

Revisiting EMI of the education system of Bangladesh in the purview of NEP, LPP, and ELF

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Received: 10 July 2025 **Revised:** 30 Nov. 2025; **Accepted:** 24 Dec 2025; **Published:** 31 Dec. 2025

To cite this article (APA): Faquire, R. K. (2025). Revisiting EMI of the education system of Bangladesh in the purview of NEP, LPP, and ELF. *AJELP: Asian Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 13(2), 117-132. <https://doi.org/10.37134/ajelp.vol13.2.9.2025>

Abstract: With the rise of English as a global lingua franca, the demand for English-medium instruction (EMI) has grown significantly across Asian education systems. In Bangladesh, the integration of EMI into the language education system has been driven largely by the National Education Policy (NEP) yet implemented with minimal regard to the foundational principles of Language Policy and Planning (LPP) and the pedagogical prerequisites outlined in English as Lingua Franca (ELF) research. This article critically examines the structural and ideological underpinnings of English Language Education (ELE) in Bangladesh and evaluates its effectiveness through the intersecting lenses of NEP, LPP, and ELF. Using Shohamy's five-phase LPP model, the study proposes a comprehensive Language-in-Education Policy (LEP) that embeds EMI within a coherent medium-of-instruction (MOI) framework. Drawing on sociolinguistic data, international best practices, and empirical research, it argues for mother tongue-based literacy in early education, elective and proficiency-based EMI from secondary level onward, and proportionate use of English in higher education aligned with internationalization goals. The study advocates a balanced approach that affirms Bangla's primacy while accommodating English as a strategic linguistic resource—ensuring linguistic equity, cognitive development, and cultural continuity.

Keywords: Bangladesh, English-medium instruction, language policy and planning, bilingual education, language education system

INTRODUCTION

With economic globalization, English has emerged as a lingua franca, prompting Asian countries including Bangladesh to develop English Language Education (ELE) programs aimed at producing graduates with English language skills. The growing need for English as Lingua Franca (ELF) around Asia has stimulated the education authorities in Bangladesh to make a major revision in the National Education Policy (NEP) beginning in the 1990s. This move has led to the establishment of a countrywide ELE system comprising compulsory provision for English literacy up to undergraduate 1st year and elective English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) at all phases of education. However, this ELE has been created with the NEP by disregarding the main principles of Language Policy and Planning (LPP), which calls for post-implementation review and replanning.

CREATING A STUDY FRAMEWORK FOR EMI

This qualitative study examines the pedagogical, heuristic, and ideological rationale for EMI provision in Bangladesh, assuming that EMI requires LPP endorsement grounded on sociolinguistic ideology. The study contextualizes ELE practices in Bangladesh's language situation and explores their appropriateness from three applied linguistic perspectives: NEP, ELF, and LPP.

The study employs Shohamy's (2006) LPP model, which provides a mechanism for establishing a language education system. Shohamy's model involves five steps: creating an ideological basis, formulating policy, planning, establishing administration, and implementation. Based on this model, a Language-in-Education Policy and Planning framework is formulated to design a Language Education System suitable for Bangladesh's language ecology, accommodating EMI in a comprehensive MOI system by synchronizing the relative status and function of Bangla, English, and other languages used in Bangladesh.

EMI PRACTICES IN THE LANGUAGE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF BANGLADESH

Bangladesh emerged as a monolingual nation-state with more than 99% of the population speaking Bangla, while the remaining speakers use more than 40 different varieties of languages belonging to the Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic, and Indo-European language families, along with a few speakers of the Kurux language belonging to the Dravidian language family (Faquire, 2010, p. 66). The speakers of languages or their varieties other than Bangla learn and speak Bangla as a second language (SL), which functions as a lingua franca for them. Thus, the prevailing language situation in Bangladesh can be characterized by the phenomenon of extensive monolingualism along with an inconsequential degree of bilingualism. Its monolingualism can be characterized by the use of Bangla, while insignificant bilingualism is found to exist with the use of a tribal language as a first language and Bangla as a second language in some remote districts (including the Chittagong Hill Districts and northern districts), suggesting a rationale for the implementation of a monolingual education program along with a specific bilingual education program for students belonging to the bilingual speech community. Although bilingualism exists in the use of English, except in English medium schools, private universities, and corporate sectors, it does not favor bilingual education.

Given the above-described monolingual ecology in Bangladesh, the provision for the ELE system has existed in Bangladesh with the endorsement of various language policies depending on the colonial, postcolonial, and national settings since the implementation of NEP in the 1980s. After the political event of independence by separation from federal Pakistan, the Bangladesh Shikkha Commission Report, i.e., NEP (1974), was formulated, which led to making compulsory provision for Bangla literacy and Bangla as a Medium of Instruction (BMI) as well as an optional provision for literacy education in Foreign Languages (FL), which include English. Until the last revision of NEP in the 1990s, the ELE remained an unregulated system for decades. However, it has been reinstated in the latest revision of NEP (2000 and 2010). Thus, the revision done in NEP from 1991 to 2010 has promoted an English-only FL policy by diminishing the preceding all-inclusive FL education policy formulated in 1974. Accordingly, this attempt at an English-only FL policy led to institutionalizing a language education system comprising a Bangla-English biliteracy program from the elementary level to the undergraduate 1st year as well as the EMI as an elective MOI alternative to the BMI from the elementary level to the graduate level of education. Consequently, English has emerged as the MOI in most of the faculties, e.g., Engineering, Medical, and Natural Science,

at the universities of Bangladesh since then. As a result, English remains an FL among the non-affluent classes de jure, while it has grown to be an SL among the affluent class and has become a means of social and economic disparity. With the backdrop of the above discussion, the existing provision for ELE can be presented in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1: *The EMI in the Prevalent Language Education System of Bangladesh*

| Phases of education | Levels of education | Biliteracy Program (Bangla & English) | Status of EMI |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| I | Class 0–III | Yes | Optional provision for EMI (alternative to BMI), despite lacking CALP prerequisites. |
| II | Class IV–VIII | Yes | Optional EMI continues, often disadvantaging students with low English proficiency. |
| III | Class IX–XII | Yes | EMI remains elective but unevenly adopted, exacerbating equity gaps. |
| IV | Undergraduate | Yes (up to 1st year) | EMI dominates in STEM fields, though students often lack CALP. |
| V | Postgraduate | No biliteracy program | EMI compulsory in many programs, disregarding ELF principles. |

The prevalent language education system shown in Table 1 has been institutionalized with the backing of the NEP and has received significant criticism since its formulation and implementation. The NEP has received significant criticism for weak conceptual foundations, fragmented implementation, elite dominance in policymaking, and donor influence over local expertise (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Hamid, 2009; Rahman, 2010; Unterhalter et al., 2003).

Critical scholars describe the ELE system as a means of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) and cultural conversion (Pennycook, 1994). In the context of Bangladesh, Faquire (2021) further argues that the unregulated institutionalization of English as a medium of instruction reinforces social stratification and cultural dependency, as EMI becomes embraced by the affluent while marginalizing broader segments of society.

APPRAISING THE ELE SYSTEM FROM VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES

As criticism has grown from the negative feedback effects yielded by the unregulated ELE system, it calls for a revisit, for which the study appraises its appropriateness in the language education system from different applied linguistic perspectives: (i) national education perspective, (ii) language policy and planning perspective, and (iii) English as Lingua Franca perspective.

The ELE from the National Education Policy Perspective

The NEP perspective endorses ELE for economic benefit, assuming English is essential for building a knowledge-based society and achieving economic development (NEP, 2000). However, this indirectly promotes English at the expense of Bangla, culminating in cultural conversion (i.e., De-Bangalization).

Thus, the unusual pervasiveness of EMI has attracted the attention of ELF researchers, who found it necessary to properly arrange EMI in educational settings. Jenkins (2018: 8) points out that the "global rise of EMI is that the motivation seems to be primarily financial and reputational, and that little thought is given to practicalities, in particular, its potential impact on those who will be most affected, i.e., students and staff."

The ELE from the English as Lingua Franca Perspective

The ELF perspective recognizes English as crucial for international academic mobility, given that academic materials, publications, and higher studies in internationally recognized universities predominantly use English.

Jenkins and Mauranen (2019) demonstrate that the English as Lingua Franca (ELF) perspective derives the rationale for the provision of EMI in consideration of the necessity of English in escalating globalization. Jenkins and Mauranen (2019) note that EMI has spread globally from European origins, with universities in Europe and Asia increasingly offering EMI programs, mainly at postgraduate level (Kirkpatrick, 2014).

The ELE from the Language Policy and Planning Perspective

From the perspective of Language Policy and Planning (LPP), the provision of language education is not a neutral act; it is a political agenda that must be supported by acquisition planning grounded in nationalistic ideologies. In this view, every attempt to introduce or reform language education reflects an underlying political orientation—either nationalistic or imperialistic in nature.

According to Phillipson (1992, p. 47), the imperialist agenda regards language as a means of (i) asserting imperial dominance, (ii) transmitting imperialist culture, and (iii) controlling the culture, education, media, and politics of a subjugated nation.

In contrast, the nationalistic agenda views language as (i) a means of socialization and nationalization, (ii) a symbol of national identity, (iii) a vehicle of civilization, and (iv) a measure of social and cultural wealth.

Postcolonial countries that have experienced linguistic imperialism have therefore adopted various forms of LPP to address language-related challenges in their postcolonial contexts. Consequently, they have sought to formulate Language Education Policies (LEPs) that consolidate all major languages—including English—within a medium of instruction (MOI) framework, taking into account their relative social and political statuses.

UNFOLDING THE RATIONALE FOR EMI FROM COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

All three perspectives supporting the EMI provide some rationale for the provision of EMI in the language education system of Bangladesh, having some merits and shortcomings. The NEP perspective provides a rationale for EMI in consideration of economic benefits. Contrary to the NEP perspective, both the LPP perspective and ELF perspective provide a basis for the provision of EMI, respectively, in national settings and global settings. The LPP perspective derives rationale for the provision of EMI in consideration of the status and function of all the national languages and FLs spoken and used in a specific country. On the other hand, the ELF perspective derives the rationale for the EMI provision in the higher education setting, which is subject to fulfilling certain conditions.

Lo Bianco (2014) conceives that there is a certain interaction between the Language Policy and Planning (LPP) perspective and the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) perspective. Hence, both share a conceptual foundation that contributes to the formulation of English Medium Instruction (EMI) provisions. Lo Bianco (2014) argues that ELF and LPP converge around pedagogy, application, and conceptualization, suggesting that motivated choices shape how these perspectives inform practice. Accordingly, the ELF perspective, in compliance with the LPP framework, provides the rationale for EMI and brings desirable benefits without harming the linguistic ecology of Bangladesh.

FORMULATING LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICY AND PLANNING

It is concluded from the discussion in the preceding section that the ELF perspective, in compliance with the LPP perspective, derives the rationale for the provision of EMI. However, Bangladesh has mostly remained unaware of the LPP and ELF perspectives, though it experienced political maneuvering over the national language problem, which ignited the separatist movement in the federal setting of Pakistan for two decades. After independence, it introduced provisions for English Language Education (ELE), which allowed the optional use of EMI in all phases of education, endorsed by the National Education Policy (NEP) primarily on economic grounds.

Keeping this context in mind, the rationale for the provision of EMI within a Language Education Policy (LEP) framework is now identified, formulated from the ELF perspective in compliance with the LPP perspective. Shohamy (2006) proposed a comprehensive mechanism for establishing a language education system through the process of LPP. Her model integrates linguistic ideology, policy, and educational practice into a hierarchical framework consisting of five interrelated steps:

- i) creation of an ideological basis,
- ii) formulation of a language policy grounded in the envisioned linguistic ideology,
- iii) interpretation of that policy into planning,
- iv) establishment of an education administration, and
- v) implementation of the plan through the education system to consolidate a sustainable language education structure.

Building upon this model and consistent with the general framework of LPP theorists (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Ricento, 2006), the rationale for a language education system in the context of Bangladesh may be derived through the following steps:

- i) adopting globalization as the underpinning ideology,
- ii) formulating a foreign language policy aligned with the ideology of globalization,
- iii) translating that policy into status and acquisition planning, and
- iv) implementing these plans through the existing educational administration.

Ideological Underpinning

LPP requires an ideological basis derived from sociolinguistic, nationalistic, and educational ideologies. Following Cobarrubias (1983), assimilation supports using Bangla for national integration, while internationalization supports incorporating English for global engagement. However, Phillipson (2009) cautions that internationalization ideology often narrowly justifies English-medium higher education.

Articulation of Language Policy

Language policy aims to build national integration and social development (Gnamba, 1981; Ouedraogo, 2000). Accordingly, language policy involves planning that is generally divided into corpus planning, status planning, and acquisition planning (also known as language-in-education policy) (Kloss, 1969; Cooper, 1989). It involves determining the status and function of the national language, i.e., Bangla, in relation to other languages and thus planning how those languages can be maintained and cultivated to meet national priorities. Status and function planning is about assigning status and function to the languages spoken and used in Bangladesh. Language status is a concept distinct from, though intertwined with, language prestige and language function (Edwards, 1996). Status and function planning deal with the allocation or reallocation of a language to functional domains within a society, thus affecting the status of a language (Cobarrubias, 1983).

There are four groups of languages spoken and used in Bangladesh, including: i) the national language, Bangla; ii) classical languages, i.e., Arabic, Pali, Persian, and Sanskrit; iii) tribal languages, especially *Garó*, *Marma*, *Santal*, and *Tripura*; and iv) the FLs, e.g., Arabic, Chinese, English, German, Hindi-Urdu, French, and Spanish. Bangladesh is a country where most of the population speaks Bangla, with the remaining speakers being speakers of one of more than 40 languages, whose SL is Bangla. Thus, Bangla is to receive the status of the national language and the function of an official language for the following reasons: i) Bangla is a symbol of Bangalee Nationalism, ii) Bangla is a means of socialization, and iii) Bangla is a means of assimilation. Thus, the foregoing reasons give a premise for Bangla to receive preeminence over other indigenous languages, such as, *Garó*, *Tripura*, and FLs, including Arabic, and English.

In keeping with the sociolinguistic ideology of internationalization, one or more FLs are to receive the status and function of FL, e.g., English, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish, but none of them, including English, is to receive the status of SL. Although English has grown to be a very influential language, its status and function have been much and long debated.

DESIGNING A LANGUAGE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE PURVIEW OF LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICY

The framework for Language-in-Education Planning (LEP) typically encompasses three core provisions: i) language and literacy education to develop literacy as a part of basic education, ii) second or foreign language education to develop proficiency in additional languages, and iii) the use of languages as a Medium of Instruction (MOI) for teaching knowledge-based subjects (Spolsky, 2004, 2009). It essentially receives the backing of LPP along with ELF, which provides a basis for an equitable provision for language education that contributes to the sustainable language ecology of a particular country.

To design a language education system, it must be borne in mind that a language education system can be endowed with monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual education programs depending on the number and type of languages used in a certain language situation. The monolingual education program supports mother tongue-based language and literacy education and subject content education, while bilingual education involves two languages, one of which is usually a mother tongue, in providing literacy education and subject content education. Similarly, multilingual education involves the use of two or more languages for multi-literacy and multilingual education. The monolingual education program is simple to both formulate and implement, but bilingual or multilingual education becomes very complex depending on what the program involves.

Each of these programs is goal oriented. Therefore, each program needs to be situated in Bangladesh's language situation. The goal of a monolingual education program with the national language, Bangla, is to assimilate everyone into a uniform national society by facilitating the process of socialization and assimilation. In contrast, the goal of a monolingual education program with an FL other than the mother tongue, as is the case with English medium schools in Bangladesh, is leading the learners to cultural shifts and language shifts. On the other hand, the goal of the bilingual education program comprising Bangla and English has been promoting bilingualism and biculturalism. Other than the cases of ostensive monolingual and bilingual programs, there are other partial bilingual programs varying in the percentage of language use to teach the subject content in the language education system of Bangladesh.

Support for the ELE program for the language education system in Bangladesh is found by consulting: i) research outcomes of pedagogical theories and practices, ii) universal guidelines principle for the provision of literacy and language education by UNESCO (2003),

and iii) recommendations put forward for Early Literacy and Multilingual Education in South Asia by the UNICEF South Asia (2019) in the upcoming two sections.

Language and Literacy Education as a Part of Basic Education

To use languages as MOI, students must gain control through literacy development. UNESCO (2006: 147) defines literacy as the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials"—skills central to acquiring knowledge-based subjects.

Children's literacy begins through home interaction and accelerates in school settings. They acquire basic conversational skills in the family environment and develop higher-order thinking through formal education. Cummins (1984) places language skills within literacy education in a continuum, indicating the Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), described as the use of language characterized as conversational language at the lowest end, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), described as the use of language characterized as academic language at the highest end. The mastery of CALP is essential for meeting the cognitive demands in an academic setting.

The LPP perspective advocates mother tongue-based language and literacy education. Thus, it requires the authority to make provision for language and literacy education in the mother tongue to support the smooth mastery of CALP as well as the development of a scaffold for higher-order thinking and learning (e.g., difficult and new concepts). According to UNESCO (1953), Principle I recommends that mother tongue instruction is essential for initial instruction and literacy and should "be extended to as late a stage in education as possible," and that "every pupil should begin his [or her] formal education in his [or her] mother tongue." The same principle further supports mother tongue-based education for minority speech communities. Therefore, it supports Bangla language-based language and literacy education and stands against English language-based language and literacy education programs. The research and evaluation reports clearly show that children require 6-8 years of formal schooling in language and literacy education to gain control in CALP (Ball, 2011; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Heugh et al., 2007; cited in UNICEF South Asia, 2019). Accordingly, children require 6-8 years of mother tongue-based education in Bangla for the proper development of CALP in L1 as well as a scaffold for higher-order thinking and learning (e.g., difficult and new concepts).

Research consistently shows early education is most effective in the learner's first language (UNESCO, 1953; Cummins, 2000). Education in unfamiliar languages can destabilize self-identity (Brock-Utne, 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009) and create 'double learning disadvantage' as students must simultaneously learn the language and content (Jhingran, 2005). Although the LPP perspective supports mother tongue-based language and literacy education, with Bangla serving as the primary medium at the school level, the current situation in Bangladesh has become more complex. At present, there are five types of language and literacy education programs in operation. Among these, two types (II and V) are directly relevant to the English-based language and literacy education programs implemented in the country, as outlined below.

1. Mother tongue-based Bangla language and literacy education with the partial provision for the education of the English language as a subject,
2. English language-based English language and literacy education, with the provision for the education of Bangla language as a subject,
3. Bangla language-based transitional biliteracy language and literacy education with the minimal provision for education in one of the tribal languages, such as, Santali, Garo

and Tripura as a subject as well as education of English language as a subject, where bilingual situations exist in some of the tribal regions,

4. Bangla-Arabic education: Mother tongue-based Bangla language and literacy education with the provision for the education of Arabic language as a subject in the Qawmi Madrasah,
5. English medium education (unregulated system of education): English language-based language and literacy education with minimal provision for the education of the Bangla language as a subject.

In practice, Bangla-speaking children undergo compulsory biliteracy education in Bangla and English. As native Bangla speakers, they enter school with BICS in Bangla, which expands with mother-tongue education but pauses with English-medium literacy. Pedagogical research has consistently demonstrated that the development of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) is facilitated when learners receive mother tongue-based language and literacy education.

English Education Aiming to Develop Proficiency

The LPP perspective backs a provision for FL education as a content-based subject. The UNESCO Declaration (1995) supports foreign language education for building intercultural understanding. Accordingly, the LEP, grounded on the LPP perspective, requires the provision of education on a content subject in English. Nevertheless, it demands a provision for the education of at least one foreign language, i.e., English. In the existing monolingual situation of Bangladesh, students enter school with a disposition of incipient BICS in Bangla and zero proficiency in English. Their learning outcome of English as FL differs depending on which language out of L1 and L2 they undergo language and literacy education. Pedagogical studies indicate that the development of an additional language (L2) is significantly enhanced when learners first receive language and literacy education in their first language (L1) during early schooling. Accordingly, children who study in their L1 or home language for several years perform much better in learning additional languages and in other academic subjects than those who receive instruction in a second or unfamiliar language as the medium of instruction.

This interdependence between L1 and L2 proficiency has been confirmed by several empirical studies and theoretical models. Cummins (1979, 2000) demonstrated that cognitive and academic skills acquired through the L1 transfer to L2 through what he termed the "common underlying proficiency" (CUP) model. Thomas and Collier (1997, 2002) found that students who receive sustained mother tongue-based education for five to six years outperform peers taught only through a second language. Similarly, Benson (2005) and UNESCO (2003) emphasized that mother tongue-based instruction strengthens both linguistic and cognitive development, leading to more effective multilingual education outcomes. This phenomenon can be best described with the 'Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis' proposed by Cummins (2005). According to this hypothesis, it is possible for BICS and CALP developed in one language to be 'transferred' to another language. Accordingly, if an individual acquires language skills in Bangla, they will get transferred to L2 English. At the developing stage, an individual will develop a common underlying proficiency for two different languages (Bangla and English) and may show individual differences in Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) of Bangla and English, which can be represented in the 'dual iceberg' model shown in Figure 1 by Cummins (2005).

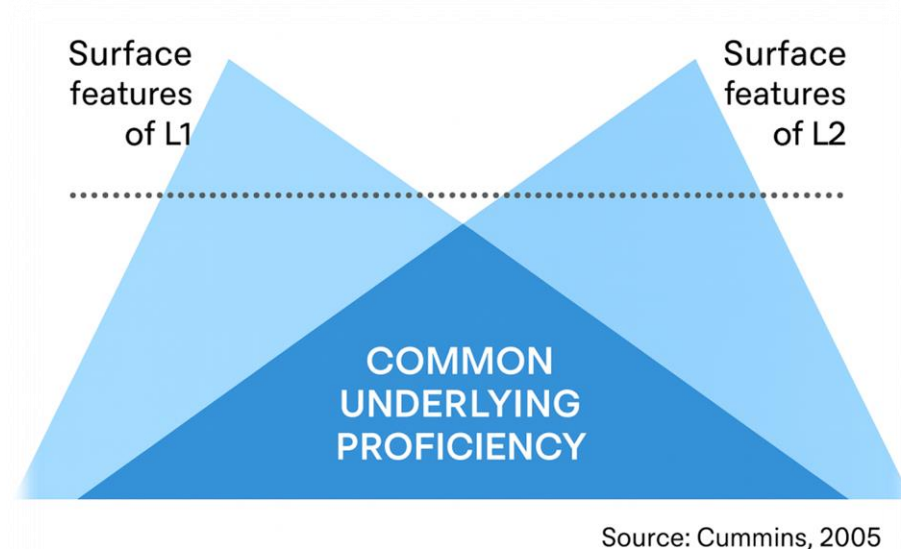


Figure-1: 'Dual Iceberg' model representation of bilingual proficiency

Figure 1 presents the dual iceberg diagram showing L1 Bangla and L2 English above the surface with Common Underlying Proficiency. Children acquire Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) in approximately two to three years of schooling when instruction begins in the mother tongue, whereas attaining Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) sufficient for academic study in a second language (L2) typically requires five to seven years of sustained, well-scaffolded instruction (Cummins, 1980; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981, as cited in UNICEF, 2019).

The relationship between L1 and L2 is additive and interdependent, not zero-sum. Cummins' Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) model explains that cognitive-academic skills developed through L1 literacy transfer to L2, provided there is sufficient exposure and motivation. Thus, strengthening L1 literacy in the early years indirectly strengthens L2 attainment later. Longitudinal studies confirm that mother-tongue-based schooling improves long-term achievement and narrows equity gaps (Thomas & Collier, 2002; UNESCO, 2003; Heugh, 2011).

Considering this evidence, Language-in-Education Planning (LEP) should ensure access to English-medium instruction (EMI) at later stages, while avoiding universal, compulsory English literacy from Grade I. Equity concerns are salient in Bangladesh. Many students face psychological barriers (e.g., language anxiety, low self-efficacy) and financial barriers (e.g., costs of tutoring, private test preparation, and materials) that constrain English attainment (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Dörnyei, 2005; Hamid & Erling, 2016; UNESCO, 2015).

Accordingly, a Foreign Language Education (FLE) policy is justified that (a) offers English Language Education (ELE) as a content-based subject rather than a compulsory requirement in the earliest grades, (b) allows optional pathways for learners who are psychologically or financially disadvantaged, and (c) introduces proficiency-based evaluation to regulate entry into EMI. LEP should specify proficiency checkpoints at key transitions, assessing BICS at primary level and CALP before undergraduate EMI entry (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Implementation requires teacher training in L1 pedagogy, cross-linguistic transfer strategies, and EMI pedagogy integrating language with content objectives (Heugh, 2011; Benson, 2005).

DESIGNING PROPORTIONATE PROVISION FOR EMI IN THE MOI SYSTEM

From the discussion in the foregoing section, it is learned that a LEP involves decision-making on the provision for using language as a means of literacy and MOI at all phases of education. Therefore, the upcoming sections will focus on the provision for EMI grounded in a comprehensive MOI system in high-school education and higher education settings.

EMI at Different Levels of Education

With the insights gained from the discussion in the preceding sections, the provision of EMI in Bangladesh's language education system can be justified.

EMI in the School Education Setting

This discussion on the language education system in the secondary school setting extends the earlier analysis of language and literacy education, which emphasized the importance of using the first language (L1) as the medium of instruction (MOI). The determination of an appropriate MOI scheme at the secondary level requires special consideration because it involves decisions about the introduction or continuation of English Medium Instruction (EMI) within the broader framework of Language-in-Education Planning (LEP).

Pedagogical research and longitudinal evaluation studies demonstrate that learners typically require five to seven years of sustained language and literacy education to gain control over Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)—the level of linguistic and cognitive ability required for higher-order thinking, reasoning, and the comprehension of abstract concepts (Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002; Ball, 2011; Heugh, Benson, Bogale, & Yohannes, 2007). These studies confirm that premature introduction of EMI before learners achieve CALP in the L1 significantly limits their cognitive and academic growth.

Drawing upon empirical evidence from multiple multilingual contexts, Ball (2011) and Heugh et al. (2007) argue that extended mother tongue-based instruction not only strengthens literacy and conceptual development but also provides the necessary scaffolding for learning additional languages. Accordingly, UNESCO (2019) and UNICEF South Asia (2019) recommend that L1 should remain as the MOI for at least six to eight years, enabling children to develop strong language and thinking skills as well as an understanding of complex concepts. During this period, learners can be introduced to additional languages—namely L2 and L3 (e.g., English)—without the pressure of having to learn academic content through them.

If L1 instruction is discontinued too early, before students have developed academic proficiency in either language, their ability to perform cognitively demanding tasks such as abstract reasoning, inferencing, and conceptual learning is substantially weakened (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 2002). In alignment with these findings, Heugh et al. (2007) observe that the use of a mother tongue-based MOI is "fully supported by international literature on language learning and cognitive development, which shows that investment in learning through the mother tongue has short-, medium-, and especially long-term benefits for overall schooling performance and the learning of additional languages" (as cited in Tollefson & Tsui, 2018, p. 6). The accumulated body of pedagogical and policy research thus provides a compelling rationale for maintaining the L1 as the MOI throughout primary education and into the early secondary years, while gradually introducing EMI only after learners have achieved stable CALP and conceptual fluency in their first language.

The foregoing analyses of the LEP support the provision of EMI for teaching academic subjects on the condition that students have achieved CALP in English. However, it does not

endorse a compulsory provision for EMI in school education and provides no reason for shifting from BMI to EMI. Rather, it supports EMI for students who can gain CALP after learning English for 6-8 years. However, in practice, students disadvantaged by financial, cultural, and linguistic barriers cannot acquire sufficient CALP in English required to study subjects through EMI. Reasonably, EMI in the secondary education setting requires revision in consideration of financial, cultural, and linguistic factors. The LEP should provide for partial EMI (some subjects in Bangla, others in English) with proficiency-based exit tests qualifying students for EMI, following international models in Malaysia and Hong Kong (Tollefson & Tsui, 2018).

EMI in the Higher Education Setting

Both the Language Policy and Planning (LPP) and English as Lingua Franca (ELF) perspectives endorse the implementation of English Medium Instruction (EMI), provided that specific institutional and pedagogical conditions are met. From the ELF perspective, EMI is justified only in contexts where the university demonstrates a concrete plan for internationalization—including the design of globally recognized degree programs, mechanisms for credit transfer, and the recruitment of academics, staff, and students from diverse linguistic and national backgrounds. In such settings, English functions as a common medium of instruction to facilitate cross-linguistic and intercultural communication in an international academic environment.

ELF researchers have made explicit conceptual and empirical connections between ELF and EMI, emphasizing that the use of English as the medium of higher education is fundamentally motivated by ELF rationales rather than by monolingual or native-speaker norms (Jenkins, 2014, 2015, 2018; Dearden, 2014). In this view, EMI in higher education is not merely a vehicle for linguistic dominance but a practical tool for academic collaboration, mobility, and knowledge exchange within multilingual, globalized educational ecosystems.

However, ELF does not endorse the compulsory provision for EMI in higher education settings. The use of EMI in higher education necessitates addressing several issues (Kirkpatrick, 2014: 6). There are several issues to be considered regarding EMI in higher education settings in Bangladesh, as presented below:

- i) The first issue is that "the adoption of EMI disadvantages many students and staff for whom English is not the first language" (ibid.). In ELF settings, teachers need not only expertise in their discipline but also the ability to communicate their knowledge effectively in English to their students. Similarly, students need sufficient proficiency in English to participate in academic activities. If they do not have a sufficient level of proficiency in English, they may feel seriously disadvantaged (Kirkpatrick, 2014). However, many students in Bangladesh enter universities with incipient CALP and Interlanguage (IL) comprising the linguistic elements of Bangla and English.
- ii) The second issue to consider is that "EMI usually excludes the use of other languages" (ibid.). In consideration of the monolingual situation in Bangladesh, there exists no ideal higher education system with an ELF setting, since teachers and students share a common mother tongue, namely Bangla. Consequently, the use of EMI in higher education creates an artificial academic situation.
- iii) The third issue to consider is that "the English of EMI is almost always based on a native speaker model, and thus ignores the crucial role of ELF" (ibid.). English medium universities run higher education systems in EMI with the expectation of providing high-quality education, though in practice, educational activities are impeded due to the lack of language competency of both teachers and students. Given Bangladesh's predominantly monolingual context (Section

3), it is very challenging to maintain a native-speaker model of English in such a monolingual country, where English functions exclusively as a foreign language.

The above discussion of the three issues put forward by Kirkpatrick (2014) shows that the ELF perspective does not fully support EMI in HE settings. Academic activities in universities are conducted with EMI, though they do not meet the requirements of ELF academic settings. Hence, the approach for providing EMI in higher education settings appears to be an imposition.

Designing a Provision for EMI in a Coordinated Language Education System

The LEP, informed by different perspectives, lends support to designing a coordinated language education system in consideration of all languages and their relative status and function. Therefore, the intended language education system supports a compulsory provision for mother tongue (i.e., Bangla) based language and literacy education, along with an optional provision for English education up to junior high school. Thus, it only endorses provision for EMI once junior high school education is completed. Subsequently, it supports an optional provision for EMI from senior high school, i.e., grade IX onward, and this will allow students to undergo education in some (e.g., one-third of) knowledge-based subjects in EMI provided that they have acquired sufficient CALP in English by the junior high school level. Likewise, it supports the provision for EMI in university education systems, complying with the principles of the ELF perspective. Accordingly, an all-inclusive language education system appropriate for Bangladesh's education system can be presented in Table 2 as follows.

Table 2: Proposed Consolidated MOI System for Bangladesh

| Phases of Education | Levels of Education | Bangla Literacy | English Literacy | Elective Provision for BMI | Optional Provision for EMI |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| I | Class 0–III | Yes (L1 focus) | No | All subjects in Bangla | No EMI to ensure CALP development in L1. |
| II | Class IV–VIII | Yes | Yes (as a subject) | All subjects in Bangla | No EMI until CALP in English is achieved (exit test required by Class VIII). |
| III | Class IX–XII | No (CALP assumed) | Yes | $\geq \frac{3}{4}$ subjects in Bangla | $\leq \frac{1}{4}$ subjects in EMI only for students who pass CALP benchmarks. |
| IV | Undergraduate | No | Yes | Discipline-specific (e.g., humanities in Bangla) | EMI for STEM/global fields, conditional on institutional ELF compliance. |
| V | Postgraduate | No | Yes | Discipline-specific | EMI only if aligned with ELF goals (e.g., international faculty/student mobility). |

CONCLUSION

The ELF perspective aligned with the LPP perspective and countering the NEP perspective, led to designing a comprehensive MOI system. In doing so, it was found that the principles of the LPP perspective, findings of pedagogical research, and recommendations of UNICEF converge on the point that mother tongue (i.e., Bangla language) based language and literacy education is a prime requisite for the natural development of communicative academic language proficiency (CALP). Hence, they support a compulsory provision for mother tongue-based literacy education and subject education until junior high school. Although it supports BMI throughout all phases of education, it allows the education of knowledge-based subjects in EMI from senior high school, provided that students have acquired sufficient CALP by this time. Similarly, the ELF perspective supports EMI in higher education provided that universities have a plan to internationalize their degrees and ease credit transfer, as well as recruit academics, staff, and students of different first languages and nationalities.

The proposed MOI system can replace ad hoc EMI with a phased, conditional approach, ensuring Bangla's primacy in early education while strategically integrating EMI for global competitiveness. Hence, this leads to the conclusion that an LEP formulated with the backing of combined rationales of LPP and ELF perspectives provides a logical basis for consolidating EMI in a comprehensive language education system, but not at the expense of provision for Bangla as MOI.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka for supporting this research.

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