East Pakistan notably the Bangalees had to use Urdu side by side English in some domains of their life such as administration and inter-state communication. Urdu was taught as a compulsory subject from class three. Those who did not have proficiency in Urdu relied on English for communication with their counterparts in West Pakistan. The undivided Pakistan was a multilingual country with Urdu, Bangla, Hindi, and Sindhi being used in respective states. The situation could well be compared with India, another multilingual country. In such a multilingual setting, English was the lingua franca for communication. English enjoyed the status of a second language. After the liberation, Bangladesh made Bangla the state language. Bangla replaced English in all official communications except for communication by foreign missions and among countries. Bangla also became the only medium at secondary and higher secondary levels.

Attempts were made to translate English books into Bangla to meet the needs of books in different subjects. Now Bangla is being widely used in all major domains of our national life. But there were many people who created uproar and still are doing the same about the necessity of English. They are crying hoarse that our standard of education is going down because our graduates are not becoming competent in English. They equate standard of education with English proficiency of the students.

The policy-makers opted for teaching English from the primary level as a compulsory subject. Bilingualism was made universal in our whole education system without thinking about its usefulness and identifying the domains of use of English and Bangla. So the ultimate result was that we could not create proficient manpower either in mother tongue or in English. There is no doubt that our teaching methodology of both MT and English is faulty. But my point is that instead of teaching English to all the students from the primary level without identifying the domains of both mother

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.2.4.1]

tongue and English, we need to give a serious thought to our language policy to minimize the wastage of our valuable resources.

2. Methodology

This research follows the qualitative method of research and is based completely on the secondary data. That is, this research does not rely on survey method. Various literature on the suitability of Mother Tongue as a medium of instruction has been consulted. Major domains of national life such as education, media, law, and administration have been investigated to see the comparative use of English and Bangla in these sectors. Moreover, data from government documents such as report and websites of different ministries have been collected and used to justify my viewpoint. A piece of research by Faheem Hasan Shahed titled "The Dysfunctional Bilingualism in Bangladeshi Education and Society" (2014) investigating the current situation of bilingual education that has been done depending on the primary data has also been reviewed and used as a reference tool. Some findings from the data analysis of that paper have been quoted to corroborate my viewpoint.

3. Literature Review

There are different opinions about the necessity of bilingualism in the education system of a country. Those who advocate for learning more than one language from childhood try to base their arguments on educational psychology and cognitive science. They argue that learning multiple languages increases brain mass and improves memory. They also argue that bilingualism contributes to better listening skills. A bilingual can attain better listening skill for his/her effort to bridge the gaps existing between two languages. According to Krizman et al. (2012), being bilingual can lead to improved listening skills, since the brain has to work harder to distinguish different types of sounds in two or more languages. They believe that learning a second language ultimately enforces the base of L1. Since learning a second language draws your attention to the abstract rules and structure of language, it can make one better at one's first language. Cognitive boosts like improved attention and better multi-tasking may be achieved because both languages are active in bilinguals simultaneously (Francis, 1999).

Contrary to bilingual education from the early childhood, a different view is prevalent that suggests that the medium of education should be MT because education using MT is the most effective way of the development of a nation. Those who advocate for monolingual education say about the advantages of educating children in their mother tongue both for their later acquisition and transference of reading skills to other languages and for their total gain from educational input. MT-based education has become an important concept in the field of primary education in many parts of the world (Dea et al., 2014). MT-based education has a positive role in ensuring quality education. The use of MT as a medium of instruction during one's early years of schooling results in improved acquisition of knowledge (Benson, cited in Dea et al., 2014).

MT education, according to the proponents of the proposition, gives a number of benefits in terms of quality and efficiency of education. They are increased access and equity (related to gender), improved learning outcomes, reduced repetition and drop-out rates, socio-cultural benefits, and lower overall costs (Mother Tongue-Bilingual Education, 2014). Moreover, there are plenty of research claiming that a second language is learned best when a first language has been learned well. So, proficiency in MT is very crucial for better L2 learning.

There is also research about strong connections between the learners' use of MT or English and girls' school participation and educational opportunities in developing countries. Women and girls, especially in rural areas of these countries, are the worst victims of injustices in language policy. Girls and women cannot get contact with the foreign language because they pass most of their time at home and with family in rural areas where the local language is spoken. This means that girls and women are less likely than boys and men to understand foreign language instruction for want of facilities and are therefore to a great extent have minimal benefits from the education process (Mother Tongue-Bilingual Education, 2014).

The opponents of bilingual education from childhood also opine that bilingual education poses some threats to the proper development of childhood because a bilingual child has to encounter two distinct cultures. Bilingualism necessarily implies bi-culturism (Richard, 1976) indicating the individual's cultural awareness of two social systems because language carries with it its own history, sociology, and cultural norms. So, if a child is faced with bilingualism in his infant years when he is in the process of developing his L1 skills and norms, he is in a kind of dilemma of handling two distinct world views associated with two languages. He will never be in a situation to differentiate

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.2.4.1]

between the norms, functions, and styles of the two cultures. According to Clarke (1976), students' difficulties in learning a SL stem from their lack of understanding of the social context of the language.

There is no doubt about the fact that the use of MT as a language of instruction is effective in helping the acquisition of second language (Heugh et al., as cited in Dea et al., 2014). It is also pointed out that the use of the first language is a factor in educational achievement and that the educational process in any society ought to be conducted through a language that both the learner and the teacher command well (Robinson, 1996 as cited in Seyoum, 2009).

To conclude, universal bilingualism in education from childhood poses difficulties of various types in the way of educational development of children. The problems are manifested in attainment of literacy by all, monetary involvement for learning a second language, and most importantly extra burden on the infantile psyche.

3.1 What is Bilingualism?

To define the term bilingualism is somewhat problematic. The actual nuance of the term is not always as clear as it sounds—specifically when we mean to produce efficient bilingual personnel in various domains of our national and international lives. A simple definition goes like this. Bilingualism means the use of two languages either by an individual or by a group of speakers such as the inhabitants of a particular region or a nation (Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics).

From a global perspective, it can be said in accordance with Suzanne (1995) that most of the people around the world actually speak more than one language and so are multilingual instead of homogeneous. In this sense, even in the Bangladeshi 'monolingual' setting, there are multilingual speech communities such as the 'Tripuras' (speaking Kokborok, Chakma, and Bangla), the 'Sylhetis' (speaking Sylheti, Bangla, and English), the 'Chittagonians' (speaking Chatgaiyan and Bangla), and so on (cited in Shahed, 2014, p.107). Suzanne also says that in most South Asian countries 'multilingualism is not an incidental feature of language use, but a central factor and an organizing force' in people's daily lives. So, it can be said that most of the people are multilinguals through acquisition process rather than monolingual and there should not be any unnecessary fetish about necessarily learning a second language in formal settings in a monolingual country. As Grosjen (1982) has pointed out that any so-called monolingual countries have a high percentage of speakers who use two or more languages on a regular basis, whereas many multilingual countries have rather few bilinguals.

3.2 The Objectives of Bilingual Education

The implicit goals of bilingual education can be listed as follows (Ashworth, 1985 as cited in Shahed, 2014):

1. To assimilate individuals or groups into the mainstream of society,
2. To unify a multilingual society,
3. To enable people to communicate with the outside world,
4. To gain an economic advantage for individuals or groups,
5. To preserve ethnic or religious ties,
6. To reconcile different political, or socially separate communities,
7. To spread and maintain the use of colonial language,
8. To embellish or strengthen the educational elites,
9. To give equal status to languages of unequal prominence in the society, and
10. To deepen understanding of language and culture.

From the above-mentioned goals, it is clear that two groups of students benefit from the bilingual education: those who wish to learn a second language by choice and those who must learn it if they are to prosper within the education system and later in the outside world (ibid). Moreover, the objectives of bilingual education are not identical in all countries. Ferguson et al. (cited in Shahed, 2014, p.110) comments, 'The implicit goals of bilingual education vary from society to society; they often overlap within a given society and may or may not reflect the aims of the society at large.'

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.2.4.1]

Regarding Bangladeshi context, it can be said that from all the goals of bilingual education, only points 3, 4, and 8 match our bilingual education (Shahed, 2014). About point 3, it can be said that certainly we need competent people in English for international communication but what is the number? Do we need to teach all people English for that purpose? Can any ESP course serve the purpose? About point 4, we can say that due to capitalization and globalization, the balance of economic and social power has gone awry and they have become relatively insignificant. Regarding point 8, it can be said that English has become a tool for creating social distinction among the population that needs to be got rid of. People with English skills are snatching all the benefits of job earning and other social upliftment.

3.3 Types of Bilingual Education

Fishman (1976) mentioned the four categories of 'bilingual education programs.' Fishman talked about these regarding the MT and the official language (Ashworth, 1985):

Type 1: *Transitional bilingualism*: Students use first language in the early classes so that they can adjust in school or master the subject matter till they learn the second language properly for using that as the medium of instruction and after that the first language is dropped.

Type 2: *Monoliterate bilingualism:* Students develop aural-oral skills in both languages. However, literacy skills are developed only in the official language, not in the MT.

Type 3: *Biliterate bilingualism (partial)*: Fluency and literacy are desired in both languages, but literacy in MT is restricted to certain subject matter—normally that are related to the ethnic group and its cultural heritage.

Type 4: *Biliterate bilingualism (full)*: Students must develop all kinds of skills in both languages in all domains.

From the above categories, we see that the current Bangladeshi ELT approaches match'type 4.' But then, the question remains: whether or not all Bangladeshis need to become 'full biliterate bilinguals' (Shahed, 2014, p.111). And have we reached that level or can we expect to reach it in near future? It is next to impossible to reach that level in near future as is evident from our current state of English literacy.

3.4 Who is a Competent Bilingual in Bangladesh?

Shahed (2014, p.114) encapsulates that a 'competent bilingual' in Bangladesh may be any one of the following persons:

1. One who can speak and write English fluently as much as s/he can speak and write fluent Bangla,

2. One who can speak English fluently but has limited writing skills; however, on the other hand, s/he can write Bangla very well,

3. One who cannot speak fluent English but can write it appropriately and can also write Bangla well,

4. One who cannot express oneself properly in verbal or written English, but has very well developed receptive skills in English; she/he can understand everything in English when she/he reads or hears, and she/he can write and speak good Bangla,

5. One who cannot write either good proper Bangla or English, but has the spoken communicative skills in both languages which she/he uses in her/his daily life (e.g. in his job) perfectly,

6. One who has a very solid command of English—be it writing or speaking—but can only speak and not write Bangla well.

So, from the above categories it is evident that competence in one or two of the skills in both English and MT is considered competence in bilingualism. But it is very difficult to ascertain the number of competent bilinguals in Bangladesh from the above mentioned categories because there are over-lapping among them. There are many people who are very competent in spoken English, but cannot write correct English. On the other hand, there are many people who are good neither in English nor in Bangla. It also cannot be determined who is using which language for what purpose. Bilingualism is also relative and difficult to achieve "native-like control of two languages" as defined by Bloomfield. At what point do we decide that a person is now 'native like'? (Harding-Esch & Riley, 2007).

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.2.4.1]

3.5 History of Bilingual Education in Bangladesh

Mcleod (cited in Rahman et al., 2010, p.116) says that Bangladesh was under Indian subcontinent which was under British rule from 1757—1947. The European missionaries and East India Company established some educational institutions (Phillipson, 1992). The imperialistic education began from the period of British colonization, that is, early 19th century (Rahman et al., 2010). At the beginning of 19th century, the English language schools based on British model were established in the region, which is now Bangladesh (Ali et al., as cited in Rahman et al., 2010). Only those Indians who were proficient in English were recruited for the government job (Phillipson, 1992). At the end of the first half of 19th century, the British rulers made this continent a field of trade and business (Young, 1957). So, they started to give attention to the education of the natives with English as a medium so that the natives can explore their (Western) language, literature, science, and technology. Thomas B. Macauly passed an important resolution in 1835 with the goal to teach some Indians who retain their Indian-ness in blood and color but British in taste and ideology (Young, 1957).

The hidden agenda of the British was to create some so called British elites who would be Britain's future customers, particularly in terms of their language and culture (Rahman et al., 2010). After 104 Macaulay's resolution, the promotion of English was accelerated by political, economic, and social power; thus, the seed of linguistic and cultural imperialism was sown (Phillipson, 1992). So, we see that the British rulers were not motivated by philanthropic intention to teach the Indians English. This practice of English education from primary to tertiary level continued throughout the Pakistan period with Urdu having been taught as a compulsory subject.

There was a kind of indecision about the position of MT and English in the curriculum since the inception of Bangladesh.

The first Bangladesh Education Commission headed by Dr. Qudrat-E-Khuda recommended that there should be no other language up to class v except MT and from class vi to xii, English would be taught as a compulsory subject. The National Curriculum Committee (NCC) that was formed after the acceptance of the report, could not reach at any consensus regarding from which class to teach English. So, the higher level, that is, the Cabinet gave the decision about English in the curriculum. That is, English started from class 1. There was a negative impact of this decision of teaching English from so early a stage. As a result, the average child could acquire neither English nor MT properly (Shahed, 2009). A second language at so pre-mature an age took away their time, attention, and ability from MT acquisition.

4. Necessity of Education in Mother Tongue in Bangladesh

Generally the literacy rate in Bangla is still not up to the international standard. A recent survey by an international organization reveals the fact in its monthly publication. Though the target reading fluency for children is 45-60 words per minute by the end of Grade 2, a recent study conducted by Room to Read found that in Bangladesh students at the end of grade 2 could only read an average of 33 words per minute and 16% of those students could not read even a single word (An Unprecedented Study in Bangladesh, Room to Read, October 2014.). So, we see that our MT education is itself an unsystematic, unscientific, and neglected domain. The Education Commission after the country's independence recognized that "language teaching in our country is defective and unsystematic. It should be improved soon. There is no need for learning other languages except the MT up to class v" (Talukdar, 1985, translated from Bangla by this author). Moreover, adolescents can learn faster than the younger children and if they get proper motivation, they can become proficient in second language acquisition much more quickly (Harding-Esch & Riley, 2007). What Graddol (1997) says about the problems of English education in general is relevant in this regard. He said that many countries lack qualified teachers or other resources to make the teaching of English in primary schools effective.

5. Critique of Bilingualism in a Monolingual Country like Bangladesh

It is a misconceived idea that our development is impossible without English. But, the fact is that we are callous in giving due attention to neither Bangla nor English. The situation is dichotomous (Humayun Azad, 2010). Charles, A. Ferguson and Anwar S. Dhil piloted 14 important and insightful models showing the relation between language planning and national development. Their second model postulates that a country naturally tends to prioritize only one language for development. The use of more than one language in the development work poses threats of several types.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.2.4.1]

So, when any country goes ahead for development, only one language starts to be used in the process and in course of time becomes the dominant one (p.58).

He adds that in the development process of Bangladesh both English and Bangla are being used, but neither of them is getting prominence. Though many decision-makers want to prioritize English, for political reasons such as popular mandate, the rulers are compelled to prefer Bangla to English. Ultimately the development of Bangladesh is hampered due to this situation of conflicting interests between two languages and consequently this situation disrupts the progress of both the language and the country. If only Bangla were used as the language for development, Bangla would very soon reach a standard, new vocabulary would be created, spelling would be systematic, terminology would be developed, and syntax would be disciplined (Azad, 2010).

6. Unplanned Universal Bilingualism

It is unfortunate that we have been maintaining unplanned bilingualism in our education from the primary level for ages. We are crying hoarse that we cannot do without English. As a compulsory subject, English is being taught from class 1 through class 12. To justify the policy we refer to the necessity of English as a global language and the language education policy of other countries. But the countries we refer to are multilingual. On the other hand, ours is a monolingual country and, more importantly, we have not yet identified our domains of English use. We are more worried about the poor English knowledge of our students but pay no attention to MT education which has a similarly inferior quality. We are investing more efforts on English learning and teaching at the cost of MT education but the result is still very poor. This diverts a huge portion of the focus and attention of our policy- makers from MT to English. At the peril of MT we are concentrating on English language. But we should not create this uproar about English because Bangla occupies an unquestionable position in all domains of our national life.

6.1 Counter-arguments against Universal Bilingualism

So should we stop this present policy of bilingual education from the primary level? Will the 'switch' to MT yield positive results for the education? The prominent educationist Sirajul Islam Chowdhury (1992) gives a summative answer to this discourse. He comments that to impose bilingualism on the whole nation is not only impractical but also undesirable and ideally it should be voluntary rather than obligatory.

Musa gives similar opinion about the discourse of bilingualism. He says

> We need to think if our rural farmers, laborers, fishermen, blacksmiths, and others need to be or want to be bilinguals. It is more important to become educated rather than to become bilinguals. Bilingualism should not adversely affects one's possibility to become educated. Though bilingualism is necessary for Bangladesh, it would not be good to drag the entire population into this necessity (Musa, 1995 as cited in Shahed, 2014).

7. Domain-wise Analysis of English Use

I shall analyze the domain-wise use of Bangla and English and find answers to the following questions. How much of bilingualism do we need to maintain to address the needs in these domains? Is English necessary in all domains? Can we do without English for all? Why is there so much fuss about English? To find answer to these questions, we have to investigate the domains where English is claimed to be necessary. Is English being used widely in all these domains? The domains to be analyzed are: a. Administration, b. Education, c. Media, d. Law, e. Home, and f. Outside Home.

7.1 Administration

The language of public office in Bangladesh is mostly Bangla. Though not mandatory, all the works in public offices are conducted in Bangla except communication with outside world. It is true that there are a few instances of using English by senior government officials. To stop this practice on 29 April, 2014, the High Court also issued a rule on the government to explain in two weeks why it should not be directed to use Bangla mandatorily in all sectors including offices and courts of the country as per Bangla Bhasha Procholon Aain (Bangla Language Introduction Law of 1987).

We see that there were initiatives and signs of sincere efforts to use Bangla from the top political leadership of the country during various governments. But there were antagonistic forces which did not want to let it happen. The

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.2.4.1]

colonial mentality of the civil and military bureaucracy and 'nouveau riche' tried to marginalize Bangla. The adage 'the foreign dogs are better than the domestic scholars' is applicable to them.

7.2 Education

After the independence in 1971, out of nationalistic feelings and love for mother tongue, the government banned English medium schools in 1972 (Banu & Sussex, 2001). In the meeting of Council Committee held on 28th December 1978, the following opinion was also expressed strongly about the use of MT in education. Stress should be laid on preparing the coming generation from the very elementary school level for application and use of Bangla in all activities of life and living.

Though the situation has changed later and more importance is being given on English education, still English has got limited use in education. In education, English is being used in a limited way in such institutions as English medium schools, a few class 1 private universities, Moreover, the special training academies of Defense Forces and cadet colleges use English as the medium of instruction. Other than the private universities and defense academies mentioned above and the English departments of public and private universities, the medium of instruction in all schools, colleges, and universities is Bangla. It was expected at the time of enacting the Private Universities Act, 1992, that the medium of instruction of these universities would be English to make the graduates competent for the global market. But it was not the case. Apart from these institutions mentioned above, the medium of instruction in all public and private schools, colleges, and universities is Bangla.

Bangla is the medium of instruction in mainstream Bangla medium (Kamol, 2009). Most of the students of Bangladesh go through this stream (Banu & Sussex, 2001). There are two types of institutions under Bangla medium: Public and Private. However, each type has a primary, secondary (S.S.C), and higher secondary (H.S.C) level (Haque, 2011). Public schools and colleges provide only Bangla medium education. A few English medium schools follow the British and American curriculum. The number of English medium schools is very insignificant compared to the total number of Bangla medium schools. Compared to the Bangla-medium schools and colleges, the total number of English medium schools in Bangladesh might be lower than 0.5 percent. According to Kamol (2009), there are approximately 500 English medium schools in Bangladesh. The number might be actually greater than this. These schools are attended by a limited number of privileged people. They go abroad for higher studies and never to return home.

In vocational education too, Bangla plays a dominant role as the medium of instruction. While the middle class people opt for Bangla in public schools and colleges, the poor and the rich go for Arabic and English respectively in madrashas and English medium schools. So, we see that English is being used in a very limited way in our education system. In the students' domain of English use, Shahed mentioned in his article "The Dysfunctional Bilingualism in Bangladeshi Education and Society" (2014) that only 5.9% of respondents said that they always use English inside the classroom. The same view is also expressed by parents in that article. 75.3% respondents agree to the statement, "Those who do not require English or do not want to learn English should be educated through Bangla."

7.3 Media

In both print and electronic media, Bangla is being significantly used. The latest updates from the Press Information Department, Ministry of Information, Bangladesh gives the following list of Bangla and English newspapers and channels. The total number of printed Bangla newspaper is 31 whereas it is 8 in English. The total number of online Bangla newspaper is 83 but it is 16 in English. There are 23 Bangla TV channels but no Bangladeshi English TV channel. A couple of Bangla channels telecast English news two or three times a day.

The Bangladeshi people largely depend on Bangla channels for their entertainment. Majority of people still watch Bangla channels for news and entertainment programs. Quite interestingly for majority of educated housewives in towns, Indian Bangla and Hindi channels like ZTV, ETV, Star Jalsa, and Sony are the main attractions. We can also cite here Shahed's findings. He shows that only 1.4% of students watch English news on local channels. Only 12.7% always watch English news on foreign channels. Similarly, only 12.7% always and 50.8% sometimes read English daily newspapers. However, 92.3% of student respondents said that they watch English movies on TV (ibid). It is surprising in the sense that so huge a percentage of students say that they watch English movies on TV. But it is not unnatural because the author selected all the participants of his survey from Dhaka city. It is true that the teen-agers and youths in mega cities are very keen on watching English movies on Star Movies, ZTV, and sports programs on Star Sports and Ten Sport.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.2.4.1]

7.4 Law

It is true that once almost all the laws of Bangladesh were enacted in English and once the higher court used English for its court proceedings. But nowadays the use of Bangla in all higher courts both by the bar and the bench has increased much. However, the lower courts always use Bangla. All the important law books have been translated into Bangla by this time and these books are popular in law colleges. Law graduates passing from these colleges are naturally either scared of using English or allergic to English. The law graduates from these colleges are spreading across district level courts and are paving the way for the widespread use of Bangla. The Higher Court also gave directives to the government several times to ensure the use of Bangla in all domains of national life.

7.5 Home and Outside Home

English is not used much at home and outside home. At home, majority of people use their own dialects. A few people use the standard Bangla at home. In public offices and meetings seminars and workshops, people use Standard Bangla. The findings from Shahed's article give the following statistics. Only 1.3 % people use English always at home and only 1.6% use English outside home (Shahed, 2014).

8. Need for Need-based Competent Bilinguals

In Bangladesh at present English is essential for the global connectivity, enrichment of knowledge, and creation of skilled manpower for global market. Nobody will ignore the importance of English in this age of globalization. It would be unwise and suicidal to stop learning and teaching English completely due to sentimental ego. We should not detach ourselves from this tempo of development and global connectivity. As business is expanding globally and technology is advancing, we urgently need to explore opportunities to generate, utilize, and export skilled workforce for the economic development of our country. We should grasp this benefit of globalization and create efficient bilingual personnel for the international domains.

In line with it, it would be wise to re-plan our language priorities and teach and learn English in a way which does not discard our MT but lead to an effective bilingualism. Bangla and English will have to be assigned their due place. Domain and function wise English courses should be designed. Importance should be given on proper teaching and learning of MT. Emphasis should be given on knowing MT well and using it in local, regional, public domains as well as in private domains and simultaneously teaching, learning and use of English for international contexts. At the same time, we need to keep it in mind that with limited resources we cannot afford to teach all the people English. We need to conduct Needs Analysis of our future generation and accordingly, design Need-based Courses for our potential learners and thus save our time, money, and resources.

The importance of Needs-based English for Banglaees was first felt by Michael west in 1926 in India. He carried out 'Needs Analysis' for the Bangalee learners of English hundred years back. In a report he felt that Bangalee learners need to learn English so that they might contribute to economic development of their country. He reflected that the current approach to teaching English had 'lower surrender value' because people derived little benefit from amount of teaching they received during an incomplete course of instruction. He called for developing practical reading skill in English, which would help the Bangalee students have access to the technological knowledge needed for the economic development of their country (Khansir & Pakdel, 2014). It is true that deciding on language policy is a policy issue and so requires decision from policy- makers.

9. Implications of the Study

The study tries to show through a comparative analysis of the use of English in different domains of national life that we can do without making so much fuss about teaching English to all students necessarily from the primary level. There is some food for thought and consideration for the policy-makers of the national language policy. The uproar about the universal English education from the primary level no doubt costs the government a lot of money, time, and energy. They will find scope to consider and reckon whether so much money and time should be spent (if not wasted) for teaching all English students compulsorily. I hope that this study will create scope for further research in universal bilingual education in Bangladesh and the other developing countries with English as Foreign Language contexts.

10. Conclusion

It is time we plan our language policy wisely. It is time to re-define the role of MT and English. I think primary education should not be bilingual and English can be taught as an optional or compulsory second language from

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.2.4.1]

secondary level. Those who want to pursue higher studies in research-oriented areas should be motivated to study Academic English. There should be provision for the acquisition of knowledge in the MT. At the same time, it is true that our MT education is also not flawless and students cannot write Bangla correctly. It is regrettable that we do not bother much about the MT proficiency of our students. We take MT proficiency of our students for granted. But the crying need of the time is to shift our focus to effective MT education.

There is now a re-thinking about the proposition "Should everyone have access to higher education." Similarly, we will have to give a second thought to the discourse "Should bilingualism be compulsory for all children from the primary level"? We must re-plan our language policy focusing on issues such as whom, when, and how to teach English. The domains for both the MT and English should be identified. ESP/EAP courses may be designed for those who want to use English for Specific Purposes as well as Academic ones. Students studying medicine, science, technology, and business need English for Specific/Academic Purposes such as English for Medicine, English for Law, English for Computer Science, and so on. The objective of English teaching and learning should be rather to create competent bilinguals, not to help merely pass the hurdles of examinations. Then only money, time, and labor spent for bilingualism can be cost-effective.

References

Ashworth, M. (1985). *Beyond methodology: Second language teaching and the community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008413100012214

Azad, H. (2010). *Bangla Bhashar Shatru Mitra*. Dhaka: Aghami Prakashani.

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

Chowdhury, S. I. (1992). *In and outside the garden*. Dhaka: Bidya Prakash.

Clarke, S. P. (1976). The negotiated syllabus: What is it and how is it likely to work? *Applied Linguistics, 12*(1), 13-28. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/12.1.13

Dea, L. M., Basha, T. T., & Abera, N. A. (2014). Challenges in use of mother tongue based education as medium of instruction in primary school for quality enhancement: in case of Wolaita Zone Administration (2012/2013, *Merit Research Journal of Education and Review*, 2,152-162. Available Online http://www.meritresearchjournals.org/er/index.htm.

Fishman, J. (1976). Bilingual education: What and why? In J. Alatis and K. Twaddell (Eds.) *English as a second language in bilingual education.* Washington, D.C.: TESOL. 263-271.

Francis, W. S. (1999). Analogical transfer of problem solutions within and between languages in Spanish-English bilinguals. *Journal of Memory and Languages*, *40*(3), 301- 329. https://doi.org/10.1006/jmla.1998.2610

Graddol, D. (1997). *The future of English? A guide to forecasting the popularity of the English language in the 21st century.* The British Council.

Grosjean, E. (1982). *Life with two languages. An introduction to bilingualism.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Harding-Esch, E., & Riley, P. (2007). *The bilingual family: A handbook for parents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. www.cambridge.org

Haque, M. S. (2011). Bridging the gap between academia and the real world: An exploratory framework from Bangladesh. *Proceeding, 3rd International Seminar on Culture, English Language Teaching, and Literature, 2011*, 182-196.

IBIS Concept Paper. (June 1st, 2014). *Mother tongue - bilingual education.* Version 1, Retrieved from www.ibis-global. Org., Denmark

Kamol, E. (2009, 31 December). Closing the gaps. *The Daily Star*.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.2.4.1]

Khansir, A. A., & Pakdel, F. (March, 2014). Needs analysis and language teaching. *Language in India, 14*(3), 1-20. www.languageinindia.com.

Krizman, J. (2012). Sub-cortical encoding of sound is enhanced in bilinguals and relates to executive function Advantages. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of United States of America, 109*(20), 7877-7881.

Musa, M. (1995). *Language planning and other essays*. Dhaka. Muktodhara.

Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Press Information Department. (2014). www.pressinform.gov.bd. Retrieved on 28 Dec. 2014.

Rahman, M., Hamzah, M. I. M., Meerah, T. S. M., & Rahman, M. (2010). Historical Development of Secondary Education in Bangladesh: Colonial Period to 21st Century. *International Education Studies, 3*(1).

Richard, E. B. (1976). Bilingual children and educational cognitive style analysis. In A. Simoes (ed.) *Stress and anxiety*. Washington: Hemisphere.

Room to Read Newsletter. (2014). *An unprecedented study in Bangladesh*. October 2014, Issue 24.

Romaine, S. (1995). Bilingualism (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Seyoum, H. (2009). *Language policy and access to education*. In Seyoum Hameso, Trueman, T., & Temesgen Muleta-Erena (ed.). *Ethiopia: Conquest and the quest for freedom and democracy* London: TSC Publishers, 153-166.

Shahed, F. H. (2009). The politics of language in the Bangladeshi education system: A deliberate perpetuation of obscurity and chaos. *Metropolitan University Journal*, *2*(1), 24-45.

Shahed, F. H. (2014). The dysfunctional bilingualism in Bangladeshi education and society. *Language in India, 14*(6). www.languageinindia.com.

Young, G. M. (1957). Minute of 2 February 1835 on Indian education. In G. M. Young, Macaualay, *Prose and Poetry*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 716-729.

[Downloaded from mail.ijreeonline.com on 2026-11-19]

[DOI: 10.29252/ijree.2.4.1]