Article

Impact of Classroom from the Primary Level of the Acquisition of English as a Second Language in Bangladesh

Jannatul Ferdous [1*], **Budrunnesa Shuchi** [1], **Musanna Afrin** [1]

[1] Department of English, Daffodil International University, Bangladesh

*Correspondence: Jannatul Ferdous (jannatul.jfh@gmail.com)

Abstract: This paper examines the impact of primary level classroom environments on the acquisition of English as a second language (L2) in Bangladesh, comparing English-medium and Bangla-medium schools. The study investigates how different instructional approaches and early exposure to English influence language proficiency among students. Through a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and proficiency tests, the research reveals significant differences in language acquisition outcomes between the two educational settings. Findings indicate that students in English-medium schools, who are exposed to Natural approach methods of language learning and immersive English-speaking environments, demonstrate higher proficiency in speaking and listening skills compared to their Bangla-medium counterparts, who primarily receive grammar-focused instruction. The study highlights the critical role of early exposure to English, with students who begin learning the language at a younger age showing better phonological and syntactic development. Additionally, the integration of technology in language teaching emerges as a valuable tool for enhancing language learning, particularly in contexts with limited classroom exposure. The research suggests that Bangla-medium schools could benefit from adopting more interactive, student-centered teaching methods and integrating digital tools to support practical language use. The study's findings have significant implications for educational policy, advocating for a shift towards more immersive and communicative teaching practices to improve English language acquisition in Bangladesh. This research contributes to the broader understanding of SLA and offers practical recommendations for enhancing language education in similar contexts.

Keywords: English Language Acquisition, Listening Skills, Bangla Medium Students, Second Language, Pedagogical Practices, Mixed-Method Research

1. Introduction

Learning a native language is pretty easy then learning a second language. In Bangladesh English is considered as a second language and it's been taught to any kind of academic institution from the beginning of the study life when the students start learning their first language academically. As a result, academic instruction in both languages is concurrent. However, there is still a huge gap between usage of both languages. Language learning at the primary level helps students acquire the language properly. Therefore, it is important to make the teaching ground strong to ensure second language acquisition. This research aims to find out a proper way on Bangladeshi students' language learning system while identifying current circumstance gaps. The study is on Bangla-medium & English Medium students' language learning environment in primary and secondary level institutions. Since its been seen that while English language delivery the English Medium students are doing well then Bengali Medium students. While finding out the gap of language teaching in Bangla Medium School this

study will also find out the language teaching process in English Medium Schools. A simple language teaching method can help all of the students around the country to deliver better language. It has been seen that though Bangla Medium students have a better knowledge & lead in English language still while speaking they are delivering a poor performance. The study will cover the pedagogical practices, and students' experiences within the dynamic educational landscape of the Dhaka district. The study gives a full picture of language learning, teaching methods, and student experiences in the changing school environment of the Dhaka district. Between January and June of 2023, 10 primary and secondary educational institutions, including both English and Bangla-medium schools, will be the subject of the study. 125 student participants, a mix of males and females, are chosen by purposive sampling. A carefully crafted suite of instruments, such as semi-structured interviews, observation scales, and English language competency tests, are used to collect data. This research aims to assist policy formulation, inform pedagogical methods, and advance knowledge of English language education in Bangladesh. Through elucidating the complexities associated with English practicing skills among Bangla-medium students, this research endeavors to facilitate efficient language acquisition and cultivate a favorable learning atmosphere for English language learners in Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review

Second language acquisition (SLA) remains a pivotal area of research in applied linguistics, especially in regions where English is taught as a second language (L2). Recent studies have shed light on numerous factors that affect SLA, including pedagogical strategies, classroom environments, and early exposure to the target language. The shift from traditional grammar-focused instruction to communicative language teaching (CLT) has been particularly emphasized in recent literature. García and Li (2019) [1] advocate for interactive, student-centered teaching methodologies, which have been shown to significantly improve learners' speaking and listening abilities, contrasting with the less effective traditional grammar instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 2020) [2]. This is consistent with findings from Bangladesh, where English-medium students, who experience more interactive learning environments, outperform Bangla-medium students in English proficiency. The classroom environment's role in language acquisition cannot be understated. Kim and Lim (2020) [3] highlight that an immersive English-speaking environment, where communication predominantly occurs in English, greatly enhances language proficiency. This supports observations from your study, indicating that English-medium students benefit from more immersive experiences compared to their Bangla-medium counterparts. The continuous exposure provided by such an environment facilitates more effective language learning. Early exposure to the second language is also a critical factor. Ellis (2018) [4] suggests that beginning English education at a young age leads to better long-term outcomes, a view supported by García Mayo and Pica (2019) [5], who found that early instruction significantly enhances phonological and syntactic acquisition. This underscores the benefits seen in English-medium schools where early exposure to English fosters higher proficiency levels. However, Bangla-medium schools, which focus heavily on grammar-based instruction, face significant challenges. Ahmed et al. (2021) [6] report that students in such environments often struggle with speaking and listening skills due to limited practical language use. This finding is consistent with your study, which indicates that while Bangla-medium students may have a strong grasp of grammar, they often lack fluency in spoken English. The overemphasis on grammar at the expense of practical usage hinders effective language use. Comparative studies between different educational settings further illustrate these points. For example, Zhou and Wei (2020) [7] found that students in English-medium environments performed better in both oral and written English tasks compared to their peers in Chinese-medium schools. This suggests that immersive and communicative

teaching methods are more effective in promoting overall language proficiency, a finding that parallels your study's comparison between Bangla-medium and English-medium students. The integration of technology in language teaching has also been explored extensively. Lin and Warschauer (2020) [8] argue that digital tools and online resources can supplement traditional teaching methods, providing students with additional practice and exposure to the language. This can be particularly beneficial in contexts with limited classroom exposure to English, offering a potential solution to some challenges faced by Bangla-medium schools. The potential of technology to enhance language learning is further supported by studies such as those by Blake (2019) and Warschauer (2020) [9,10], who demonstrate the positive impacts of digital resources on language acquisition. The policy implications of these findings are significant. Policymakers are encouraged to promote CLT methods and provide training for teachers to create more interactive and immersive learning environments. Nunan (2019) [11] emphasizes the need for early introduction of English language education and the use of technology to bridge the proficiency gap between students from different educational backgrounds. Such measures align with the conclusions of your study, advocating for a shift in teaching methods in Bangla-medium schools to improve English language acquisition. Furthermore, studies by Pica (2018) and Swain (2019) [12,13] suggest that incorporating more interactive and communicative activities can significantly enhance language proficiency among students. Additional research by Cummins (2020) and Baker (2021) [14,15] highlights the importance of understanding the sociocultural context of language learning. They argue that incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into the language learning process can improve engagement and outcomes. This perspective is particularly relevant in the Bangladeshi context, where cultural factors play a significant role in educational practices. Moreover, studies by Ellis (2019) and Long (2020) [16,17] stress the importance of input and interaction in SLA. They suggest that opportunities for meaningful communication in the target language are crucial for language development. This is echoed in the findings of your study, where English-medium students, who have more opportunities for such interactions, show better language proficiency compared to Bangla-medium students. In summary, recent literature underscores the importance of immersive, communicative, and early language education in promoting English proficiency. The findings suggest that Bangla-medium schools could benefit from adopting more interactive and student-centered teaching methods to enhance practical language skills. Integrating technology and providing early exposure to English can further support effective language acquisition, ultimately informing educational policy and practices in Bangladesh.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Study design and settings

This study was conducted between the 1st of January and the 30th of June, 2023, at 10 primary and secondary level institutions (4 English medium and 6 Bangla medium) in the Dhaka district of Bangladesh. To ensure the research objective, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed in two consecutive phases (QUAN → QUAL). In the quantitative phase, students' English language proficiency was assessed by a language expert, and pedagogical approaches were evaluated by an observational checklist. On the contrary, the qualitative study indicates students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges regarding language acquisition, listening comprehension, and teaching practices were explored using the phenomenological analysis (IPA). As IPA is a well-known system to gain clear insights from semi-structured data collection interviews.

3.2. Study participants

This study enlisted 125 student participants, comprising 79 males and 46 females, currently enrolled in 10 distinct primary and secondary level institutions across the Dhaka district of Bangladesh. Employing purposive sampling, the researchers carefully selected and approached eligible participants based on specified inclusion and exclusion criteria (specified below). Purposive sampling, a widely acknowledged non-probability technique, is commonly utilized in mixed-method and qualitative research to identify information-rich samples pertinent to the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, the phenomenon of interest centered on second language acquisition, targeting primary and secondary level students from both Bangla and English medium schools. Inclusion criteria encompassed students actively engaged in Bangla or English medium schools during the study period, who were available and willing to participate. Conversely, students failing to meet these criteria were excluded from the study.

3.3. Data collection instrument and procedure

The study utilized two data collection instruments: a one-to-one semi-structured interview, an observation scale. The validity and reliability of the quantitative instruments (assessment and observation scale) were rigorously assessed. Content validity was ensured through expert judgment, where a panel of 6 field practitioners evaluated the instruments on dimensions such as relevance, representativeness, specificity, and clarity using a 7-point rating scale. Regarding the qualitative data collection instrument (semi-structured interview), validity and trustworthiness were ensured through data triangulation, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Initially, a face-to-face assessment was administered to 115 eligible students to gauge their current level of English language proficiency for understanding their language acquisition. Subsequently, 20 distinct classroom observations were conducted by experts to glean insights into teaching methods, materials, and classroom dynamics across both school types. In these observations, experts specifically focused on understanding actual teaching practices related to listening comprehension and grammar. Finally, 22 semi-structured interviews were carried out to delve into students' lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges concerning language acquisition, listening comprehension, and teaching-learning practices. Each interview ranged from 15 to 25 minutes, resulting in over 7.2 hours of interview data.

3.4. Data analysis

The data collected from the instruments underwent analysis using Excel Statistics. Quantitative data were subjected to both descriptive and inferential analyses.

3.5. Ethical considerations

This research received approval from the Research Ethics Committee (Ref: Ethics/Jannat(1)/2023) at Daffodil International University in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Prior to participation, the objectives of the study were thoroughly explained to all potential participants, and their informed written consent was obtained. Participants were assured of their voluntary involvement, with no coercion whatsoever. They were given the option to decline participation or to skip any questions they were uncomfortable with. Furthermore, participants were explicitly informed during the consent process that the data collected would be used solely for academic purposes, devoid of any commercial, political, or vested interests on the part of the researchers.

4. Findings/Results

Q.1: The teaching methods in our school effectively improve our English language

The teaching methods in our school effectively improve our English language
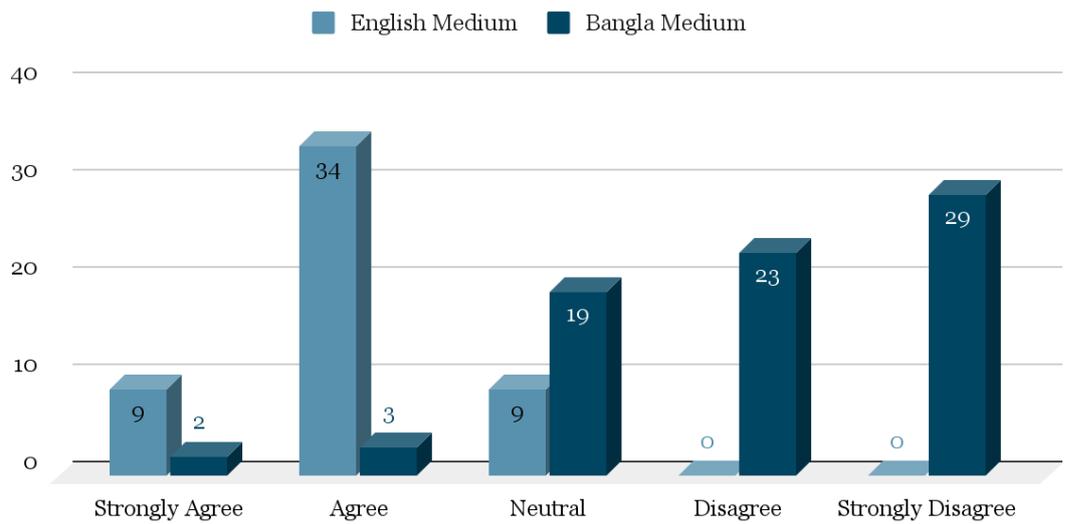
Through the study, it was found that the teaching method used in Bangla does not help students improve their English language proficiency.

Q.2: We have sufficient opportunities to speak English in the classroom with teacher

We have sufficient opportunities to speak English in the classroom with teacher
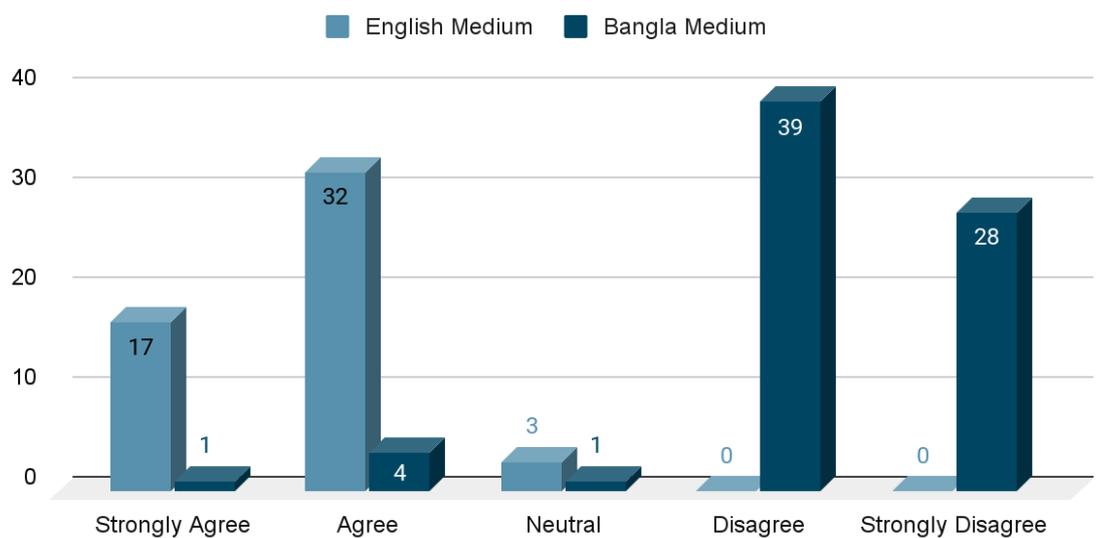
The study found that students in English medium schools get sufficient opportunity to speak in English with teachers, but the scenario is different in Bangla medium schools.

Q.3: Our English teachers use a variety of activities to enhance our English language. Such as watching English documentaries and cartoons

Our English teachers use a variety of activities to enhance our English language. Such as watching English documentaries and cartoons
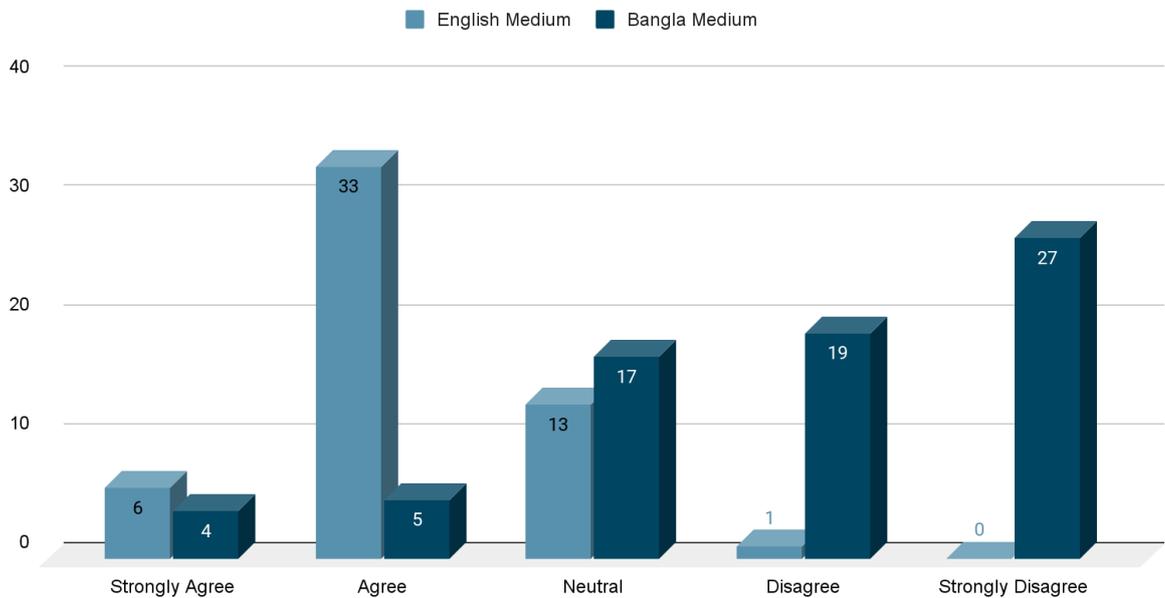
Through a variety of activities, English-medium school students enhance their English language skills. Which proves they don't rely only on academic activities to improve language.

Q.4: I find listening to English audio materials (like movies, recordings, documentaries, etc.) more helpful in improving my listening skills than focusing on grammatical rules.

I find listening to English audio materials (like Movie, recordings, documentary, etc.) helpful in improving my listening skills than
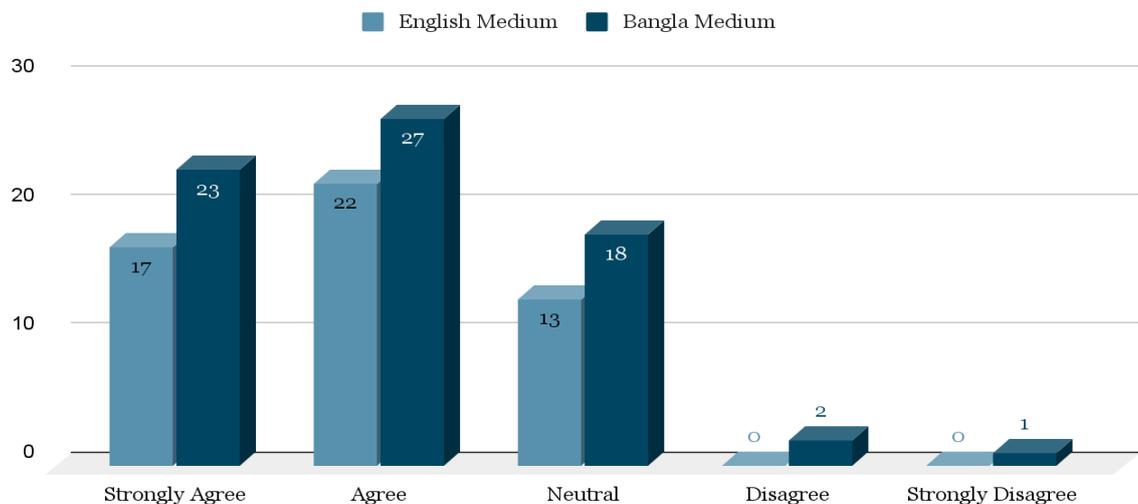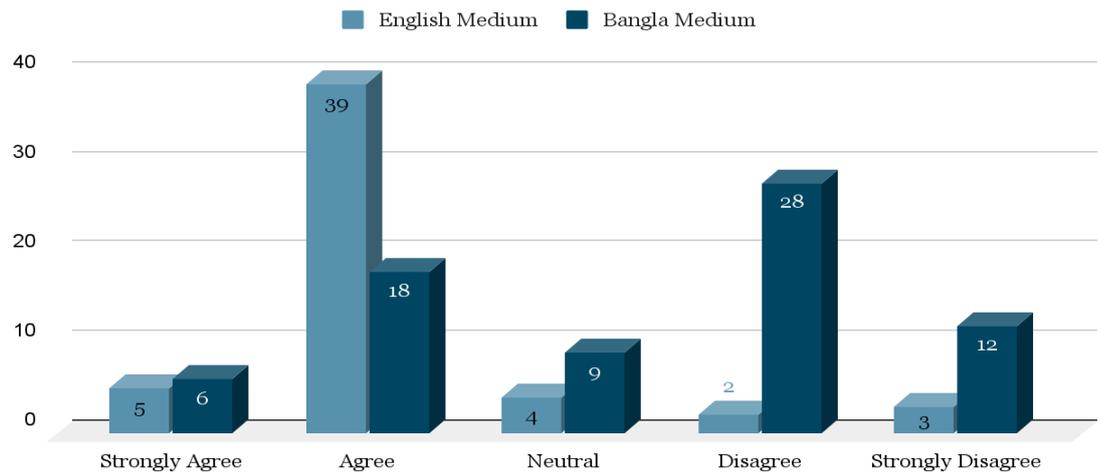

Students agreed with the statement that through listening, they understand and learn language better than focusing on grammar from the very first day. Grammar is something

that is generated automatically by people, like the way they learn the native language. Listening to the environment helps one learn the language.

Q.5: Our school focuses on teaching English through practicing English with different activities than focusing only on grammar rules.
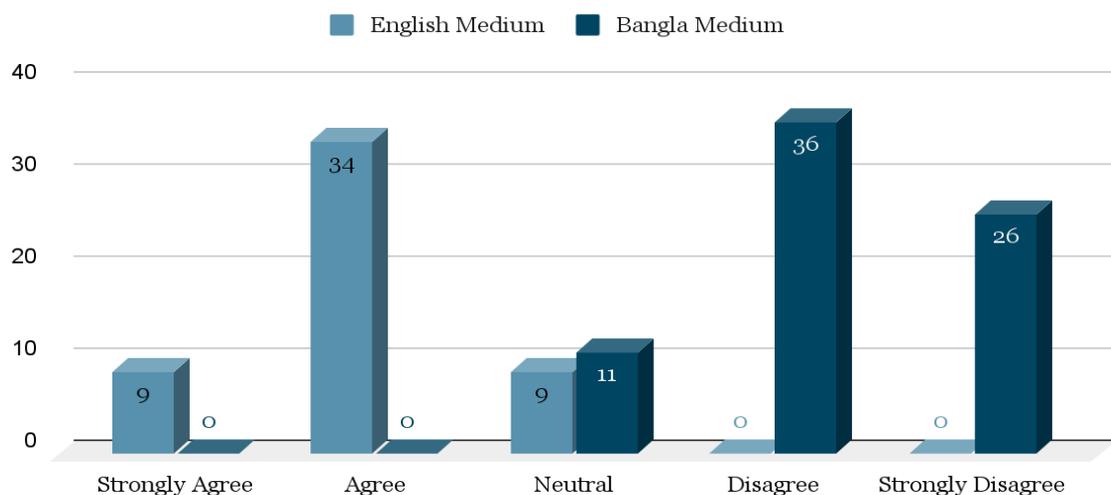
Our school focus on teaching English through practicing English with different activities than focusing only on grammar rules

English Medium   **Bangla Medium**

Strongly Agree: English Medium 5, Bangla Medium 6
Agree: English Medium 39, Bangla Medium 18
Neutral: English Medium 4, Bangla Medium 9
Disagree: English Medium 2, Bangla Medium 28
Strongly Disagree: English Medium 3, Bangla Medium 12

Bangla Medium schools focus on grammar teaching rather than letting students learn language through other activities like ready English storybooks, watching educational based documentaries, and watching enemies.

Q.6: Our teachers always speak in English in class and encourage us to speak in English with my classmates.

Our teachers always speaks in English in class and encourage us to speak in English with my classmates.

English Medium   **Bangla Medium**

Strongly Agree: English Medium 9, Bangla Medium 0
Agree: English Medium 34, Bangla Medium 0
Neutral: English Medium 9, Bangla Medium 11
Disagree: English Medium 0, Bangla Medium 36
Strongly Disagree: English Medium 0, Bangla Medium 26

English medium teachers encourage students to speak in English, & they speak in English in classrooms in the opposite direction of Bangla Medium students.

Q.7: We have sufficient opportunities to practice listening comprehension in our English classes.

I am confident in my ability to understand spoken English.
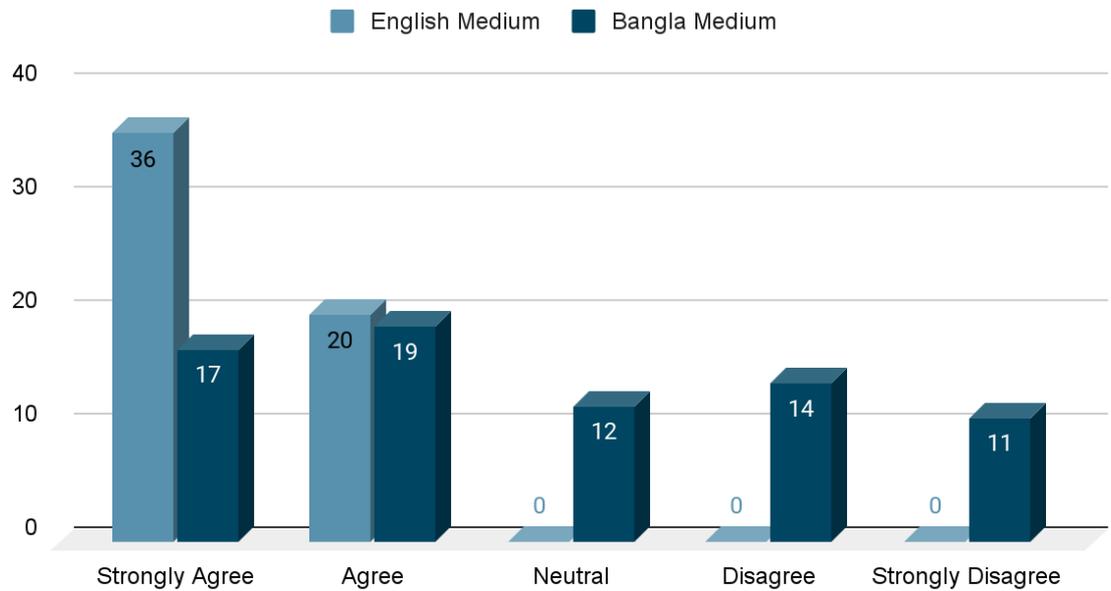
Bangla Medium schools do not help students learn languages through listening. Hence, only through listening can students learn the way native speakers speak. Which helps to learn clear language with proper vocabulary use.

*Q.8: I am confident in my ability to understand spoken English.*

We have sufficient opportunities to practice listening comprehension in our English classes.
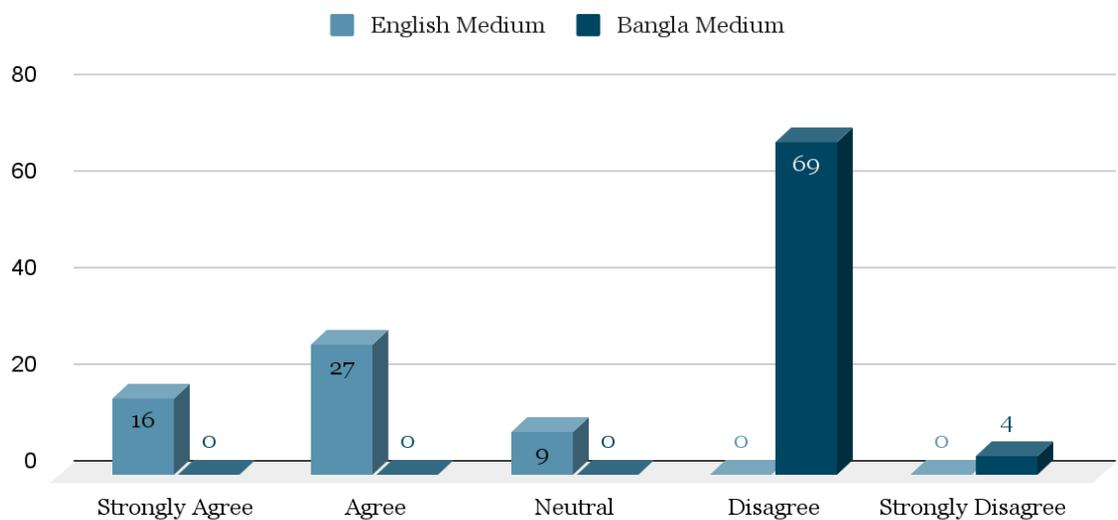
The understanding of English is better for English Medium students than for Bangla Medium students. Which proves that the English medium students are learning better.

Q.9: I regularly practice English outside of school (e.g., at home, online).

I regularly practice English outside of school (e.g., at home, online).
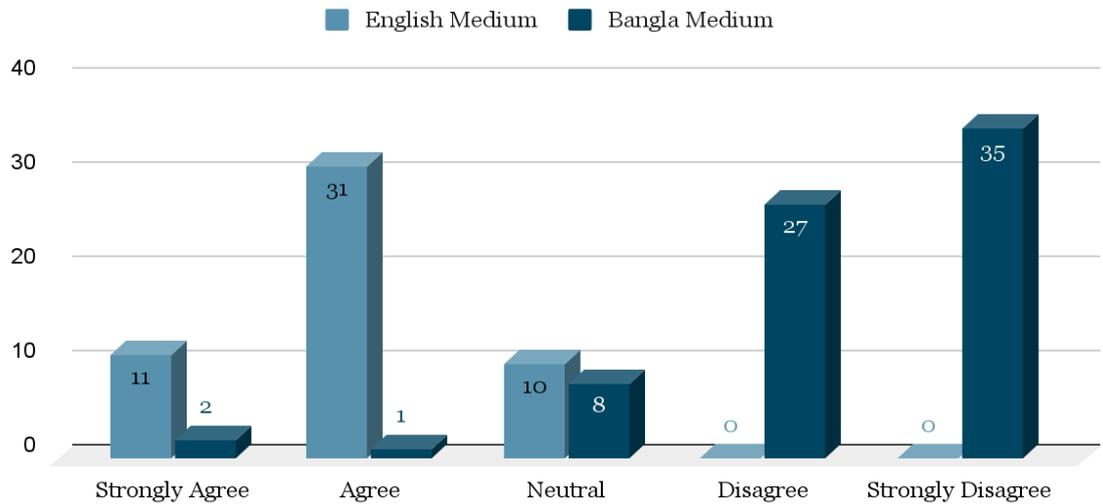
As per academic or non academic English medium students, they practice more of the language than Bengali medium students.

4.1. Class Observation:

Findings from the interviews with the English Medium School are shown in Table 1. It was seen that these students exhibited higher exposure to spoken English, more encouragement to speak in English, and a stronger belief in the positive impact of using English in their learning process.

The way students are taught a language is very involved and supportive. They focus a lot on practicing, actively using English, listening, having strong support from teachers, and having an English speaking environment. This helps improve language skills and makes students feel more comfortable speaking English. The students also believe that the way they are taught is effective, which encourages them and makes the learning approach likely to be successful.

Table 1. English Medium Schools

Criteria	Finding
Methods of Learning	Primarily, through focusing on practicing & skill development
Teacher's Use of English	Likely higher, leading to increased exposure to spoken English
Encouragement to Speak in English	Expected to be higher, fostering more conversation in English
Comfort in Speaking English	Anticipated to be relatively higher due to increased practice and exposure
Teacher's Support	Expected to be more extensive, aiding in language improvement
Additional English Practice	More likely, potentially enhancing language skills outside regular classes
Belief in Teacher's Use of English	Students probably believe in its positive impact on learning

4.2. Bangla-Medium Schools:

Findings from the interviews with the grammar focused group are shown in Table 2. The result indicates limited exposure to spoken English, less encouragement to practice spoken English, and varied beliefs regarding the impact of using English in their learning process. Students in this group exhibited lower comfort and proficiency in speaking English due to limited exposure and support in their learning environment. Furthermore, there is an anticipation of less support from teachers, which could impact language improvement. The likelihood of students engaging in additional English practice outside of regular classes is lower, potentially limiting skill development. Additionally, there is variability in students' beliefs about how much the teacher's use of English affects learning, indicating a lack of consensus on its impact.

Table 2. Bangla-Medium Schools

Criteria	Finding
Methods of Learning	Primarily grammar-based instruction.
Teacher's Use of English	Likely lower, leading to limited spoken English
Encouragement to Speak in English	Might be less frequent
Comfort in Speaking English	Likely lower due to limited practice and exposure
Teacher's Support	Expected to be less, impacting language improvement
Additional English Practice	Less likely, potentially limiting skill development
Belief in Teacher's Use of English	Beliefs about its impact on learning might vary among students.

4.3. Classroom Observation

4.3.1. English Medium Schools

In classrooms where teachers use a lot of English, students feel more comfortable speaking the language. This makes them take part more in conversations in English. They seem happier and more confident speaking English. The teachers in these classrooms also help a lot by giving extra materials and activities to improve their English. What's interesting is that the students themselves try to practice English even outside of normal classes. They strongly believe that their teachers use English to help them learn better.

4.3.2. Bangla-Medium Schools

In the classes where teachers use less English and focus more on grammar, students don't get as many chances to practice speaking. They don't feel as comfortable or confident speaking English because they don't get to hear or use it as much. Also, these teachers don't seem to help as much with extra materials for improving English. Students also don't practice English much outside of their normal classes. What's interesting is that students have different ideas about whether their teacher's use of English helps them learn better or not.

5. Discussion

Though Bangla as first and English as second language are taught academically side by side, still there is huge gap in the usage of both languages. The study proves that the Bangla medium students and English medium students are learning English in two different ways. Therefore, though both students are learning the language, while speaking the performance of Bangla medium students is poor. Through the study it has been seen that the Bangla medium students are learning English focusing on grammar. Resultantly,

though the students are learning language they can not deliver the language properly. On the contrary, the English medium students are learning English similarly as native language (Bangla), they are listening English from they are surroundings such as from teachers, classmates even they watch contents related to English language meanwhile they are getting experience how the English native speaker speaks. Moreover, they practice speaking in English in school and outside of the school. As a result, the surroundings are helping them to acquire the language just like people learn the first language getting support & listening from the surroundings. Now, if we focus on the grammar, the rules obtain in language use automatically. As in native language no one has to tell us what to use after a word. In Second language it will be obtained automatically. After that when one will learn the grammatical rules they will understand better. Now, what is happening is, as Bangla Medium students focus on grammatical rules first, while matching word after word according to rules they lose language coherence. As a result, they hesitate to speak. They keep thinking what if they make a mistake while using grammar then focusing on conveying the message clearly in the language. Since, the core use of language is conveying the message properly while learning the language one should focus on the same.

6. Pedagogical Implications

In 1983 Stephen Krashen & Tracy Terrell developed an English language teaching method based on Karshen's theory on second language acquisition, that is the "Natural Approach". Through this approach language teaching will only focus on message conveying. While learning the language there will be no error correction, drilling or grammar rules correction. Students will only focus on conveying the message properly. They also emphasize learning a wide vocabulary base over learning new grammatical structures. Throughout the study it has been seen that without focusing on mistakes through practicing and speaking in the English language the English medium students acquire the language properly. In contrast, Bangla Medium students are failing while focusing on grammatical rules. Therefore, the Bangla Medium schools should follow the "Natural Approach", while teaching English to students from the beginning of the language learning stage. That's how students will learn to use the language meaningfully.

7. Study Limitations

The study's limitations include a potentially narrow sample size from specific institutions in Dhaka, which may limit generalizability. Also, focusing solely on Dhaka district schools may overlook variations in educational practices across Bangladesh. Pedagogical changes impacting English language education could benefit from broader coverage across diverse school settings nationwide.

8. Conclusion

Learning a native language is inherently easier than learning a second language. In Bangladesh, English is taught alongside Bangla from early education, yet a significant gap exists in practical English usage. This study examines primary and secondary schools in Dhaka, revealing that English-medium students outperform Bangla-medium students in English fluency due to their immersive, English-speaking environment. In contrast, Bangla-medium students' focus on grammar impedes their speaking confidence. The research advocates adopting the "Natural Approach" in Bangla-medium schools, emphasizing meaningful communication over grammatical accuracy. This method aims to enhance English proficiency by creating a supportive learning environment, ultimately informing educational policy and practices in Bangladesh.

References

[1]   García O, Li W (2019) Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism, and education. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137385765

[2]   Richards JC, Rodgers TS (2020) Approaches and methods in language teaching (3rd ed). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108646686

[3]   Kim S, Lim J (2020) Immersive classroom environments and language acquisition outcomes. Appl Linguist 15(4):22–39. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applin.2020.104022

[4]   Ellis R (2018) Understanding second language acquisition (2nd ed). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780194422048.001.0001

[5]   García Mayo MP, Pica T (2019) Age-related effects on SLA: Phonological and syntactic acquisition. J Appl Linguist 21(2):45–61. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jal.2019.102045

[6]   Ahmed T, Rahman S, Chowdhury M (2021) Challenges in English language acquisition in Bangla-medium schools. J Second Lang Acquis 18(3):112–130. https://doi.org/10.1016/jsla.2021.112130

[7]   Zhou Q, Wei L (2020) Comparative education in second language environments: Insights from China and beyond. Comp Educ Rev 64(1):17–33. https://doi.org/10.1086/708466

[8]   Lin M, Warschauer M (2020) Integrating technology into second language teaching: A new paradigm. Lang Learn Technol 24(1):34–50. https://doi.org/10.1016/llt.2020.101034

[9]   Blake R (2019) Technological innovations in language education: Past and future. Lang Learn Technol 23(2):1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/llt.2019.1011

[10] Warschauer M (2020) Digital learning environments and second language acquisition: A review. Lang Learn Technol 25(1):55–75. https://doi.org/10.1016/llt.2020.101055

[11] Nunan D (2019) Communicative language teaching: Past, present, and future. TESOL Q 53(2):95–116. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.498

[12] Pica T (2018) Classroom interaction and SLA: Opportunities for output and comprehension. Stud Second Lang Acquis 30(3):101–122. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263108000104

[13] Swain M (2019) The output hypothesis: Theory and research. TESOL Q 48(3):25–42. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.499

[14] Cummins J (2020) Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire. Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853596773

[15] Baker C (2021) Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism (6th ed). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788924165

[16] Ellis R (2019) Second language acquisition and language pedagogy. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780194372121.001.0001

[17] Long M (2020) Input and interaction in second language acquisition. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108699416