

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE AS AN ACADEMIC SUBJECT IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

This paper provides an in-depth examination of the history and evolution of English as an academic subject in Bangladesh, highlighting the crucial role it plays in the nation's educational framework. The significant emphasis on teaching and learning foreign languages, particularly English, is explored. It is posited that Bangladesh represents a unique case in South Asia, where systematic and sustained efforts have been made to embed English into the education system.

This has included the development and effective implementation of unified linguistic policies. As a result, Bangladesh has made substantial progress in integrating English into its cognitive and cultural framework, facilitating the assimilation of new knowledge and contributing to the intellectual and cultural transformation of its society.

Keywords: English language education, English literature, Bangladesh education system, Cultural and literary studies, Academic research in Bangladesh, British colonial influence, Interdisciplinary studies, and Linguistic policies.

Introduction

Bangladesh, officially the People's Republic of Bangladesh, is a country in South Asia. As of April 2024, Bangladesh has more than 150 universities. Among these universities, nearly all offer programs in English language and literature, reflecting the subject's importance within the national education system. The study of English language and literature in Bangladesh occupies a prominent position within the nation's educational framework. This field has undergone substantial evolution since the country's independence in 1971, reflecting broader socio-cultural and economic changes. The legacy of British colonial rule has ensured that English remains a vital component of academic and professional spheres in Bangladesh.

Historical context

The origins of English education in Bangladesh can be traced back to the British colonial period when English was introduced as the medium of instruction and administration. Following independence, the significance of English persisted due to its global importance and utility in international communication. Over the years, English language and literature have been integrated into the curricula at various educational levels, from primary schools to universities.

Pre-independence era

During British colonial rule, English was imposed as the language of administration and education. This period saw the establishment of several English-medium schools and colleges, laying the foundation for English education in the region. The British aimed to



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create a class of English-speaking administrators who could assist in governing the colony. The influence of English extended to literature, with many literary works from Britain being introduced to the Bengali intelligentsia

Post-independence era

After gaining independence in 1971, Bangladesh retained English as a significant part of its educational and administrative systems. English was seen as a means of connecting with the global community and accessing scientific and technological advancements. The government and educational institutions recognized the importance of English in higher education, research, and international relations, leading to the continued emphasis on English language and literature studies.

Academic programs and institutions

Several universities in Bangladesh offer robust undergraduate and postgraduate programs in English language and literature. Among the most notable are the University of Dhaka, Jahangirnagar University, and Rajshahi University. These institutions provide comprehensive courses that cover diverse aspects of English studies, including linguistics, literary theory, postcolonial literature and applied linguistics.

English departments in bangladeshi universities

Public Universities

All public universities in Bangladesh, such as the University of Dhaka, Jahangirnagar University, and Rajshahi University, have well-established English Departments offering a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs. These departments cover various areas of English studies, including literature, linguistics, and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages).

Private universities

All private universities, including North South University, BRAC University, East West University, and City University also offer robust English programs. These institutions often provide modern curricula and teaching methodologies, emphasizing research and practical applications of English studies.

National universities

The National University of Bangladesh, a leading public university system, offers extensive programs in English through its affiliated colleges. The English programs span undergraduate and graduate levels, providing students with comprehensive education in literature, linguistics, and language studies.

Specialized vocational institutions

While nearly all universities in Bangladesh have English programs, some specialized and vocational institutions may have a more limited focus on English, concentrating instead on technical and professional education. However, basic English courses are often included in



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their curricula to ensure students have essential language skills.

University of Dhaka: Established in 1921, the Department of English at the University of Dhaka is one of the oldest and most esteemed in the country. It offers Bachelor of Arts (BA), Master of Arts (MA), Master of Philosophy (MPhil), and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programs. The curriculum encompasses a wide range of literary periods and genres, designed to cultivate critical thinking and analytical skills in students.

Jahangirnagar University: Known for its research orientation, the English Department at Jahangirnagar University offers extensive courses in literary criticism, cultural studies, and linguistics. The department encourages interdisciplinary studies, fostering an environment where students can explore the intersections of literature with other social sciences.

Rajshahi University: The English Department at Rajshahi University provides a diverse range of courses, emphasizing both literature and language. The department is noted for its focus on regional literature in English and comparative literature studies.

North South University (NSU)

Department of english and modern languages

The Department of English and Modern Languages at North South University offers comprehensive programs in English language and literature. The department provides a diverse curriculum that includes courses in British and American literature, linguistics, and TESOL. The program is designed to develop students' critical thinking, analytical skills, and proficiency in English.

Programs offered:

Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English
Master of Arts (MA) in English

Highlights:

Emphasis on research and practical application of linguistic theories
Regular seminars, workshops, and guest lectures
Opportunities for internships and collaborations with international universities

Brac university

Department of english and humanities

BRAC University's Department of English and Humanities offers a well-rounded program that integrates literature, cultural studies, and language instruction. The department aims to provide students with a broad understanding of literary traditions and contemporary cultural issues.

Programs Offered:

Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English
Master of Arts (MA) in English



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Highlights:

Interdisciplinary approach combining literature with cultural and media studies
Strong focus on research and critical analysis
Various extracurricular activities including literary clubs and publication opportunities

East West University (EWU)

Department of English

East West University's Department of English provides a comprehensive education in English language and literature. The curriculum is designed to equip students with advanced skills in literary analysis, linguistic theory, and practical applications of English in various professional contexts.

Programs offered:

Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English
Master of Arts (MA) in English

Highlights:

Focus on contemporary literary theories and critical thinking
Courses in creative writing, linguistics, and translation studies
Active involvement in research projects and academic conferences

City university department of english

City University's Department of English is committed to offering quality education in English language and literature. The department's programs are designed to foster intellectual growth and prepare students for various professional fields requiring strong communication and analytical skills.

Programs offered:

Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English
Master of Arts (MA) in English

Highlights:

Curriculum covering a wide range of literary genres and periods
Emphasis on both theoretical and practical aspects of English studies
Regular cultural events, workshops, and seminars to enhance learning experiences

Academic structure for english degrees in bangladesh

Bachelor's degree in english

To complete a bachelor's degree in English in Bangladesh, students typically need to fulfill the following requirements:

Duration: 4 years

Credits: 120-140 credits



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Course structure:

Core Courses: These usually include subjects such as British and American literature, linguistics, and foundational courses in language and writing.

Electives: Students may choose from various elective courses that can include topics like creative writing, cultural studies, and advanced linguistics.

General Education: Courses outside the English department, are often required to ensure a well-rounded education.

Thesis/Project: Some programs require a final-year thesis or project where students conduct research and present their findings.

MASTER'S DEGREE IN ENGLISH

For a master's degree in English, the requirements are as follows:

Duration: 1 year (can extend up to 2 years depending on the program and the institution)

Credits: 36-74 credits

Course Structure:

Advanced Core Courses: These include specialized courses in areas such as advanced literary theory, linguistics, and specific literary periods or movements.

Research Methods: Courses that prepare students for conducting academic research.

Electives/Seminars: These allow for further specialization in areas of interest.

Thesis/Comprehensive Exam: A significant research thesis or a comprehensive examination is typically required to complete the degree.

Admission Process for English Programs in Bangladeshi Universities

GENERAL ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The admission process for English programs at Bangladeshi universities typically involves several steps, including meeting eligibility criteria, submitting an application, passing an entrance exam, and participating in an interview. The process may vary slightly among universities, but the general requirements and procedures are similar.

Undergraduate Programs (Bachelor's Degree)

Eligibility Criteria:

Academic Qualifications: Applicants must have completed their Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) or equivalent examination.

Minimum Grades: A minimum GPA is often required, both in the HSC and Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams. For example, many universities require a GPA of at least 3.0 out of 5.0.

Subject Requirements: Some universities may have specific subject requirements, such as a minimum grade in English.

APPLICATION PROCESS:

Online Application: Prospective students must fill out an online application form available on the university's official website.

Submission of Documents: Applicants need to submit their academic transcripts, certificates, and other required documents.



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Entrance Exam:

Written Test: Most universities conduct a written test that assesses the candidate's proficiency in English, including grammar, comprehension, and essay writing.

Subjects Covered: The exam typically covers English language skills, general knowledge, and sometimes, basic analytical skills.

Interview:

Personal Interview: After passing the written test, candidates may be called for a personal interview to evaluate their communication skills and motivation for studying English

Selection Criteria:

Merit-Based: Admission is usually granted based on the combined scores of the entrance exam and the interview, along with academic performance in previous examinations.

Graduate Programs (master's degree) Eligibility Criteria:

Undergraduate Degree: Applicants must have a Bachelor's degree in English or a related field from a recognized institution.

Minimum GPA: A minimum GPA requirement is often specified, such as 3.0 out of 4.0.

Application Process:

Online Application: Candidates must apply online through the university's application portal.

Submission of Documents: Required documents typically include academic transcripts, letters of recommendation, and a statement of purpose.

Entrance Exam:

Written Test: Some universities require a written test for graduate admissions, which may include questions on literary theory, linguistics, and critical analysis.

Subjects Covered: The exam content varies but generally includes advanced topics in English literature and language.

Interview:

Personal Interview: An interview may be conducted to assess the applicant's research interests, academic goals, and suitability for the program.

Selection Criteria:

Merit-Based: Admissions are based on the applicant's performance in the entrance exam, interview, academic background, and other criteria set by the university.

NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES

Undergraduate Program (bachelor's degree)

Program Structure:



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Duration: 4 years

Credit Requirements: 120-140 credits

Curriculum: The Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English curriculum is designed to provide a balanced education in English literature, language, and linguistics. Courses typically include:

English Literature (from Chaucer to contemporary literature)

Linguistics (introduction to linguistics, phonetics, syntax)

Applied Linguistics and TESOL

Creative Writing

Comparative Literature

Literary Criticism and Theory

Translation Studies

Eligibility Criteria:

Academic Qualifications: Completion of Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) or equivalent examination with a satisfactory GPA.

Minimum Grades: Generally, a minimum GPA of 2.5 in both SSC and HSC exams.

Admission Process:

Application: Interested students must apply through the respective affiliated college.

Entrance Exam: Some colleges may conduct an entrance exam to assess the candidate's English proficiency and general knowledge.

Graduate Program (master's degree) Program Structure:

Duration: 1-2 years

Credit Requirements: 36-74 credits

Curriculum: The Master of Arts (MA) in English program includes advanced coursework and research opportunities. Key areas of study are:

Advanced Literary Studies (British, American, and World Literature)

Advanced Linguistics (sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics)

Research Methodology

Critical Theory

Dissertation/Thesis

Eligibility Criteria:

Academic Qualifications: A Bachelor's degree in English or a related field.

Minimum GPA: Generally, a minimum GPA of 2.5 in undergraduate studies.

Admission Process:

Application: Students must apply through the affiliated colleges offering the MA program.

Entrance Exam: Some colleges may require an entrance exam and interview



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for admission.

Notable Affiliated Colleges Offering English Programs

Several prominent colleges affiliated with the National University offer robust English programs, including:

Dhaka College

Eden Mohila College

Government Titumir College

Kabi Nazrul Government College

These colleges have well-established English departments with experienced faculty and extensive resources to support student learning and research.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

The curriculum for English language and literature in Bangladeshi universities typically includes core courses in British literature, American literature, and world literature, alongside specialized courses in areas such as psychology, sociology, postcolonial theory, and translation studies.

Teaching methodologies combine traditional lectures with modern pedagogical practices, including seminars, workshops, and digital learning tools.

Core Courses

The core courses in English programs often cover the major periods of British and American literature, from the Renaissance to contemporary works. These courses provide students with a comprehensive understanding of literary history, major authors, and significant texts. Students also study various literary genres, including poetry, drama, and prose, allowing them to appreciate the diversity and richness of English literature.

Specialized Courses

Specialized courses enable students to delve deeper into specific areas of interest. Courses on gender studies, ELT, postcolonial theory, and translation studies offer critical perspectives on literature and culture. These courses often intersect with other disciplines, encouraging interdisciplinary approaches and broadening students' intellectual horizons.

Pedagogical Approaches

Modern pedagogical practices in English departments in Bangladesh emphasize student-centered learning. Interactive teaching methods, such as group discussions, presentations, and project-based learning, are commonly employed. Digital learning tools and online resources are increasingly used to enhance the learning experience and provide students with access to a wealth of information.

Research and Publications

Bangladeshi scholars have significantly contributed to the field of English studies through research and publications. Journals such as the "Dhaka University Journal of Linguistics" and



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"Spectrum: Journal of the Department of English, University of Dhaka" provide platforms for academic discourse and dissemination of research findings. Research topics often include postcolonial literature, diaspora studies, and the role of English in the context of globalization. Moreover, most of the universities, in Bangladesh, have their own journal site for their faculties and students such as City University runs CELL.

Research Areas

Research in English studies in Bangladesh covers a wide range of areas, reflecting the diverse interests of scholars. Postcolonial literature is a significant focus, given Bangladesh's historical and cultural context. Scholars explore themes of identity, displacement, and resistance in postcolonial texts. Diaspora studies examine the experiences of Bangladeshi communities abroad and the cultural exchanges between Bangladesh and the wider world. The role of English in globalization is another key research area, analyzing how English facilitates global communication and cultural exchange.

Academic Journals

Several academic journals in Bangladesh publish research in English studies. The "Dhaka University Journal of Linguistics" and "Spectrum: Journal of the Department of English, University of Dhaka" are notable examples. These journals provide platforms for scholars to share their research and engage in academic discussions. They also contribute to the development of English studies in Bangladesh by showcasing local scholarship and promoting international collaborations.

Employment Opportunities

Graduates with degrees in English language and literature from Bangladeshi universities have diverse career opportunities. The skills acquired through these programs, such as critical thinking, analytical abilities, and communication skills, are highly valued in various job sectors.

Additionally, in Bangladesh, there is a saying that those who know English are considered smart and talented. Moreover, they often get extra benefits and opportunities.

Academia and Research

Many graduates pursue careers in academia, teaching English language and literature at schools, colleges, and universities. They may also engage in research, contributing to scholarly publications and participating in academic conferences.

Media and Communication

The media and communication industry offers numerous opportunities for English graduates. Careers in journalism, publishing, editing, and content creation are popular choices. Proficiency in English and strong writing skills are essential for these roles.

Corporate Sector



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In the corporate sector, English graduates often find roles in public relations, corporate communications, and human resources. Their ability to communicate effectively and handle complex information makes them valuable assets in business environments.

International Organizations and NGOs

International organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) require professionals with strong English skills for roles in communication, advocacy, and project management. English graduates can work in various capacities, including program coordinators, communication specialists, and policy analysts.

Government and Public Administration

The government sector also offers opportunities for English graduates, particularly in roles related to public relations, diplomacy, and policy analysis. Proficiency in English is crucial for effective communication and collaboration in these fields.

Freelancing

Freelancing is an ideal job for anyone who wants to work from home and independently. This job requires good communication skills, especially in English speaking and writing. English for freelancing enhances communication, making it easier to understand client needs and reduce misunderstandings. It boosts professionalism by improving the quality of proposals and interactions, while also expanding opportunities to work with international clients. A strong command of English helps you present yourself effectively online and facilitates better networking with industry professionals. As a result, being a Bangladeshi freelancer can allow you to earn foreign currency.

The Role of English Among Students in Bangladesh

The role of English in the academic and professional lives of students in Bangladesh is multifaceted and deeply intertwined with the nation's historical, cultural, and socio-economic landscape. English is often viewed as a gateway to better opportunities, both within the country and abroad. For many students, proficiency in English is not just a linguistic skill but a marker of social status and intellectual capability. This perception is rooted in the colonial legacy that associated English with modernity, progress, and access to global knowledge.

However, the emphasis on English can also create a divide between students who have access to quality English education and those who do not. In urban areas, students in elite schools often receive extensive English instruction from an early age, while students in rural areas or from less privileged backgrounds may struggle with inadequate resources and poorly trained teachers. This disparity reinforces social inequalities and limits the opportunities for many students to fully participate in academic and professional spheres. Aspirations Connected to Learning English

The aspirations connected to learning English in Bangladesh are closely linked to the desire for upward social mobility, international education, and global employment opportunities.



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English is often seen as the key to achieving these goals, leading to a widespread demand for English

language education at all levels. Many students and their families invest significant time and resources in learning English, driven by the belief that proficiency in the language will open doors to prestigious universities, high-paying jobs, and international experiences.

However, this aspiration can sometimes lead to an overemphasis on English at the expense of other important areas of study. The focus on English proficiency may overshadow the development of critical thinking, creativity, and a deeper understanding of the students' own cultural and linguistic heritage. Moreover, the pressure to learn English can create anxiety and stress, particularly for students who struggle with the language.

The Relationship of English Language and Literature to Bangla, Hindi, and Urdu Traditions

The relationship between English language and literature and the Bangla, Hindi, and Urdu traditions in Bangladesh is complex and multifaceted. English, as the language of the former colonial power, occupies a dominant position in the academic and cultural spheres, often overshadowing local languages and literary traditions. This dominance can be seen in the curricula of English departments, where British and American literature are given more emphasis than Bangla, Hindi, or Urdu literatures.

However, there is also a rich tradition of resistance and adaptation, where Bangla, Hindi, and Urdu literature engage with English literature in creative and subversive ways. Many Bangladeshi writers, for instance, have used English to express their own cultural identities and to challenge the colonial and postcolonial power dynamics. They often blend English with local languages and literary forms, creating hybrid texts that reflect the complexities of their cultural heritage. This interplay between English and local traditions enriches both, allowing for a more inclusive and diverse literary landscape.

Resistances to English in the Region

Despite its widespread acceptance, English has faced resistance in various forms in Bangladesh. Some scholars and cultural activists argue that the dominance of English undermines the status of Bangla and other local languages, leading to cultural homogenization and the erosion of

linguistic diversity. There are concerns that the emphasis on English in education and public life marginalizes those who are not proficient in the language, particularly in rural areas where

Bangla is the primary language of communication.

This resistance is not just linguistic but also ideological. For many, English is associated with the colonial past and the continuing influence of Western culture in Bangladesh. There is a fear that the uncritical adoption of English and Western literary canons may lead to a loss of cultural identity and autonomy. In response, there have been efforts to promote Bangla



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language and literature, both in education and in the public sphere, as a way to assert cultural independence and preserve the nation's linguistic heritage.

The Respective Relations of Literary Studies to Language Learning

The relationship between literary studies and language learning in Bangladesh is complex and often marked by tension. On the one hand, literature is seen as a valuable tool for language learning, providing students with rich and varied linguistic input that can enhance their vocabulary, grammar, and overall language proficiency. Literary texts offer students insights into different cultures, historical periods, and ways of thinking, making them an integral part of a well-rounded education.

On the other hand, the study of literature can sometimes be disconnected from the practical needs of language learners. In many English programs in Bangladesh, there is a strong focus on the canonical works of British and American literature, which may not always be relevant or accessible to students who are still developing their English language skills. This focus on canonical literature can create barriers for students, particularly those who are not from elite backgrounds or who do not have a strong foundation in English.

To address these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need for a more integrated approach that combines literary studies with language learning in a way that is meaningful and relevant to students' lives. This includes incorporating a wider range of texts, including local and contemporary literature, and using literature as a springboard for discussions on social, cultural, and linguistic issues.

Scope and Limits of English Language and Literature in Bangladesh

The scope of English language and literature as an academic subject in Bangladesh is vast, encompassing a wide range of linguistic, literary, and cultural studies. The field offers students the opportunity to engage with global literary traditions, develop critical thinking skills, and enhance their linguistic proficiency. English studies also open up numerous career opportunities, both within Bangladesh and internationally, making it a valuable field of study in the country's educational system.

However, the limits of English language and literature in Bangladesh are also apparent. The dominance of English can sometimes overshadow the rich literary and linguistic traditions of Bangladesh, leading to a disconnect between students' academic studies and their cultural identities. Moreover, the emphasis on English can exacerbate social inequalities, privileging those who have access to quality English education and marginalizing those who do not.

To fully realize the potential of English language and literature in Bangladesh, it is essential to adopt a more inclusive and critical approach that recognizes the value of local languages and literatures and addresses the social and cultural challenges associated with English studies. This includes promoting bilingual or multilingual education, incorporating a wider range of literary texts in the curriculum, and fostering a critical awareness of the cultural and political implications of studying English in a postcolonial context.

Challenges and Prospects



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Despite the considerable progress, the study of English language and literature in Bangladesh faces several challenges, including inadequate funding for higher education, limited access to contemporary research resources, and a need for more trained faculty members. Nonetheless, the prospects for English studies in Bangladesh remain promising, driven by the global demand for English proficiency and the increasing importance of cultural and literary studies in understanding global issues.

Challenges

One of the main challenges facing English studies in Bangladesh is inadequate funding for higher education. Financial resources affect the quality of education and research, leading to a supply of modern facilities and research materials. Access to contemporary research resources is also limited, hindering the ability of scholars to stay updated with the latest developments in the field. Additionally, there is a need for more trained and experienced faculty members who can provide high-quality education and mentorship to students. Since English is the second language in Bangladesh, mastering it can be challenging for non-native speakers. Students often face difficulties in understanding the content and books due to differences in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Additionally, the lack of sufficient practice and exposure to the language can further hinder their proficiency. As a result, many students struggle with reading comprehension, writing skills, and effective communication in English.

Prospects

Despite these challenges, the prospects for English studies in Bangladesh are promising. The global demand for English proficiency ensures that English remains a vital part of the education system. The increasing importance of cultural and literary studies in understanding global issues also highlights the relevance of English studies. Efforts to address the current challenges, such as improving funding for higher education, enhancing access to research resources, and investing in faculty development, will contribute to the growth and development of English studies in Bangladesh.

Conclusion

English language and literature as an academic subject in Bangladesh play a crucial role in the nation's educational and cultural landscape. As the country continues to engage with the global community, the study of English will remain vital for fostering critical thinking, cultural awareness, and academic excellence. With ongoing efforts to address current challenges, the field is poised for further growth and development, contributing significantly to both national and international academic discourse.

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