

A Thesis

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the Masters of Arts (MA) in Education

Exploring Challenges in Teaching English to
Multilingual Indigenous Students (Grade 3-4)
from Bengali Medium Primary Schools in
Bangladesh

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	2
Chapter 2: Literature Review	
2.1 Culture of Indigenous settings	5
2.2 Bilingual reading instruction	10
2.3 English language learners	13
Chapter 3: Population and Methodology	
3.1 Research location.....	19
3.2 Participants	21
3.3 Data collection.....	22
3.4 Data analysis	23
Chapter 4: Result and Discussion	
4.1 Linguistic aspects	24
4.2 Demographic and culture	28
Chapter 5: Conclusion	34
References	37
Appendices	39

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Thinking language matrix.....	14
Figure 2	Different learning stages.....	15
Figure 3	Challenges of linguistic aspects.....	28
Figure 4	Challenges of demographic and culture	32

ABSTRACT

The outcomes of English language education for indigenous students in Bangladesh are falling below the national standards, despite the existing policies and strategies. Given that most Bengali students are bilingual and struggle with learning English, multilingual students, especially those from various ethnic minority communities with mother tongues other than Bangla, may encounter even more difficulties in learning English as a second language. A study was conducted in two remote schools in Chittagong Hill Tracts to examine the challenges faced by multilingual indigenous students (in grades 3 and 4) in Bengali Medium Primary Schools. Through qualitative research methods such as focus group discussions and classroom observations, the study revealed that the primary challenge was the lack of consideration for linguistic aspects and cultural relevance in the curriculum, which resulted in teachers struggling to implement necessary teaching strategies and conduct classes effectively. Moreover, students were disengaged in the learning process and lacked motivation, leading to difficulties in memorization and text comprehension. To tackle these challenges, it is recommended that the curriculum address linguistic barriers, and teaching methods tailored to a diverse classroom environment should be implemented. This could involve the use of different reading models, incorporating visuals and culturally relevant examples, and employing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic approaches such as Total Physical Response (teaching through body movements) to make learning more enjoyable for these students. However, due to the small sample size, further research with a larger sample size is necessary to fully comprehend and address these challenges.

Chapter 1

Introduction

As globalization expands, teaching English has become increasingly significant in non-native English-speaking nations such as Bangladesh to maintain economic growth and develop a skilled workforce (Rahman et al., 2019). However, according to UNESCO, 40% of people worldwide need access to education in a language they understand to overcome linguistic barriers while learning English (as a foreign language) fluently by engaging in idea-generating activities and communicating their ideas. As foreign language learning generally develops fully from scratch, English is taught in primary schools as one of the mandatory subjects in multilingual contexts worldwide to cope with the globalized world. English is a universal communication medium and an essential communication skill in the public and commercial workforces. In light of the trend and significance of developing a skilled workforce, the Ministry of Education in Bangladesh has been implementing various strategies to teach English well in primary schools, as language learning is entirely created from scratch. These strategies include implementing a communicative language teaching (CLT) curriculum, teaching pedagogies and instructional materials, professional development of language teachers, reforming the assessment system, improving the school infrastructure and recruiting more teachers, as a large portion of the population still relies on public schools to enroll their children (Mustary, 2021). Furthermore, SDG 4 - "Universal Primary Education" by 2030, accelerates this progress by enrolling more than 20 million children in 65,564 government primary schools (Rahman, 2019). Besides, Article 17 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh states that "All children must receive free and

compulsory education" to maximize the enrollment of primary school students to a hundred percent.

Despite all the policies and strategies undertaken to teach English under the national education policy, the outcomes of learning English among students are not at a satisfactory level to meet the national standards given by Bangladesh's national primary education policy, and the curriculum currently in use in the educational system has not yet been standardized (Mustary, 2021; Rahman et al., 2019). The existing "Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach" for teaching English to primary school students has faced several challenges, including teachers using the traditional teaching-learning method and Bangla/Bengali as a medium of instruction. Additionally, students struggle to express their ideas in writing, which is one of the four essential components of literacy development (Rahman, 2019). More significantly, the main reasons students fear learning this foreign language are inadequate classroom activities that compel students to memorize a passage for the exam script without creativity and a lack of vocabulary (Rahman, 2019).

Since the majority of Bengali students are bilingual (English is their second language) and face language barriers, there is a substantial possibility that multilingual students who are from different ethnic minority communities and have different mother tongues other than Bangla may face more challenges while learning English in the classroom because they are learning two languages simultaneously. Due to language barriers, a disproportionately high number of indigenous children who are classified as multilingual (for learning English) are at risk of dropping out of school (Rahman et al., 2019). Hence, this poses a significant challenge to the inclusion of indigenous children, who comprise approximately 40 different ethnic minorities, in

mainstream education. Moreover, in Bangladesh's primary education system, English language teaching (ELT) must have a consistent language policy and planning to fulfill its standards. Therefore, multilingual students require greater emphasis in English language teaching (ELT) (Rahman et al.,2019). However, for multilingual students, often known as ethnic minority communities (from language, culture, and religious perspectives) of Bangladesh, ELT in their learning context(primary schools) has not yet been evaluated. As excluding this vast group of multilingual students, SDG4 cannot be ensured; we must find ELT challenges for those multilingual students to help them be a skilled workforce in the future.

Multilingual students frequently find it challenging to learn English as a third language in the classroom because they speak Bengali in the classroom and their mother tongue at home. They need to be proficient in English before enrolling in secondary education, so it is essential to find out how to teach them the language effectively. To address this issue, this study investigates the challenges currently associated with teaching English to multilingual students in Bengali medium Government primary schools for grades 3-4. This particular group was selected for the study because, for young learners in grades 3-4, teaching English as a foreign language is most effective at a very young age. It is also an ideal time for these learners to learn how to construct sentences in an essay and how to express their ideas in English before entering high school. Therefore, the research question examines the challenges and opportunities of teaching and learning English in multilingual primary school classrooms in Bangladesh (grades 3-4).

Since less research has been done in this particular context on ELT for multilingual students, curriculum developers and education policymakers will be able to develop initiatives based on the research's findings and recommendations to ensure quality education, reduce dropout rates,

and safeguard this large population from being marginalized. Additionally, based on the study findings, Teachers' Training Institutions can equip sufficient instruction and training to enable English teachers to meet the needs of every student. Furthermore, by reducing student language learning gaps and ensuring that marginalized populations have equitable access to quality education, this initiative can offer a chance to overcome the COVID disruption in education.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Culture of Indigenous Settings

A person's or a group's culture is made up of their implicit and explicit traits, which are shaped by their historical and sociocultural background, present experiences, knowledge, disposition, abilities, and modes of understanding (Milner IV, 2010). Race, ethnicity, history, heritage, customs, rituals, values, symbols, language, identity, class, region/geography, resources, and gender all influence these traits and ways of being (2010). Culture can be used to characterize our way of life and the values, ideas, and attitudes we apply daily since it is constantly evolving and adapting to changing circumstances (2010). As a result, there is a significant connection between cultural identity and education. The notion of cultural identity and culture serves as motivation for students. The cultural roots of students are important because disparities in racial, ethnic, linguistic, social, and economic backgrounds can lead to cultural disconnection or lower learning motivation (Altugan, 2015). In this context, education aims to change and bring about changes. The learner's awareness of his or her own identity and characteristics that are prominent during the formal school learning process is significantly enhanced by culture (Altugan, 2015). Additionally, culture in the curriculum has a significant impact on how students build their identities (2015). In addition, social class, community affluence, and social and cultural capital are thought to influence educational aspirations and success. Cultural identity enables students to develop their social and cultural competencies as individuals, which they then

apply in the classroom when interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds or with majority groups (Altugan, 2015). According to Altugan (2015), a learner's cultural identity is a psychological shift that helps them focus on their studies. For instance, if a student from a marginalized background seems to be trying to compete with others, she is unlikely to answer the question in the classroom. Therefore, students may exhibit various learning traits that are distinct from their cultural identities and the knowledge they acquire from their surroundings. Teaching in a multilingual setting requires educators to be aware of and respond to cultural differences among their students (Altugan, 2015). They should additionally tailor their curricula to the individual student's learning styles and motivations to improve the learning environment (2015).

Furthermore, relationships are strengthened and trust is built in classrooms with teachers and students who have the same cultural identities(2015). This increases student engagement, motivation, and enthusiasm about learning together (Altugan, 2015). Since learning is a way of changing one's understanding of the social world around oneself, this is how learners' identities influence their motivation to study. Different classroom tactics should be used depending on the cultural identity variations to help students become more motivated and conscious of who they are (Altugan, 2015). Students from different ethnic or cultural groups often experience both enculturation and acculturation (2015). As a result, it's critical to take into account their differences because their cultural expectations can influence how to teach. Different activities and approaches may be needed in each culture to ignite students' interest in the subject matter. Students who actively participate in their classroom learning can assist in developing themselves in this way. Additionally, the curriculum should be designed with cultural references. Only then can the curriculum and the pedagogical strategies used in the classroom be effective (Milner IV, 2010). The goal of education will be achieved if the curriculum and culturally

acquired experiences are merged. As a result, we need to know about the thoroughly investigated social and cultural contexts that exist in the various indigenous communities of Bangladesh and their effects on the academic performance of English language learners for those students who speak more than one language.

Eleven indigenous ethnic groups, including the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Mro, Lushai, Khumi, Chak, Khiyang, Bawm, and Pangkhua, collectively refer to themselves as the Jumma people (High Landers) and live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). They make up more than 1.8% of the nation's overall population and have lived in the CHT for centuries (Hossain,2013). Indigenous peoples made up 97.5% of the overall population in the CHT region in 1947, but this percentage dropped to about 51% in 2014, and the rate of decline is still undetermined (2013). Through a government population transfer (or "rehabilitation") program and massive waves of transmigration of Bengali settlers organized by the military and civil administration, the number of non-Indigenous people unexpectedly increased. As a result, even though they hold Bangladeshi nationality, the Indigenous people are now marginalized in their own state (Hossain, 2013). The majority of ethnic groups were eventually forced into the current geographic limits after being progressively pushed back by state authority. Because of their deeply chauvinistic perspective, both the State and the general public in Bangladesh have failed to acknowledge the existence of Indigenous communities and their distinct cultural practices, despite the country's historical diversity in language, religion, and ethnicity (Hossain, 2013). This began with the liberation of Bangladesh when it became clear that one of the most crucial challenges was to recognize the distinctive identities of the Indigenous peoples, who were previously referred to as "tribal" or "Adivasi" as "Hill People" or "Pahari" (2013). Therefore, other fundamental requirements, especially education, would undoubtedly be overlooked when

identity as defined by the Constitution is the primary concern. Additionally, seven out of ten women in CHT are illiterate and the region's literacy rate is lower than the country as a whole (Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact, 2007).

For indigenous people, their way of life is based on their land. They farm, hunt and catch fish on the land, in the forests, and bodies of water within their territory. So, the relationship to land has social and cultural aspects in addition to economic ones (Dhamai, 2014). Indigenous peoples' land tenure and land rights are primarily determined by their customs and traditions, and they are not always linked to written land tenure papers (Dhamai, 2014). Therefore, in Bangladesh, indigenous lands are frequently designated as "Khas" land or state land, or they are simply categorized as reserve forests or eco-parks (2014). Additionally, Jum cultivation—also known as shifting cultivation—is among the most popular farming in the CHT. The CHT was previously a food surplus territory, but it is currently a food deficit area because of factors like population growth pressure, a decline in the amount of land available for agriculture, and various limits on Jhum farming (Hossain, 2013). Rice, maize, millet, sesame, cotton, ginger, cucumber, pumpkin, melon and a few other crops are the main crops that are grown. Besides, they have a low level of entrepreneurship despite the fact that a wide range of industries support the CHT economy, Bengali (non-indigenous) people have total authority over these sectors. Consequently, these people's economic situations remain poor (Hossain, 2013).

Approximately 1.6 times greater than in rural Bangladesh, rural CHT has extreme poverty (Hossain, 2013). Across all ethnic groups combined, more than 62% of households in the region are below the absolute poverty line, and over 36% are extremely poor (2013). Among Indigenous peoples, the percentages of absolute and hard-core poverty are 65% and 44%, respectively

(2013). Because they are women and Indigenous, Bangladeshi indigenous women are among the most vulnerable groups in society. They are also heavily marginalized in the domains of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural life. The majority of Indigenous women, as has frequently been noted, experience many forms of prejudice due to their sex, race/ethnicity, language, culture, religion, and class.

Their languages, with their unique alphabets and intonations, are an integral component of the nation's rich cultural heritage (Dhamai, 2014). However, many of these languages are in decline due to pressure from the dominant culture. Indigenous language loss, sometimes referred to as "language death," is a global problem that impacts Bangladesh as well as other countries. In addition, waving one's clothes is another characteristic of their culture (Dhamai, 2014). The majority of women go to markets to sell their goods after working in the fields(2014). In addition. Indigenous rely on natural remedies to treat their illnesses. To heal from all diseases, they worship nature (Dhamai, 2014).

Overall, inclusive education is a dream come true for these Tripura, Marma, Chakma, and 54 other indigenous communities who have spent decades fighting to preserve their language and culture and gain the identity of being indigenous rather than tribal. The curriculum and teaching pedagogies will be inclusive and easy for them to understand given their linguistic differences and disadvantageous rural areas. The self-identification of indigenous communities is a fundamental criterion for them, according to AIPP, IWGIA, and Forum-Asia (2010). They also face several disadvantages, including those related to geography (distant and inaccessible areas), culture (language barriers), economics (lower literacy rate and unemployment compared to the

national average), politics, and structural issues with infrastructure development, health, and education.

2.2 Bilingual Reading Instruction

"Bi/multilingual students' learning is maximized, when students are free to use all of their current language skills (in two languages), rather than being restricted and inhibited from doing so by monolingual instructional assumptions and practices" (Moll & Diaz, 1985). When the medium of instruction is something other than English, students who perform exceptionally well in other language classrooms sometimes have low reading skills in English because of their poor oral English development (1985). Oral language deficits in students can be identified in reading classes. According to a study on bilingual readers who speak Spanish, kids could understand more English than they could communicate in English reading classes (Moll & Diaz, 1985). According to Moll & Diaz (1985), students were able to decode and participate in English conversation when given the first intervention—instruction before assessment—even though they had trouble pronouncing some of the words; however, they understand English less well than their native language. So, instruction is very important for reading comprehension as it helps students to perform at the most advanced level.

English reading must be taught in the context of what children can do in their mother tongue. The second intervention was creating a proximal reading lesson- helping students to read aloud so that teachers can help them to pronounce unfamiliar words (Moll & Diaz, 1985). Oral constraints are a major problem for the reading development of multilingual children, so reading classes should be structured in the classroom to support children in decoding, vocabulary development, and spoken language development. Thus, the teacher should initially assist the

students in decoding the text. The teacher should read aloud to the class and use their assumptions to help them understand the content. Thus, the main objective of the reading classes ought to be "Reading for meaning" (Moll & Diaz, 1985). When it comes to helping pupils understand, reading, explanation, and review should be done in English so that they can take part in the conversations. Next begins the process of introducing individuals to unfamiliar and difficult words, also referred to as vocabulary growth through comprehension. When children are asked questions about what they have read in English, they should first be allowed to respond in English to whatever they know (Moll & Diaz, 1985). After that, they can be asked in their native tongue, and the teacher and the class as a whole can then clarify the proper response (1985).

Second language acquisition is a vast area to explore challenges for ESL learners in schools following a curriculum where students have less exposure to learn English from their surrounding environment outside of the classroom. Starting from the 'grammar-translation' method for ESL learners, there are several theories and strategies to boost second language acquisition (Alijumah, 2020). However, 'natural learning' is used to denote a second language acquisition in everyday communication in an ordinary way and free from systematic guidance (2020).

Although in the most research, bilingual and multilingual education shows no difference in meaning, in terms of ESL learning environment, as multilingual students have to learn English in addition to a second language (which is Bengali in this research context), the linguistic challenges are different and must be investigated and analyzed before planning a curriculum. Most often the ESL learning occurs with the influences of both the first and second language and how much they get the chance to practice without mixing them.

The language of instruction, and more especially whether or not children's home language should be utilized for instruction, has been at the center of the controversial discussion regarding how to effectively teach emerging bilingual children (Soltero-González *et al.*, 2016). Reading proficiency in English and the development of biliteracy are both aided by teaching emerging bilingual kids to read and write in both their native tongue and English. According to a study, paired literacy training is more successful since it uses two languages, with one mother tongue serving as the basis for literacy development (Soltero-González *et al.*, 2016). There, language settings are deliberately linked in several ways, including the use of bilingual texts, a common theme or genre, or literacy goals (2016). This paired literacy program never aims to switch children around to receive all of their instruction in English (2016). Instead, the objective is to support the development of bilingualism and biliteracy. Both the growth of their mother tongue literacy and the acquisition of English literacy are not hindered by the simultaneous teaching of literacy in both languages (Soltero-González *et al.*, 2016). Instead, it promotes biliteracy and enhances the acquisition of English literacy. Additionally, the study confirms how crucial it is to schedule enough time for literacy instruction in the two languages starting at the beginning of school (Soltero-González *et al.*, 2016). For instance, grade 4 should have one hour and twenty minutes for English lessons, while grade 3 gets forty minutes.

In alignment with the prior research, an additional study demonstrates that bilingual students can become more proficient in English more easily when they receive interactive local-language support in two/three local languages in addition to English (Castillo & Wagner, 2019). This support is provided through developing content that is tailored to the target group's cultural and contextual needs. Teachers should be sufficiently prepared to address the variety of learner needs, and students should have the opportunity to learn both their home language and English in

the classroom in formal school settings, since the language of instruction (LOI) plays a significant role in literacy acquisition, especially within multilingual settings (Castillo & Wagner, 2019). Learners' language of instruction shouldn't be changed to only Bengali and English above grade three as this will impede the growth of their literacy.

Here, the term cross-linguistic influence comes which refers to “full range of ways in which a person’s knowledge of one language can affect that person’s knowledge and use of another language”. This cross-linguistic transfer phenomenon occurs when an L2 is learned after L1 as the interaction of those two languages occurs in the mind of learners and there is transfer from L1 to the L2 and vice versa ($L1 \leftrightarrow L2$) in the learning of L2. In case the learners are studying an additional language L3 (English for this research context) after their chronological L2 (Bengali), there are interactions among a multiplicity of different linguistic systems which is more complex i.e. $L1 \leftrightarrow L2$, $L1 \leftrightarrow L3$, $L2 \leftrightarrow L3$ (Nsengiyumva, 2021).

2.3 English Language Learners

Instead of relying entirely on teacher-directed instruction or activities to provide material, students learn English when they actively interact with other students in English. Engaging in oral activities has two purposes: it improves language use and fosters conceptual understanding (Hill, 2013). Additionally, since academic and oral language are different, students need to learn in the classroom how to develop academic oral language, such as how to sound like books by utilizing the vocabulary specific to each discipline (2013). They need to practice using grammar, vocabulary, and sentence starters in order to be a good writer. By meeting their language needs,

thinking language matrix can be beneficial for ESL students (Hill, 2013). The way the Thinking Language Matrix operates in the classroom is as follows (2013):

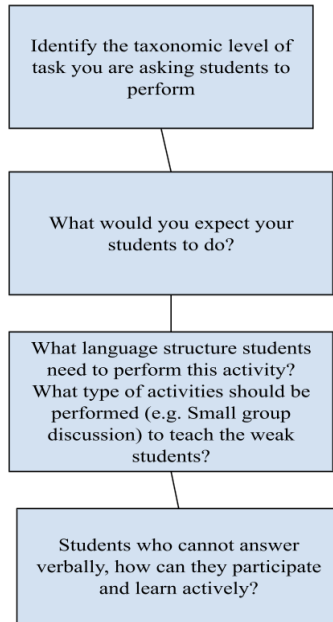


Figure 1: Thinking language matrix (Hill, 2013)

Stages that students can go through to begin thinking in English as a second language while they are in different learning stages within the same classroom(Hill, 2013):

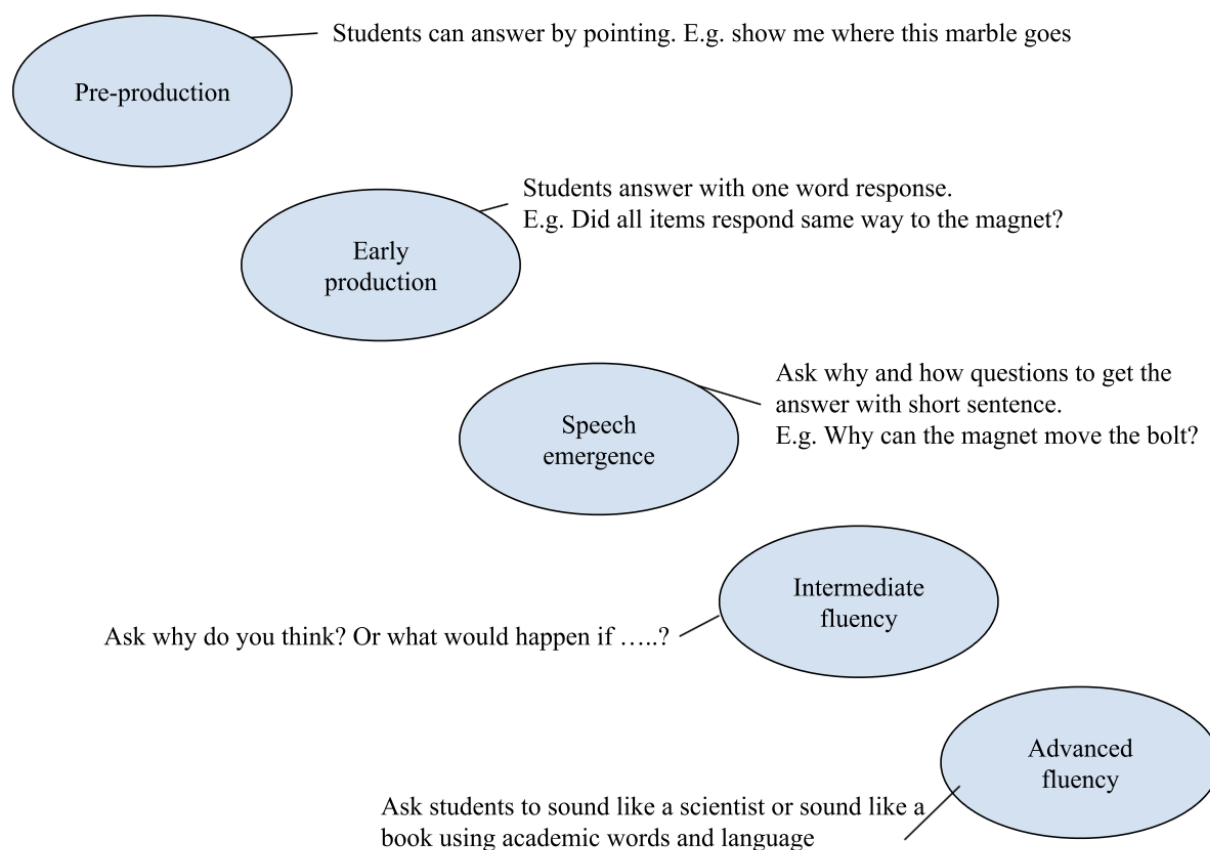


Figure 2: Different learning stages (Hill, 2013)

The steps in teaching ESL learners in the classroom are setting up the learning environment, assisting students in developing comprehension, and assisting students in extending and applying knowledge (Hill, 2013).

Another study found that teachers of multilingual and multicultural students should also be knowledgeable about diversity-related issues and second language acquisition theory and research (Freeman, 2000). They also need to become knowledgeable about culturally relevant and first language-supporting resources for their students. Above all, they must come up with efficient teaching strategies for students with backgrounds and experiences different from their own. Given that children who completely develop their first language acquire a second language

faster, it's important in this instance that the importance of the student's first language should not be overlooked during the learning process(Freeman, 2000). To make sure ESL students are learning efficiently, a few questions should be addressed, following the research(Freeman, 2000):

1. Are curriculum and lectures structured around "big" questions? Teachers can still give books in the primary languages of their students even if they do not speak those languages themselves. Because the books address subjects that the students have thought about or experienced, they are drawn to read works like these. Students become more literate and proficient in the English language as they explore these subjects.
2. Do students participate in actual writing and reading tasks?
3. Is an effort being made to utilize the interests and prior knowledge of the students?
Are alternatives available for students?

Students may find themselves not interested when classes have no impact on their lives. Often, the curriculum in traditional educational institutions assumes that students have similar life experiences. Therefore, it could be challenging for English language learners to draw links between what they are learning and what they already know. On the other hand, teachers enhance the chance that students will make the connection between their experiences and their academic work if they give them a choice in the questions they study. All students can expand on the ideas and knowledge they bring to class with this method.

4. Does the content make sense? Does it provide the students with a purpose?
5. Do students get the chance to collaborate with others?

6. During their educational experiences, do students speak, listen, and write?
7. Are the mother tongues and cultures of the students respected, encouraged, and developed? Teachers can find ways to encourage their students' native languages even if they are unable to instruct them in them, and they can also include their students in activities that examine the cultures of all the students in the classroom.
8. Do students participate in activities that help them feel good about themselves and give them chances to succeed?

For ELLs (English Language Learners) to acquire language and develop conceptual understanding, it is crucial to establish linkages with their mother tongue (Olds *et al.*, 2021). Establishing connections from their first language helps students capacity to transfer to the new language, as people acquire language through their need to communicate with the people around them. Additionally, it is better for students' academic performance when instructions are translated and heard in their native language (Olds *et al.*, 2021).

Since first language acquisition is advantageous for teaching new language acquisition, teachers should place a high priority on their students capacity to draw links with their native tongue. According to research, encouraging a student to use their native language can accelerate their acquisition of a second language (Olds *et al.*, 2021). This is because using one's primary language gives students the chance to transfer knowledge to their new language. Furthermore, it was discovered to be beneficial to use a variety of well-known teaching techniques to meet the demands of ELLs, such as modeling, scaffolding, vocabulary tactics, and small groups—a practice known as "culture supporting language acquisitions" (Olds *et al.*, 2021). The use of well-known tactics in the classroom fosters students language development. Additionally, by

making a slight modification, the same strategies might still be helpful because students require guidance and lots of opportunities to practice their new language (Olds *et al.*, 2021).

Using a management style that is culturally appropriate is another tactic for ESL students (Mays, 2008). The topic matter should take into account the differences in students cultures both at home and in the classroom. Therefore, as cultural and linguistic relevance is essential to the learning process, teachers should be aware with the cultural views and values of the students studying in the diverse classroom (Mays, 2008). Additionally, teachers should talk with students about how they arrived at their answers rather than rejecting those that seem incorrect(2008).

Chapter 3

Population and Methodology

3.1 Research Location

Two remote primary schools in Bangladesh's Khagrachari district, within the Chattogram division, were used as the study site. The Khagrachari district's Manikchari upazila was located in the three schools. The schools were called Joggachola Government Primary School and Sapmara Government Primary Schools. The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region was chosen because it is the residence of the majority of the indigenous populations—roughly two million people. Taking into account the fact that distant schools were chosen where teachers and students from both indigenous and Bengali groups could be found to obtain reliable information regarding the topic of study. The distance between schools and Manikchari Upazila was seven to ten kilometers. The only risky way to get to the schools was by motorcycle. Although we were welcomed warmly by the teachers and students, it seemed that school hours were not set in stone. The number of teachers was insufficient. More than four classes are taught by one teacher consecutively on the same day. When the distance gets too far, there are insufficient teachers.

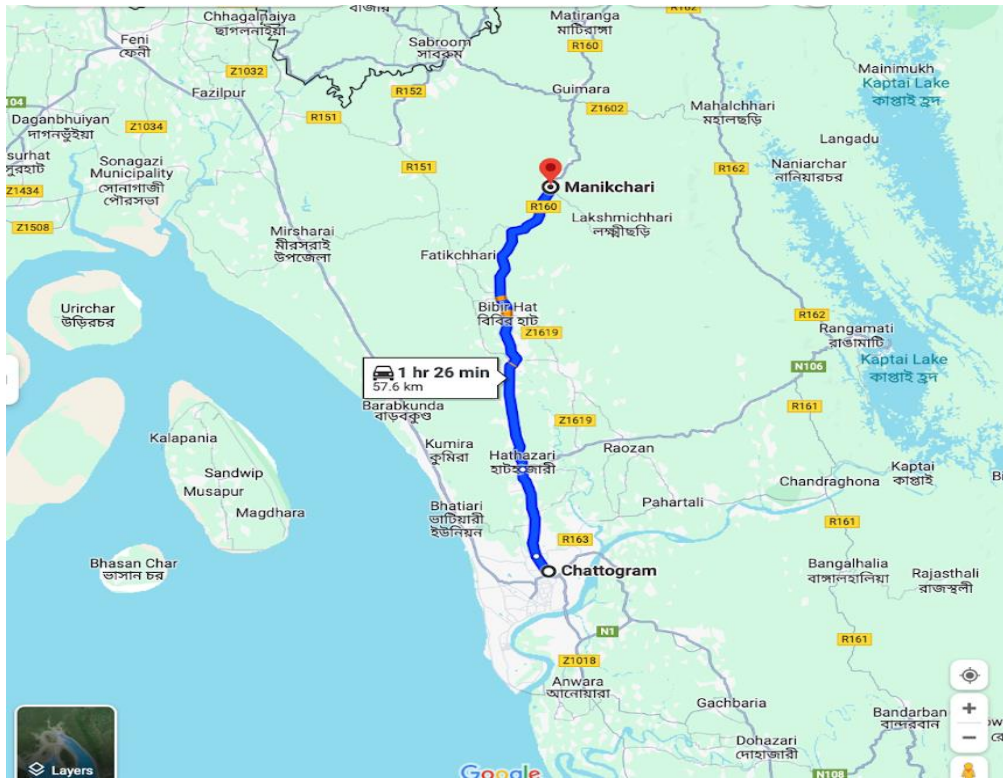


Image: Location of Manikchhari Upazila, Chittagong Hill Tracts from Google Map

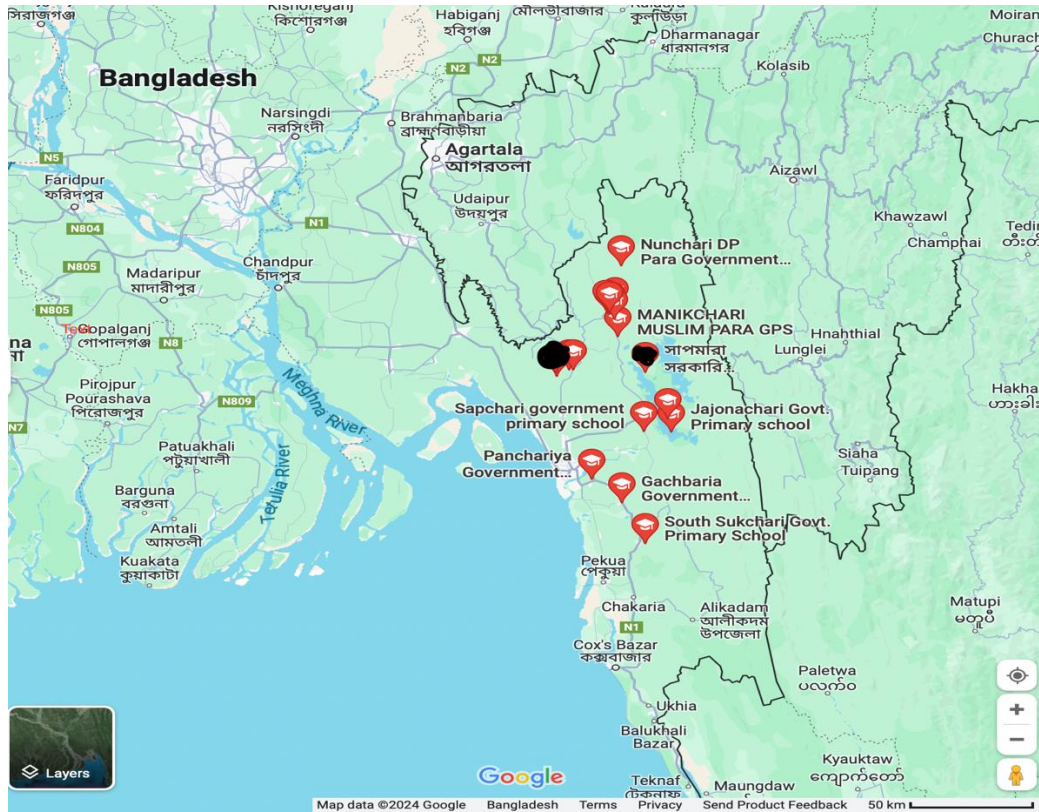


Image: Location of two schools in Manikchari Upazila, Chittagong Hill Tracts from Google Map

Ballpoint was used to identify two different schools. There was only a rented motorcycle that could be used to go the 7 miles to reach to these two schools.

3.2 Participants

During the data collection process, 77 participants from two primary schools were interviewed through Focus Group Discussion. Of them, 17 were teachers, while the remaining ones were third- to fourth-graders. Due to a board exam later that day, Grade 5 students were unable to take part in the discussion. Students from the Marma and Tripura indigenous populations were present in the classroom with Bengali children. While Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with

teachers were not particularly difficult, Focus Group Discussions with students were difficult and time-consuming because they would often remain quiet when questioned.

Despite hillsides, the proportion of indigeneous students to Bengali students was 1:3. In the first school, the teacher-to-student ratio was normal; however, when I traveled to remote places, I discovered that the ratio of student to teacher reached 60:1. It was a little unexpected that there were only three teachers at the last school I visited, even though there were over 300 students enrolled. After talking to them, I discovered that even though they are appointed, teachers are transferred to other schools because the schools were too far away from the main upazila. I observed students conversing in the classroom using their native tongue. Following the discovery of the two communities (Bengali and Indigenous), most of the indigenous students sat with students from their community and felt free to converse in their native tongue. Indigenous students experience discomfort and lack of flexibility when questioned.

3.3 Data collection

The study was followed by a qualitative method consisting of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) for both teachers and students. There was a semi-structured questionnaire for conducting Focus Group Discussion for both teachers and students. The questionnaire was kept as semi-structured so that participants could be asked follow-up questions. Focus Group Discussion with teachers was around 25-30 minutes whereas Focus Group Discussion with students was around 35-40 minutes as students needed more time to be friendly and answer the questions. To ensure there was no interference, no teacher was kept on as a translator during the Focus Group Discussion

with children. Moreover, I was able to fully understand and communicate with them because I knew Marma and Tripura language.

3.4 Data Analysis

Derived data from the field study was analyzed following the descriptive qualitative data analysis method. Interviews were recorded transcribed and stored in Microsoft Word for analysis later.

Direct answers were also taken as a quotes during the data analysis.

Chapter 4

Result and Discussion

4.1 Linguistic Aspects

The education of indigenous communities in formal institutions faces a major challenge related to linguistic aspects. This includes difficulties students may have in mixing three languages - English, Bangla, and their mother tongue. It also involves understanding how cross-linguistic communication occurs when multilingual students are learning English. Furthermore, it is important to address how teachers are handling and resolving these challenges within the classroom to ensure an inclusive curriculum for all students.

Indigenous students in Bangladesh face challenges when it comes to understanding content in English due to the mixture of languages they are exposed to, including Bengali and their native tongue. Through class observations, it was evident that these students are learning and using three languages simultaneously in school: English, Bengali, and Tripura/Marma, which is their mother tongue. Teachers from the focus group discussion acknowledged the language mixing and the use of multiple languages in the classroom but were unsure of how the language transfer occurs in the learners' minds while learning English. For an example whether the learning is from L1(Native) to L3(English) or L2(Bengali) to L3. These students were observed conversing with teachers in Bangla while also speaking their native tongue with their peers. Nonetheless, multilingual learners were seen assisting one another in grasping the material or questions part of the reading comprehension. It appeared that they were flexible enough to learn from each other

in their native language. The focus group discussion also highlighted the effectiveness of teaching or translating text and vocabulary into the students' mother tongue, as it helps them grasp the material more quickly. It is crucial to assess the student's proficiency in Bengali before introducing English, as they are learning both as non-native languages. Understanding how these multilingual students interact with English as their third language, and the dynamics of their language-learning process is essential for their academic development.



Photos: Focus group discussion with indigenous students



Photos: Focus Group Discussion with teachers

One surprising discovery from the Focus Group Discussion with teachers is that Bengali teachers could not recognize the impact of language barriers and language mixing on multilingual students' struggles with learning English. These lead to difficulties in understanding content, decoding text, and learning new vocabulary for students. When asked about the differences between Bengali and indigenous students' English abilities by asking “Do you think Bengali students are better at English than students from other ethnic communities? and Which is hard for multilingual students to understand in the classroom?”, the Bengali teachers expressed that they did not perceive any distinctions in understanding English content. Besides, teachers could not express their thoughts on the question of what they think about second language acquisition

while teaching English to indigenous students. This suggests that Bengali teachers did not experience language barriers like indigenous teachers and students, and this makes it difficult for them to understand the differences in the classroom. Nonetheless, the indigenous English teachers acknowledged challenges in helping their students understand the text's content. "Since I am Marma, I try to translate texts in the Marma language to help Marma students in understanding, but this is impossible for me to do the same for the other indigenous communities," said one of the teachers.

The curriculum and teaching pedagogies lack clarity and do not provide information on the linguistic aspects that should be taught to multilingual learners. From my class observations, I have noticed that phonological transfer and syntactic transfer are not integrated into the teaching pedagogies. Students are asked to read passages without proper guidance on how to pronounce specific words. Additionally, during the Focus Group Discussion with Bengali teachers (who teach English), it was evident that there are no clear strategies for teaching multilingual students in the classroom when dealing with their diverse languages. When asked, "How do you manage students from different backgrounds, considering their diversified languages?" the teachers did not have a clear answer. As observed and discussed in the Focus Group, students struggle to communicate fluently in Bengali. Therefore, teaching English in Bengali makes it difficult for them to understand grammar, sentence construction, and the meaning of sentences. Additionally, teachers said that "indigenous students have more problems in speaking and reading passages in the classroom." From the class observation, students find difficulty in reading passages, learning new vocabulary, and decoding text from passages. The class observation found it difficult for them to pronounce new, unfamiliar words in English, such as "pollution" and "environment," when reading the passage. They also found it challenging to decode the text and understand the

meaning of the passage, as they had not received any instruction on what the passage was about or what they would learn from it before reading it.

Thus, overall, the challenges were as follows:

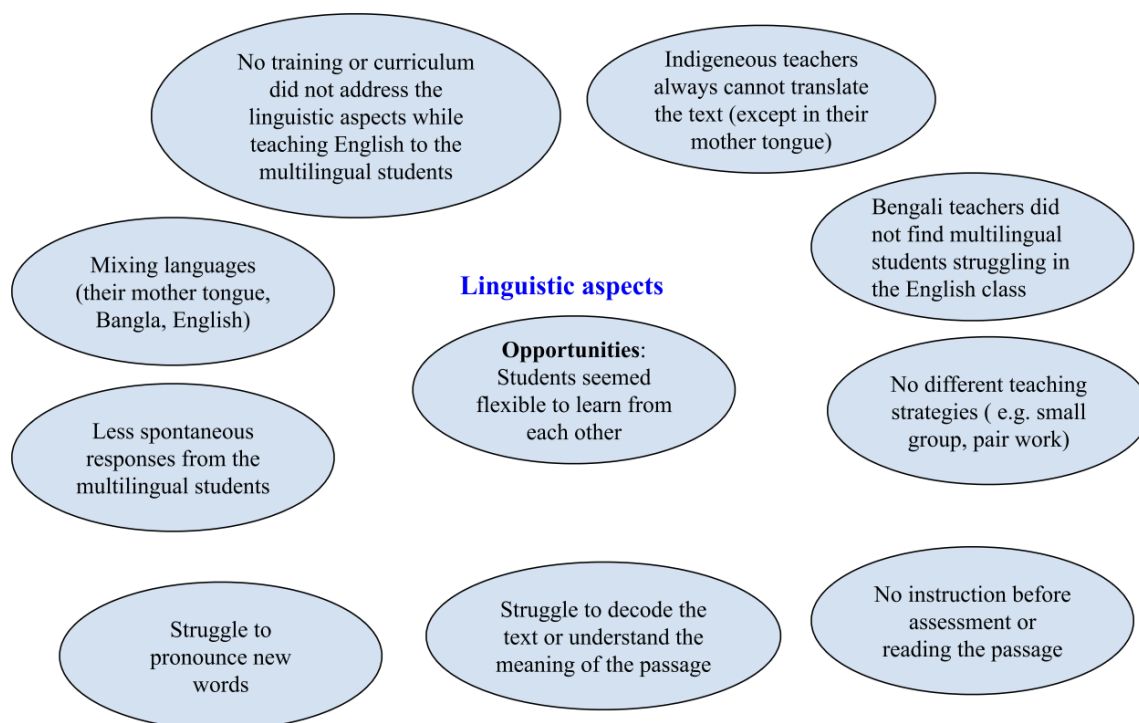


Figure 3: Challenges of linguistic aspects

Additionally, there was a noticeable lack of active student participation during class. When the teacher called on students at random to read a passage, they appeared disengaged and reluctant to participate. The class activities also lacked variety, such as pair work or small group discussions. Furthermore, it was apparent that the large class size (approximately 45-50 students) led to a lack of attentiveness to the teacher's instructions. The teacher utilized traditional lecture methods, which did not incorporate any new teaching strategies, resulting in a monotonous learning

environment. However, by implementing and regularly monitoring class activities, it would be easier to identify areas where students are struggling to grasp the content. This also underscores the need for a curriculum and teacher training in interactive teaching methods to make learning English more enjoyable, particularly for multilingual students.

Therefore, addressing linguistic aspects in the curriculum and teaching pedagogies is crucial, as students from diverse cultures and backgrounds study in the same classroom. It is important to consider the individual learner, understand how cross-language transfer occurs in their mind, help each of them navigate a new language English following Bengali, and introduce and modify different teaching pedagogies in the classroom.

4.2 Demographic and Culture

The cultures of those two targeted indigenous communities Marma and Tripura, which are two marginalized indigenous communities out of eleven different ethnic indigenous communities are rich. They are deprived not only of living in geographically remote hilly areas but also of their own identity as the Bangladesh Government does not identify them as indigenous but as tribal groups of people. However, the political and geographical exclusion makes those communities lag to come out of the darkness of social stigma, and gender stereotypes. There is no distinct information about each indigenous community's literacy rate. The literacy rate among Indigenous communities is far lower than the national rate. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational and Information Statistics (BANBEIS), the dropout rate was 59 percent in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), whereas the national rate stood at 19.2 percent in 2016. Even when Indigenous children from plain land and hills reach the classroom, their first experience with formal education starts with being admitted to a local primary school where most of the teachers are Bengali.



Photos: Class observations

The importance of culture in learning English cannot be overstated. Textbooks, classroom explanations, and teaching strategies such as games should all be culturally relevant. This not only sparks excitement in learners to master a new language but also fosters cross-cultural awareness among students. Ultimately, the learning process should be enjoyable and applicable to everyday life, enabling students to grasp it easily and sustain their learning.

During the classroom observation, it was evident that there was a higher percentage of Bengali students compared to indigenous students. Unfortunately, the English class teachers did not seem

to provide them with any special attention. When the children were asked about how often they ask their teachers questions and whether they enjoy doing so, most of them remained silent. This silence indicates that they are hesitant to speak up when they don't understand something. They seem to believe that it's normal to struggle with understanding the material and are afraid to ask questions out of fear of upsetting the teacher or being viewed as weak by their peers. I also noticed that multilingual students seem unwilling to learn or read passages unless a teacher forces them to or calls on them. The teacher tends to prioritize students who perform well without engaging the rest of the class. It is important to conduct more research to determine whether their culture contributes to their lack of curiosity or reluctance to actively participate in learning by asking questions. Teachers and parents should work together to find ways to motivate students to participate actively in class and to learn proactively. Additionally, the teachers tend to ask closed-ended questions, such as "Did all of you understand?" after their lectures, rather than inquiring about specific points the students may have struggled with. This approach overlooks the fact that the children find it difficult to understand and assumes they will simply learn on their own or through private tutors. Consequently, the students end up mindlessly memorizing English rhymes that have no relevance to their daily lives or culture. This memorization stems from their inability to connect what they are learning to their own culture. The rich cultural heritage of the students is not integrated into the teaching methods and curriculum. According to indigenous teachers, a similar issue arises when the children read Bengali text—they can decode the words but struggle to comprehend the material. As a result, they fall behind without a solid grasp of Bengali.

I found that students from multilingual indigenous communities and the majority of Bengali community students have less intercultural awareness, which makes it difficult for them to form

deep friendships or bonds. In the classroom, girls from the same community tend to sit in one corner and boys in another, without much interaction between different communities. To improve students' intercultural awareness, it is important to provide opportunities for them to engage in various class activities and exchange knowledge with one another. This will help foster mutual respect for communities and cultures. By integrating cultural awareness into ESL learning, educators can offer students a more comprehensive understanding of the language, including its cultural nuances and real-life usage.

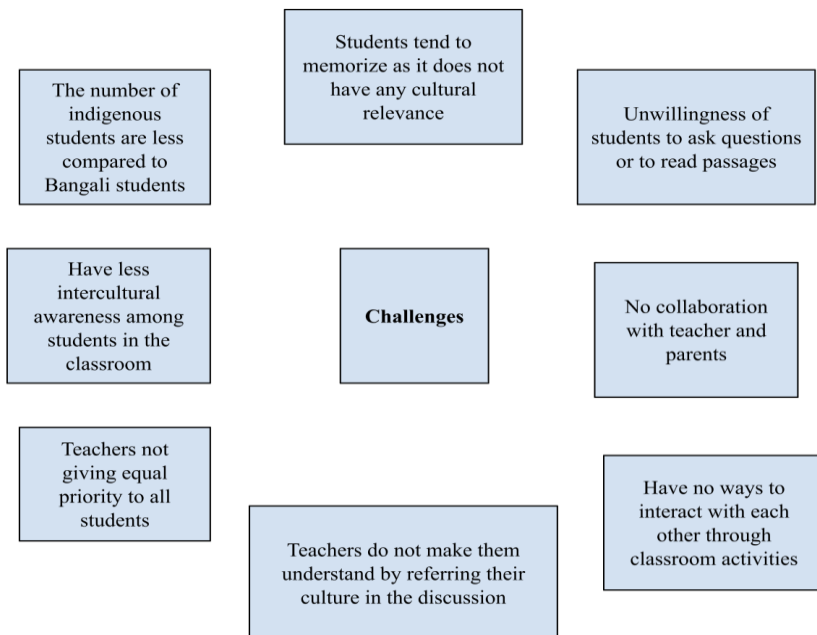


Figure 4: Challenges of Demographic and Culture

These approaches will create a more supportive learning environment for multilingual indigenous students who are learning English after studying in Bangla. Ultimately, the national education ministry should prioritize providing sustainable, quality education rather than simply increasing the percentage of students obtaining degrees from elementary school.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

As stated, the primary challenges are language barriers and the cultural irrelevance of the English textbook when taught to multilingual students, which leads to other challenges including students' lower intercultural awareness and lack of willingness to learn spontaneously. English proficiency will enable multilingual indigenous learners to study alongside the majority of Bengali students how to navigate this globalized world if the curriculum takes these problems into account and teachers receive the necessary training.

Recommendations

Several basic themes emerged in this study which resulted in many recommendations. Extensive research should be conducted on how many multilingual students struggle to learn English following the Bengali language and where the challenges remain. Furthermore, linguistic barriers should be addressed in the curriculum and should be incorporated with the teaching pedagogies followed for a mixed classroom where both bilingual and multilingual students are studying. How those three languages interact with each other in each individual's mind while learning should be investigated.

Improved English language curriculum and teaching strategies are crucial for the academic success of multilingual indigenous students in primary schools. Without the necessary changes, these students may struggle to adapt to a globalized society. Failing to achieve proficiency in English could result in unemployment after graduation, as many job sectors now require this skill. Since language learning is most effective when started early, delaying English language

acquisition may cause these students to fall behind. As the future leaders of their society, they need a quality education to become proficient in English.

In order to support multilingual students in decoding text and learning new vocabulary, it is important for teachers to provide clear instructions before they begin reading a passage. This can include modeling reading for the students, engaging in choral reading or Echo Reading (where the teacher reads a sentence or paragraph and the students repeat), Repeated Readings (where the teacher reads and then the student reads the same paragraph three more times), or Buddy Reading (where students read to each other). Additionally, teachers can help students form reading groups in the classroom to practice reading both inside and outside of the classroom. This approach can help students engage with the material and learn more effectively. Furthermore, teachers can regularly assess students to track their learning progress.

When students struggle to remember words, especially if the content is less relevant to their culture or daily life, teachers can incorporate more visuals. If multimedia projectors are not available, teachers can provide real-life examples to help students remember new words. This will help students to engage and learn spontaneously. Teachers also can give them regular assessments to check their improvement in learning. As students struggle to remember words, as the content is less or not relevant to their culture or daily life, teachers can use more visuals, if visuals are not possible to show with a multimedia projector, then teachers can give real-life examples so that students can remember those new words.

Teachers can help students understand instructions better by speaking more slowly and using Total Physical Response (TPR) to link language with physical movements. For instance, when teaching a new word like "run," the teacher can demonstrate the action. This visual, auditory, and

kinesthetic approach makes learning more enjoyable and helps students learn faster. Indigenous English teachers should not only help students learn English, but also encourage them to think in English. They can use different learning strategies, such as graphic organizers, and encourage students to practice English in the classroom. For example, when teaching stories in English, students could act out the passage they have read.

Teachers can begin writing lessons by allowing students to write freely and share their thoughts. They can then be divided into small groups for discussion, where the teacher can provide feedback. Peer discussion can help broaden their knowledge through shared learning experiences. Regular assessments are essential for writing students.

These recommendations can be implemented in the Primary Teachers Training Program, where teachers undergo a year of intensive training to learn what and how to teach. Monitoring classes and providing feedback from trainers can significantly improve teaching quality.

Limitations

The lack of funds resulted in a limit on the number of schools for the research study. In addition, it would be more productive to discuss with parents alongside to doing focus group with teachers and students. Furthermore, the main limitation was the dearth of research conducted in this specific area within the particular context. Additionally, there was no assessment of the students' proficiency in English.

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Appendices

Semi-structured questionnaire

Date of Interview: 13-14 Nov 2023

Areas to focus on the study:

- Socio demographic factors (cultural background, community influence, ethnicity, religion, interference of first language)
- Psychological factors (motivation, attitude, anxiety, self-efficacy, aptitude, low confidence, stage fear)
- Linguistic factors (language mixing in the classroom, inability to understand classes)
- Teachers' perspectives, observations and responses towards Second Language Acquisition (SLA) for learning English in the classroom among multilingual students

Semi-Structured Questionnaire for Students:

- Which subject is your favorite?
- Which ethnic community do you belong to?
- How many languages are you good at or learning?
- Why and why not English is your favorite subject?
- How many days and how long is your English class being taken?
- Why do you want to learn English?
- What is hard for you to learn English?
- Do you understand what is being taught in the English classroom? If you do not know in the classroom, what did you do?
- What do you like most about the English class?
- What topic do you need to improve on in English? (Writing, speaking, listening or reading)
- Have you ever watched English movies, episodes, or series?
- Have you ever seen a foreigner (native speaker) or watched movies in English, or done anything else that influenced you to learn English?
- What things you can do learning English? Why you are excited to learn English?

- How do you learn English? Do you translate into Bengali or in your language before speaking , reading or writing English?
- How do teachers teach English if you need help understanding? Do they translate into Bengali or in your language?
- Do you have any private tutors from where you learn English?
- Do your parents or siblings help you to learn English or motivate you to score well on English tests?
- Are most of your friends Bengali or from your community? Which language do you speak with them?
- Which language do you speak at home? Your mother tongue or Bangla?
- Do you feel like you're mixing languages in the English classroom? When teachers ask a question, or you read English independently, do you translate it into your language first and then English?
- Do you have a fear of speaking English or anxiety about not pronouncing well in English?
- Are you good/ bad/ average in English? Do you find writing passages or reading difficult?
- Do you or your friends laugh when others make mistakes in the English classroom?
- If you make mistakes in English class, how and where do you learn? How do teachers help you?

Semi-Structured Questionnaire for Teachers:

- Which subject and grade do you teach?
- How long is the class time?
- What is the performance of the students in the classroom?
- How do you manage students from different backgrounds, considering their diversified languages?
- Do you think Bengali students are better at English than students from other ethnic communities?
- Which is hard for multilingual students to understand in the classroom?
- How do you help those multilingual students to understand the topic?
- Do you feel that they have stages of fear, shyness, and anxiety to speak?

- Are they motivated to learn English? Why and why not? Which encourages them to teach English?
- Do you translate into their language if one of the students does not understand?
- How are writing passages taught?
- How often or how do they practice reading?
- Can they learn from peers in the classroom? Which ways?
- Which language do they mostly use inside the classroom? With you and your peers?
- Do they mix languages as they simultaneously learn two languages (Bangla and English)?
- Do you teach them outside the classroom through private or tuition?
- Do you feel supported by your parents to score well in English?
- Compare their score in English with other subjects. Is it comparatively challenging for them to learn English?
- What is your opinion about second language acquisition for those multilingual students who are under-resourced?
- How can they learn well, eliminating language barriers among them?