

# Proliferating English-Medium Schools in Bangladesh and Their Educational Significance Among the “Clientele”

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## Abstract

This paper investigates clientele’s perception of choosing English-medium schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It surveys students, parents, teachers, and principals from both English and Bengali-medium schools. The clientele of these schools has cognizance of international examinations and inextricably associate themselves with the international community as it gives them diverse opportunities and upward mobility. The findings highlight English-medium schools as a launching pad to go abroad. It is also clear that English-medium schools in Bangladesh are only available to the elite, unlike many other developing countries where even the poor can ‘buy’ English-medium education through ‘low-fee English-medium schools.’

**Key words:** English-medium schools, International education, School choice, Clientele.

## 1. Introduction

In the recent decades, English-Medium Schools (EMSs), which are mainly private schools have experienced a discernible proliferation in Bangladesh. ‘Passports to Privilege’ as Rahman (2005) calls the EMSs in Pakistan. This study aims to understand what has led to the proliferation of these schools? Why English-medium schools when there already exists Bengali-Medium Schools (BMSs), Madrasa (Islamic institutes), and NGO schools? Moreover, why English when the people of Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) have protested and fought for their mother tongue Bengali with West Pakistan? The choice of EMSs will reflect light to the questions above. However, it is observed, English schools with international qualifications are growing rapidly and ubiquitous everywhere in the world.

The presence of these schools is so vibrant in the big cities in Bangladesh, that it has been able to entrench and disseminate in the economically weaker areas of Bangladesh too. Furthermore, their popularization is so high that the government of Bangladesh realized it was incumbent on them to set up schools that would follow the national curriculum in English. “Government, in turn, meeting social elites [English-medium school] educational demand” (Song, 2013, p. 153). However, this article only concerns the perceptions clientele has about why enrollment in English-medium schools (International Qualification) has increased within the recent decades. Here clientele is the recipient of English-medium education ranging from the students, parents, teachers, to principals.

Unlike many other developing countries, Bangladesh has no ‘Low-fee English-medium schools’, although low fee private schools exist but the medium of instruction is Bengali. This could be due to the perception that knowledge and skills in English are not needed to move up the social ladder in Bangladeshi society as Bengali is the national language. This situation is similar to many countries such as Japan, but the difference might be that the extent of influence the force of globalization exerts on each country. Upward social mobility within the country (operated in Bengali) may be felt much more urgent than the participation in

globalized world, which is run mainly in English. In the case of Bangladesh, English is not designated as the official language but is a de facto language of higher education and a medium of elite education and a main language of the judiciary system. This situation differs from many Asian countries, including China, Korea, and Japan, where English is not used for official purposes in society and only learned as a foreign language in formal education. The fact that English is merely taught in schools often means a poor command of the language, which may result in a demand for a more “efficient” training in private schools. Moreover, English-medium education is cherished by those with a colonial mind (personal communication, Juneja & Shiroza, January 14, 2015).

However, this study only surveyed schools with the General Certificate of Education (GCE) of UK, which is perceived to be the most internationally recognized qualification systems in the world. It has two levels: the General Certificate of Education (GCSE/O level) is taken at the age of 16 and the Advanced (A) level taken at 18 (British council, 2010). The Ordinary level (O level) has been replaced by GCSE (General certificate of Secondary Education) in UK schools, but available to international students. Students can take any number of O level/IGCSE exams but it depends on the qualifications (Edexcel/CIE) the institutions chose for. The exam papers of O, A, and IGCSE are sent to the UK from all over the world and they are marked by examiners appointed, trained and monitored by the boards (British Council, 2010). Candidates are identified by a number, not by country. A candidate does not necessarily have to register through a school, one can register as an individual. (British Council, 2010). The O and A level examinations are administered through the British Council, which has its office in major cities in Bangladesh such as Dhaka, Chittagong, and Sylhet.

In Bangladesh, amongst all of the International qualifications O level/ IGCSE and A level qualifications from the UK are most popular. Thus, this paper investigates EMSs with the General Certificate of Education (GCE), and deals with O’ level students. There has been huge research works on the mainstream Bangladeshi educational (Bengali) system locally and internationally but there has been little focus on the role and significance of English-medium schools in the educational scene of Bangladesh. None of the research investigates the demand and supply of EMSs and the reason for choosing these schools in Bangladesh. In order to understand the educational significance of these schools, the clientele’s choice of these particular schools need rigorous study. Furthermore, what role it is playing in Bangladeshi society needs to be researched. The proliferation and popularization need to be identified and how conducive it is to Bangladeshi society. Therefore, the first aim of this study is to document the rationale for choosing EMSs which will draw out the justifications provided by students, parents, teachers and principals. The second aim is to identify student’s interest in future prospects such higher education, settlement, and career. The third aim is to examine the clientele’s socio-economic status. Finally, it will also examine the Bengali-medium schools’ clientele’s view on EMSs. This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What perceptions do the clientele has about why enrollment in English-medium schools has increased within the recent decades?

The sub-questions are:

- i. Who are the clientele- rich/poor?
- ii. Are these schools demand/supply driven?
- iii. Are the students satisfied with these schools?

## **2. Historical Background of EMSs in Bangladesh:**

English-medium education was first introduced by the British rule in the Indian subcontinent. At that time, Bangladesh did not have an existence as a sovereign nation. Therefore, it is essential for us to know the history of EMSs in the Indian subcontinent. Hence it leads to understanding the reasons for the establishment of EMSs by the British rule during the colonial period. The historical aspect is stated as follows:

Under British rule, there were two kinds of elitist schools in India: those for the hereditary aristocracy, called the chiefs’ colleges; and those for the newly emerging professional classes, called European or English schools, including English-teaching schools and armed forces schools which taught all subjects in English. Both kinds of institutions served political and social purposes. (Rahman, 2005, p. 25)

However, ‘Partition of India’ in 1947 led to the creation of two new nation India and Pakistan. Pakistan, comprised of two wings, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan, which were geographically and culturally separated and India in between these two wings. East Pakistan was governed by the West Pakistan, despite the fact that, East Pakistan was economically and educationally more powerful than the West Pakistan wing. Economic maltreatment of East Bengal, it is argued, was one of the factors that led to the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971 leading to the creation of Bangladesh (Auspitz et al., 1971; Islam, 1972; Rao, 1972; Laporte, 1975; Bhatia, 1979, as cited in Asadullah, 2006). Historically, East Pakistan enjoyed a higher rate of gross

enrolment in primary and secondary education compared to West Pakistan (Asadullah, 2006). In the year 1961, literacy rate (for population aged 5 years and older) of East Pakistan was 19.9% whereas West Pakistan’s literacy rate was 14.4% (Asadullah, 2006). Despite having economic strength and educational development, East Pakistan was still under West Pakistan’s control. Therefore, it is crucial to look at the historical background of EMSs in Pakistan as the Western wing controlled the Eastern wing in terms of providing educational facilities and resources too. In 2005, Rahman’s historical background of EMSs in Pakistan states that,

The parallel system of elitist schooling did not change because of the establishment of Pakistan. Indeed, as the military and the higher bureaucracy both came from this elite background, these schools multiplied in Pakistan as the professional middle-class started expanding in 1960s. Thus it is no surprise that the government-dominated by members of these elitist groups came up with policies that supported English-medium schools. (p. 26)

It is significant to note that the process of colonialism was still instilled among the elitist group. The language issue has always been very crucial in the Indian subcontinent as there are several languages spoken. The two wings of Pakistan, East and West were also caught in the language conflict, as West Pakistan ruled and administered East Pakistan and wanted ‘Urdu to be the national language of both the wings. Whereas, in East Pakistan, the majority of the people were Bengali language speakers. Subsequently, the 1952 language movement led by the Bengalis helped to establish ‘Bengali’ as the national language. Later in 1971, Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign nation from the Pakistani regime.

English-medium schools were already existing since the British period and more English schools with varieties of international qualifications were being introduced by the foreign nationals after the creation of Bangladesh. It is assumed that some of the schools listed here are the oldest English-medium schools existing since the British period and after the liberation of Bangladesh. Schools such as St. Gregory was established in (1882), St. Francis Xavier’s Girls High School (1912), Dacca American Society School (1953) closed during 1971 and opened again in 1972 with a new name American International School Dhaka (AISD), and St. Francis Xavier Greenherald (1972) registered to Cambridge International since 1954 is also an extension of St. Francis Xavier (1912). These are some of oldest schools existing since British and Pakistan regime in Bangladesh. These schools were established mainly for the expatriate children who could pursue international English-medium education and even the local elites were enrolled as they were aware of the economic importance attached to English-medium education.

However, after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, many of these schools became Bengali-medium schools such as St. Gregory and St. Francis Xavier’s. Now, EMSs with international qualifications are also established by the Bangladeshi nationals. Indeed, there are numerous international examinations available in Bangladesh from many countries, such as United Kingdom (O level, and A level affiliated to Edexcel, and CIE), America, Canada, West Australia (WACE), and the International Baccalaureate (IB). Similarly, Bangladeshi government also felt the need to establish English schools, which would be controlled by them but under private management. According to The News Today (2014), the government in the late 90s opened ‘English version’ at the cadet colleges following the curriculums of the primary and secondary education board. In the 70s and 80s, the medium of imparting lesson in classrooms was Bangla at cadet colleges of the country.

### 3. English-Medium Schools: Proliferation and Popularization

The year 1990’s is the major period of the growth of English-medium education in all over the world that was still struggling to have an existence in the international community. According to Lowe (as cited in Hayden and Thompson, 2008), the last decade or so of the twentieth century have been those English-medium international schools established in a number of countries where host country nationals are allowed to attend international schools, and where the form of education offered is seen by the members of the socio-economic elite of that country as a means of giving their child a competitive edge. International schools in Bangladesh started to proliferate and gained popularity due to its certain features that could align itself with other parts of the world. The first reason could be, mainstream education failing to provide quality education to the local elite insisted them to receive English-medium education.

Secondly, the reason for the growth of English-medium school could be the shortages of schools. According to Harlech-Jones, Baig, Sajid, and Rahman, (2005), governments are not always opposed to private schools (English-medium schools). Moreover, Kingdon (as cited in Harlech-Jones, et al., 2005), argues, “budgetary resource shortages in the face of growing school-age populations have recently encouraged many governments to reexamine the role of the private sector in education” (p. 559). In this respect, in the case of Bangladesh, English-medium schools and its existence have raised many questions as it often acts like a private enterprise with a profit motive. According to Kitaev (2007), “Bangladesh’s government is more concerned with maximizing coverage and the promotion of Education for All, rather than with any particular kind of education (religious or otherwise) to be provided by private institution” (p. 95). However, despite the exorbitant tuition fees charged by these schools, many still prefer English-medium education to Bengali-medium education.

In 2008, Hayden and Thompson found the growing influence of English as the main international language, and the associated desire of many non-native English-speaking parents for their children to speak English as well as their own mother tongue has been the other major contributory factor in its growth. Similarly, Kitaev (2007) argues “among more specific reasons for which parents choose to send their children to private schools is the use of English language as medium for teaching in Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh” (p. 95). Mackenzie (2010), states that the major factor that influences parents is the perceived importance of English-medium education. In addition, Harlech-Jones et al. (2005) found the parents’ attitude towards proficiency in English is thoroughly pragmatic, for the clientele, as it is associated with better study opportunities, and better life chances for more mobility. Therefore, English is the dominant factor for choosing English-medium schools that give access to wider benefits.

Schools having International qualifications intrinsically suggest that these are catered for the elite section of the society. “International examinations are increasingly being used by local elites to reproduce their advantage in the face of growing educational competition and the changing economic order associated with globalization and post-fordism” (Lowe, 2000, p.1). He also mentions, “while access to overseas university is a reason for some, this is by no means and other reasons relate to perceptions of the educational quality of both the schools and the curricula and to the access that international qualifications may give to the international community” (Lowe, 1999, p.1). Subsequently, these international examinations in the context of Bangladesh reflect their demands and a channel to earn opportunities. International qualifications are associated with western values and validly affirm their dominance over the world.

The current trend of sending children to English-medium schools in Bangladesh has an explosive growth. Considering English-medium schools to be the epitome of educations in the Bangladeshi educational landscape has created a rage among the general population. It is a general agreement that these schools have grown significantly, although accurate data is not available on number of schools. In the year 2010, and this is the first time when BANBEIS (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics) conducted a survey on English-medium schools and it reveals that there are 442 English-medium schools, but due to lack of access to these schools by the officials, only 159 schools were included in the survey. Thus, they only provided the number of schools that they could access. However, during a roundtable discussion on EMSs, organised by Federation of Bangladesh English Medium School Student Guardian Forum (FESGUF), it was reported by the ministry of education, that there are about 17000 EMS and Kindergartens in Bangladesh (bdnews24.com, 2005). However, the exact numbers of EMSs are still unknown as most of the schools do not register to the government. However it is presumed a company license is needed to open a school. In contrast, to open an English version school “just one application is enough to seek permission from the board to open English version (Prof. Fahima Khatun: ex-chairman of Dhaka education board, as cited in Billah, 2011)

The popularization of EMSs is exclusively growing due to English as a medium of instruction. Now myriads of EMSs are opening to meet the demands of the clientele. It is assumed, clientele has chosen English-medium schools to have an easy access to privileges that would have been denied if the children were in the mainstream education. Mainstream education has always been criticised for providing low-quality education, although there exists much debate on the quality of all the types of schools in Bangladesh.

Besides having an emphasis on English, there are other reasons for the growth of these schools. Earlier these schools were meant only for the elite class, but now some of the schools are made accessible to the middle-quintile too. However, despite some of the schools’ attempt to target the middle-income group have succeeded, but to appear for the O level examination, fees to be paid to the examining bodies remain same for both the upper and middle quintile. However, these schools are still preferable for the benefits it aims to provide. Supposedly, entrance to an English-medium school often connotes with secured future and one does not have to struggle in their near future as they provide wider relevance. The unprecedented demand for English-medium education has positive implications on students educational and career prospects. Moreover, English-medium schools are believed to provide quality (perceived) educational needs and thus it could be the leading reason for their growth, which is also the main concern of the clientele.

Recently, many EMSs are ‘mushrooming’ in urban as well as peri-urban areas of Bangladesh, and this is purely based on observation and could not be supported with evidence as we have already mentioned earlier that there is no exact data available on the numbers of EMSs. Now the focus from sending the children to mainstream education (Bengali medium) has shifted to EMSs, mainly due to economic and social privileges. A study on English-medium schools in South Korea by Song (2013) states, “in South Korea, the privileged few purchase English-medium education from international schools with the understanding that what they purchase will prepare their offspring well, or at least better than Korean-medium education for career opportunities in the global economy” (p. 153). The clientele of EMSs believes accepting English-medium education itself introduces a sensibility towards a perceived quality, which is being denied by the mainstream education.

In Bangladesh, EMSs (providing O and A level) gained popularity because of their credibility, international standard, flexibility, and emphasis on English language, (Diba, 2009). Similarly, Siddiqui and Parvin (2012), notes that demand of the urban

rich and middle-income families for an education system with strong footing on English language resulted in gradual growth of English-medium schools in the private sector. International examinations are important to parents and students as it acts as an advancement of their future priorities. In a study on value of examination Little (1997), found that international qualifications are taken to gain access to foreign universities and to improve employment prospects with companies having foreign interests. Thus, choosing international examination not only enhances their credentials but also gains them success, making both mutually infused.

One of the most important justifications for choosing international qualifications in Bangladesh is using it as a launching pad to go in a foreign country for future prospects such as education and career. According to Hasan (2011), those who have studied under English-medium education have higher chances of applying to and attending universities abroad. Nevertheless, this does not entail that the non-elite who chooses to go abroad has English-medium education or their choice of education is non-English-medium. Lowe (1999), who explicitly states that the attraction of these schools is partly due to its “international curriculum”, the use of English is particularly valued, both for its status it confers and because English gives access to the business and commercial world. The value of international examinations throughout the developing world has led the parents and the students to decide upon their gaining higher education degree in a foreign country. Moreover, political instability and absence of social security coerce the students to immigrate in a foreign country. In spite of having some of the reputed universities within their national border, students prefer foreign university to their home university.

#### 4. The Data, Method, and Results

The relevant data were collected in 2013 from 3 EMSs which include students, parents, teachers, and principals. These schools were chosen randomly, as access to these schools is very difficult due to being under private control and management. Apart from EMSs, 2 mainstream BMSs have also been surveyed in order to get better perceptions of the contested issue. A total number 114 students filled out the questionnaires (both EMSs and BMSs), and 10 students interview have been finalized. For this research, 10 teachers, 10 Parents and 2 principals were interviewed from EMSs. On the other hand, 25 students from BMSs filled out the questionnaire, 2 teachers, 5 parents, and 1 principal have been interviewed.

**Table 1.1** English-Medium School Participants

| Research field: Dhaka      |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| No. of Schools (N-3)       |                     |
| Total participants (N-121) | No. of participants |
| Students                   |                     |
| Questionnaire              | 89                  |
| Interview                  | 10                  |
| Teachers                   |                     |
| Interview                  | 10                  |
| Parents                    |                     |
| Interview                  | 10                  |
| Principals                 |                     |
| Interview                  | 2                   |

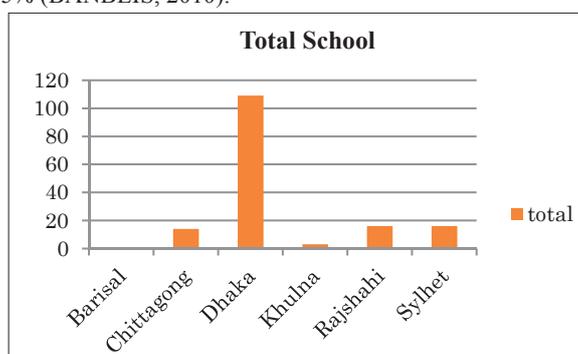
**Source:** Authors' calculations

**Table 1.2** Bengali-Medium School Participants

| Research field: Dhaka     |                     |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| No. of schools (N-2)      |                     |
| Total participants (N-33) | No. of participants |
| Students                  |                     |
| Questionnaire             | 25                  |
| Teachers                  |                     |
| Interview                 | 2                   |
| Parents                   |                     |
| Interview                 | 5                   |
| Principal                 |                     |
| Interview                 | 1                   |

**Source:** Authors' calculations.

Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh and it has been chosen as the research field as it has the highest number of schools in Bangladesh, which consists of 68.55% (BANBEIS, 2010).



**Figure 1.1** Number of EMS in each division in Bangladesh:

**Source:** BANBEIS, 2010.

This city also has the best schools (perceived) that attract many students every year from all over the country. British Council is the examination centre and it is located in Dhaka, but it has extended its branch to other major cities too. Earlier, in order to appear for the international examination, students from other parts of Bangladesh had to travel to Dhaka but in recent times, they can sit for the examinations in their hometown.

Nevertheless, this study was conducted in a very short period hence, it covers only one region in Bangladesh. Therefore, it does not cover entire Bangladesh's English-medium educational landscape. Furthermore, access to these schools was very difficult and in most of the cases schools authority denied access to the schools. Similarly, due to lack of access, more students could not be arranged for an in-depth interview. This research also lacks parents' proper socio-economic status; although the researcher could get to know their educational and occupational status but the income status could not be acquired due to the sensitivity of the issue. This has drawn a line of demarcation to the research conducted.

#### 4.1 Aggregate Analysis of the Students, Parents, Teachers, and Principals:

In order to identify the educational significance of EMSs among the clientele, questionnaires were distributed and semi-structured interview was conducted with the students from both the type of schools to comprehend the justifications for going and preferring EMSs. These schools were visited multiple times to distribute questionnaires and to conduct interviews. At these schools, principals, selection of teachers and parents were also interviewed. Questionnaires were directly distributed and interview was conducted with the respondents. O level (equivalent to secondary education) students were selected as until O level, students are regular in the classroom whereas, during the A level (equivalent to higher secondary) students are often busy in coaching classes and are not very regular to the schools. Moreover, during A level, many students fly off to foreign countries for higher education. Therefore, the authors chose O level students as they were the best fitting for the research purpose. Inductive Thematic Analysis was employed to analyse the numerical interview data. In addition, the authors used aggregated analysis of all the respondents.

### 5. Why English-medium schools are chosen?

#### Justifications for choosing EMSs (EMSs clientele)

##### 5.1 Students:

The surging demand for English-medium education has helped to establish EMSs in every street in Dhaka city and now one can see the increasing sway of English-medium schools in Dhaka city. This shows the proliferations of these schools, and it is only an impression of the people, as BANBEIS does not provide the exact numbers of EMSs existing in Bangladesh. The study reveals that the students are studying in EMSs as they use English as a medium of instruction and English is required in higher education. Moreover, the students also want to seek a permanent settlement in a foreign country. According to the students, these schools provide them with better careers, better facilities and better opportunities.

Asked to identify the main reasons for choosing EMSs, the students prioritized the following:

**Table 1.3** EMSs' Student Participants' Justifications

| No. of EMSs students (N=89)         | Evidence from data |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Language                            |                    |
| %English as a medium of instruction | 100                |
| Higher education                    |                    |
| % Bangladesh                        | 8.99               |
| % foreign country                   | 91.01              |
| Settlement                          |                    |
| % Bangladesh                        | 19.10              |
| % foreign country                   | 80.90              |
| Career                              |                    |
| % Public sector                     | 13.49              |
| % Private sector                    | 86.51              |
| Types of job                        |                    |
| %MNCs                               | 86.51              |
| %Others                             | 13.49              |

**Source:** Based on authors calculations.

**Note:** MNCs (Multinational Corporations) and others include lawyers, actors (entertainment field), engineers, and entrepreneurs.

The research reveals the most important justifications for studying in EMSs. The table reports all the respondents identified English as a medium of instructions to be the crucial reason for choosing EMSs. The students want to pursue education in English as it gives them academic, economic, and social privileges. However, the most crucial reason for choosing EMSs is to go for overseas higher education. Random questions were asked to each students. Therefore, S7 (student 7) stated as follows: 'my parents are making me study in this school because they want me to go abroad for higher studies', S8 said: 'The only reason for me to study in this school is for higher education in abroad, and by studying in Bengali-medium school would have helped little to meet my goal'. S3 said: 'My entire family wants me to study abroad, and that is the reason why I am here today'. The responses from the students indicate immigration remains an important decision to enrol in EMS. On the contrary, S2said: 'it is a wrong assumption that we cannot get admission into a public

university, it actually depends on us, and how diligently we can work to get into the public universities’. According to S4, who noted as follows: ‘in the public universities there is an opportunity to give examination in English, so I think there are chances but we need to have sound knowledge of our country’. As a matter of fact, it is a significant justification for studying in EMSs as the medium of instruction is English in these schools and this is what makes the students to have an easy access to any foreign university or a reputed university in Bangladesh.

Similarly, many students want to seek a permanent settlement in a foreign country than Bangladesh. The research delineates that 80.90% of the students prefer settlement in abroad and only 19.10% of the students want to live permanently in Bangladesh. S7 noted as follows: ‘With our schooling, we enjoy little benefits in Bangladesh, so why should I live here’ and S10 stated: ‘There is no security of having a good job in Bangladesh, although often English-medium background students are preferred but if we lack knowledge in Bengali, we are not valued here’. Accordingly, S4 noted as follows: ‘I don’t want to stay in Bangladesh for political instability’ and S8 stated as follows: ‘with our international qualification we are valued abroad than in our own country’. This too indicates that immigration to a foreign country is an important factor for receiving English-medium education.

However, as only a few wants to live permanently in Bangladesh and many wants to seek a permanent settlement in abroad, these students also want to work in companies that earn them benefit. It is strongly believed in Bangladesh that students from English-medium background do not have an interest in the public sector job as public sector highly demand proficiency in Bengali language. This elides the importance of public sector job among the EMSs students. Subsequently, most of the students wanted to work abroad and when they were asked, if they failed to go abroad then which sector would be their choice for working in Bangladesh. The finding shows that 13.49% of the students want to work in the public sector, whereas 86.51% desires to seek a job in the private sector. According to S5: ‘The public sector is of no good as the job requires proficiency in Bengali and it is not equipped with modern technology and neither have modern facilities’. S6 said: ‘there is flexibility in the private sector and English is in demand in these sectors, and we are appreciated more in these places than public sector’. These findings reveal that updated facilities and the modern working ambience provided by the private sector have gained popularization among the EMSs students.

One of the justifications is the importance of career among the students highlight that the majority of the student participants wants to have a career at Multinational Corporations (MNCs). More importantly, many students now want to work in a different kind of field where they can utilize their international qualifications. Several students said MNCs are the perfect place for them to work as English is one of the essential requirements at MNCs. MNCs creates a creative ambience for the employees who can exhibit their prolific ideas to the leading edge. Out of 89 students 86.51% respondents prefer job at MNCs and only 13.49% prefer other jobs. Here others include lawyers, actors (entertainment field), engineers, entrepreneurs etc.

## 5.2 Parents:

The most significant reasons to send their children to EMSs are listed below. The following justifications are those of the interviewees’ response.

- Medium of instruction,
- Higher education in abroad and Bangladesh,
- foreign immigration due to political instability
- International qualification
- International curriculum
- Foreign textbooks
- Teaching and learning process, fewer students, class size, infrastructures.
- Social security,
- Career,
- Appalling condition of Bengali-medium schools
- Social identity

Parents demand EMSs for their children’s better future where in the absence of social security, they are giving the children English-medium education in order to give them a path which leads to success. Parents chose these schools due to the emphasis on English. According to the parents, English has a greater association for a better future, which not only helps to establish their children’s future prospects such as education and career but also resilient in overcoming hurdles in life. According to P3 (Parent 3) who stated as follows: ‘English is an international language and it is a recognized language. Academic learning in Bengali will not earn them benefits. But if the students study in English, it will help them in their future, such as in career, facilities and then they can go abroad easily’. Another parent P8 noted: ‘we struggle here every day, there is either strike in the country, or session jam in public universities, and the good private universities also charge high tuition fees, so why not send them abroad for higher studies’.

P9 stated: 'English-medium education is supposedly providing world class education, and unlike the students from Bengali-medium, I do not think they have to struggle like their counterparts, and even in Bangladesh, job sectors are more open toward students with O/A level background'. These findings indicate that the parents are aware of the importance of English in social and economic spheres.

Some of the parents are sending their children to EMSs, as they are not satisfied with the mainstream education. Parents commented that Bengali-medium schools' students only memorizes the textbook without understanding the concept. Similarly, teaching and learning are also very traditional where the students face difficulties in comprehending to what is being taught. Moreover, functional learning does not take place in the classroom as teachers engage themselves in private coaching centres and often absent from the schools. Most surprisingly, if a student does not enrol in their coaching centre then the student does not get good grades and often the teacher fails them. Teaching and learning crisis have propelled the parents to demand for English-medium education. They also believe, as English is an international language, children need to learn the language to keep pace with the world.

### **5.3 Teachers:**

Teachers at English-medium schools mentioned English is an international language and its role in education and job has made English-medium education popular among the clientele of these schools. Most of the teachers mentioned, the demand for English is due to the benefits it sought to deliver to the clientele. Learning English helps to build a global network and participate in the global market. In recent years, by piecemeal people are changing their attitude toward jobs especially, those who seek English-medium education are no longer limited to stereotypical jobs such as medical or engineering profession. Many wants to pursue a career at MNCs, which highly demand English proficiency skill. The teachers are aware of the benefits of English education and its importance in the international community.

### **5.4 Principals**

This study also sought to understand principals' thoughts regarding the proliferation and popularization of EMSs. According to them, English is necessary for better life chances and in order to have a prosperous life, English proficiency skill is a key requirement. Moreover, having 'O level' and 'A level' makes it easier for the children to have access to the international community and represent themselves in the global market. English-medium education has transformed the society into a better place and its contribution to Bangladeshi education has gained prominence by introducing international qualifications. The principals also blamed the failure on the quality of mainstream education has promoted the growth of English-medium education. As, despite charging exorbitant tuition fees, the clientele of these schools still want to seek English-medium education. Looking at the demand for English-medium education, even the economically weaker areas of the country have opened these schools for the local elites, in order to contribute to educational development. They also commented that learning English is crucial for the development of Bangladesh.

### **5.5 Bengali-Medium Schools' Clientele's interview**

Students, parents, teachers, and principals of BMSs have variegated perceptions on EMSs. Most of the Students hold positive perceptions on English-medium education. While, only a few students have negative views on EMSs. However, the majority of the students appreciate English-medium schooling and their association with better outcomes. These students also have the cognizance of the benefits of English and how it accelerates opportunities in the future.

#### **5.5.1 Students:**

The students complained about the traditional style of teaching and learning method, and most importantly, they still memorize without understanding the concept despite the introduction of the creative method. On the contrary, their counterparts focus on creative learning and have analytical and problem-solving skills. Similarly, the students also feel that they do not have access to better facilities, such as modern teaching aid well-equipped computer lab or library, which could enhance their learning ability or comprehend the subject matter properly. Their views reflected on the appalling conditions and low quality education provided by the BMSs, and how they have been forced to depend on coaching centres due to the low teaching activity of teachers. As the teachers spend little time in the schools and more time in the coaching centres.

#### **5.5.2 Parents:**

However, unlike the students, their parents were infuriated at the dissemination of EMSs. The parent participants complained about the unjustifiable tuition fees that the schools charge and their contribution to education do not come out meaningful.

According to the parents, none of the children from EMSs has the ability to become a doctor or an Engineer. They have emphasised on being doctor or engineer as these two professions are very popular among the BMSs’ clientele. Likewise, the parents also complained about EMSs’ teachers educational credentials as most of the teachers have Bengali-medium educational background and they do not have professional training. These parents feel that BMSs also teach English thus, it is not necessary to take up English-medium education. Overall, parents seem to appreciate Bengali-medium education as they do not aspire to send their children to a foreign country and they also have a high regard for government jobs than private sector jobs.

### 5.5.3 Teachers and Principal:

Teachers and principals have multifaceted views on EMSs. They seem to appreciate English-medium education, but at the same time, they pointed out few wrong measures taken by these schools. According to them, EMSs runs like a private enterprise often with a profit motive, teaches international curriculum, most of the schools do not have a playground, hold little value on Bangladeshi tradition and culture. Whereas, they prefer an English version schools as they follow the national curriculum which, focus on Bangladeshi content. They also mentioned, that none of the schools follow rules and regulations and do not have accountability and transparency. Moreover, the government do not monitor these schools. Despite, many criticisms these schools face, they still help to bridge the gap between Bangladesh and the international community. These findings indicate teachers and the principal highly value English learning and also believes English education plays a crucial role in social and economic development.

## 6. Discussion

EMSs are conceded to be instrumental in shaping, delivering, and meeting the demands of educational needs of their clientele. However, its indispensable characteristics have helped to build images and manoeuvre them according to the clientele’s expectations. The diluted identity of BMSs has contributed to the growth of EMSs popularity in Bangladesh. The salient features of these schools are their facilities that undoubtedly have made the BMSs and the government-controlled English version schools be considered as subservient and have elided their importance. Although, this study does not deal with the underlying factors of BMSs and English version schools, but the society has seen such changes in the paradigm of the schooling system in Bangladesh.

The educational significance of EMSs among the clientele is various. In struggling to gain recognition even the schools with low tuition fees (in comparison with the elitist school’s tuition fees) tend to provide better facilities and introduces a sensibility towards quality. This study focused on various issues that could lead to the reasons for choosing EMSs. The main research question is to know the clientele’s perceptions for choosing English-medium schools in Bangladesh. In other words, why EMSs are chosen? The clientele of these schools has certain educational demands that are fulfilled by the EMSs only. These schools help to propel the demand of those who associates English-medium education with a better future.

In particular, it cannot be ignored that many parents have withdrawn their children from BMSs and transposed them in EMSs. Although, this cannot negate and raise a question of the perceived quality of BMSs but can justify their reasons for doing so. Not all the students were enrolled in EMSs from their initial years of schooling but some were withdrawn from BMSs either for having a desire to go in a foreign country or looking at the explosive growth of these schools created a sense of considering it as instrumental.

The most significant reasons for studying in EMSs are for the use of English as a medium of instruction, to seek higher education in a foreign country and make adherences to the international paradigm, which highly echoes globalization. Most of the students during the interview responded that they prefer a degree from a foreign university, which will earn them an international stature. The recent decades have seen such widespread usage of English that have indispensable and pragmatic connotations to economic development. English being international language have propelled and elevated its users. As a result, myriads of EMSs are growing in Bangladesh, as the general population has high regard for English language learning.

In the findings many students, parents, teachers, and principals revealed that the students of EMSs hardly return to Bangladesh, as they are acculturated to that culture than their own, similarly, the students are highly regarded in foreign companies than in Bangladesh. In responding to Lowe (1999), his findings from Jordan, elucidates that most of the Jordanian students [having international qualification] return to the country, as they are not dependent on seeking overseas employment. However, this does not prevail in Bangladesh, where the attraction of English-medium is highly credited for immigration. Similarly, an anonymous author reports on brain-drain generated by EMSs, that most of the students do not want to return to the country. There are multifarious reasons for not returning to Bangladesh and career is one of them.

In contrast to previous studies regarding the career choice of students, we found that most of the students want to work in a foreign country. Lowe (2010) also states ‘IGCSE improves access to internationally oriented job opportunities’ (p. 368) However,

if they were unable to build their career abroad then they would prefer working in a multinational company in Bangladesh, as these companies require good English proficiency skills. Haydon and Pinon (2010), findings reveal that the private sector in Bangladesh demands employees with good command of English. This echoes that English language can entrench them to obtain a place in the global market. Locally available English-medium education that befits the nation undergoing the process of the globalization revolution and that at the same time provides “students with skills for the global workplace” (Spring, 2008, p. 337, as cited in Song, 2013, p. 139).

Likewise, in the case of Pakistan, Rahman (2005) found that “products of English schools either go abroad to join multinational corporations and the international bureaucracy or drift back home to fashionable NGOs and foreign banks” (p. 34). A similar situation prevails in Bangladesh as well. On the contrary, in 2005 Harlech-Jones et al. found (Pakistan’s case) most of the parents preference occupations is ‘doctor/medical specialist, Government officials, and military officer. While, this research’s interviewees prefer a job at MNCs and other jobs that even in few years back was not appreciated by the parents. Eventually, parents have transformed their hidebound attitude and now acknowledge any kind of jobs that their children wants to take up. However, the parents and students of BMSs have not shrugged off their parochial attitude toward jobs that is of equal respect.

In particular, another significant finding is the cultural practices of these students who often believed to have less knowledge on culture and tradition of Bangladesh. While, the findings suggest that the students have enough knowledge of their country and culture but the authors such as Haque and Akhter (2011), and Anonymous (report on brain-drain generated by English-medium education,) found out that the students of EMSs have very little knowledge on the culture and traditions of Bangladesh. Most of the students have knowledge on Bangladesh although, referred as synthetic, additionally, they also practice cultural festive and have knowledge on the genesis of the celebrated days. For instance, 96% of the students are aware of the name of the national poet whereas only 4% did not know the name, in case of the writer of national anthem 85% students knew the name and only 15% could not name it. Similarly, 78% of the students knew the date of Independence day, whereas 22% were incorrect. Even most of the EMSs students celebrated Bengali culture, such as 95% of the students celebrated and only 5% were not interested in celebrating. In this research, discussion on Bangladesh and its culture and traditions is imperative as this reflect the distinct traditions of EMSs Even though every year many EMSs students go to foreign countries for study, settlement and career purpose, nevertheless, this does not mean that students lack substantial knowledge on Bangladeshi culture and thereafter seeks immigration.

One of the research questions is to know the type of clientele of these schools whether they belong to upper, middle, and lower quintile. However, due to the sensibility of the income issue, this study could not draw out the income structure of the families. Nevertheless, it exhibits the annual tuition fee of grade 10 in one of the schools is TK. 139,197 (2015) equivalent to \$1786.15 (2015), some schools even charge more than this amount. However, the parents not only pays to the schools but as mentioned earlier they also need to pay (in pounds) for per subject, which is further divided into per unit registered for the O level examination. This demonstrates that the parents belong to the upper quintile of the society in Bangladesh.

The recent growth of EMSs and increased parental demand did not lead to the reduction in school fees, but it is the presumption of people that these schools are growing rapidly for a profit motive. Despite, the schools being ostentatiously costly, people are still willing to admit their children in EMSs. The students’ questionnaire and parents’ interview generate that the parents are highly educated and most of them are from the upper section of the society. Parent’s educational and occupational background is shown below:

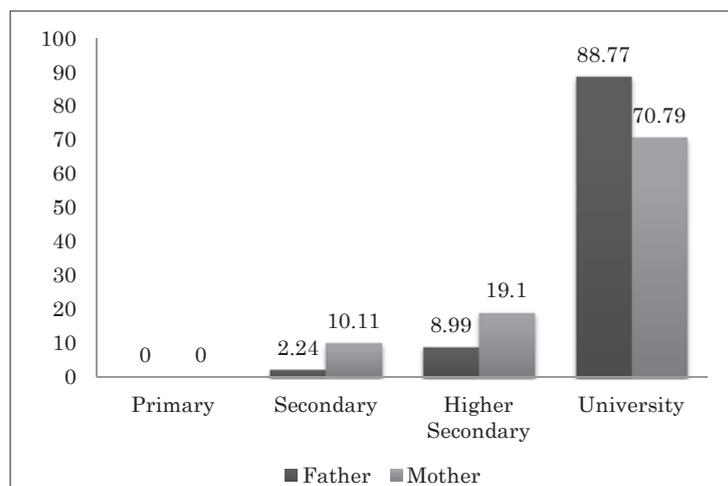
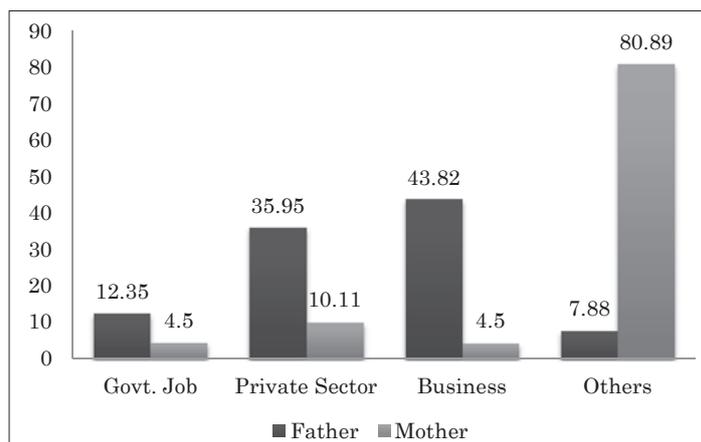


Figure 2. Parents’ Educational Background:



**Figure 3. Parents' Occupational Background**

\*Others- Father: Moviemaker, Hockey player, umpire, etc  
Mother: Housewife, Land lady.

Many parents have a university degree, which displays that they are educated and aware of English education. Their unanimity on the importance of English education reflects the association to a better future that also illuminates their desire to have higher status. The occupational background also reflects that they are engaged in the profession that resonantly belongs to higher income group. Many has a university degree and appointed as top officials in the public and private sector. Moreover, along with paying high tuition fees they also pay a huge amount of examination fees to Edexcel or CIE through British council in Bangladesh. This suggests that the parents are well off and have the ability to afford their children's educational costs.

We had raised another question that sought to know whether the schools are demand or supply driven. The English-medium schools in the research area (Dhaka) started surging for providing better educational needs. Most of the authors mention that these schools are demand driven (Andhrabi, Das, and Khawaza, 2008; Baird, 2009; Bangay, 2005). According to Baird (2009) who explicitly reports that, in developing world, private schools are demand driven, and parents demand these schools as the government fails to provide better education. Similarly, English-medium schools are demand driven in Bangladesh as well. These schools were initially demanded by the elite section of the society (Banu and Sussex, 2001). In the same way, soon the middle-income group demanded such schools and consequently, Bangladeshi government started to open English schools (national curriculum) which would be controlled by them but would be under private management.

Our purpose is to illuminate the various justifications that the clientele of these schools sought predominantly. According to many authors the main attraction of these schools is the English-medium instruction, similarly, this is one of the key reasons for choosing EMSs in Bangladesh, especially those schools affiliated to Edexcel and CIE. Many universities especially private universities lay great emphasis on English language and this extends them to receive an education that is needed for future use. Hence, English-medium instruction and its further usage in higher education have propelled the parents to admit or transpose their children to EMSs. EMSs' efficiency has led the clientele to accept education that is worth spending.

We expound other reasons that are equally significant in demanding English-medium education. The clientele is an integral part of English-medium education and EMSs diligently extends their service to entrench the clientele. The most discernible aspirations for choosing EMSs with international qualifications such as O level/IGCSE is to have an easy entry to a foreign country where the students can study, reside and work permanently although, sometimes the students do desire to return, but immigration remains an important factor. These globally recognized qualifications do illuminate and serve the purpose of the recipients. Therefore, the recipients have the cognizance of international examinations and inextricably associate themselves with the international community. Mainstream educational institutions especially, the public universities are always intermittent by political insurgencies that call for foreign countries, which also lead to brain-drain.

Finally, we had posited a question about students satisfaction with EMSs. A significant number nearly 100%, of the students responded that they would prefer to be enrolled in an English-medium school than a very reputed Bengali-medium school. The students at EMSs gave importance to English than Bengali. Many students believe English is imperative to have wider opportunities and facilities and at the same time, the exigent demand of the better life requires English skill. Moreover, studying at EMSs gives them recognition in society and advances their aspiration to go upward.

The clientele of Bengali-medium schools has variegated opinions on the existence of EMSs. Students prefer EMSs as these schools are widely recognized and accelerates self-development. Students also complained about the appalling condition of BMSs and despite the introduction of the creative method by the government, these schools still practice and emphasise on rote learning.

On the contrary, parents prefer BMSs as they want their children to continue higher education in Bangladesh, and aspire to see their children in the medical or engineering profession. According to the parents, most of the doctors and engineers have Bengali-medium education and none from the EMSs. However, Principals and teachers value English-medium education although they have preference for 'English Version schools' affiliated to national curriculum. They too have high regard for English language as it is associated to social and economic development

## 7. Conclusion

Since the British colonization period in the Indian subcontinent, English has always played an important role in administration, law and education. The partition of India and Pakistan (East and West) in 1947, and decades later the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 had an enormous effect on the learning of English language in the country as the Bangladeshis were tied in the hands of nationalism and their struggle to establish Bengali as the national language. In Bangladesh 98% of the people speak Bengali. Therefore, it is not surprising that BMSs still dominates and has no low-cost (English-medium) private schools, as it exists in other developing countries where access to low cost private schools is heterogeneous. For instance, In India and Pakistan, several languages are spoken, therefore, another language is needed for communication among the various language speakers. Thus, English is the official language in both the countries and used as a lingua franca. However, in Bangladesh, English-medium education is still considered as an elite education.

EMSs are playing a significant role in the educational landscape of Bangladesh. The phenomenal growth of EMSs indicates their achievement, and the implications of these schools are vast. The unprecedented demand for EMSs with international qualifications such as O level has increased rapidly in recent years. EMSs certain contingent features such as quality and medium of instruction have undoubtedly promoted the growth of these schools. Although these perceptions are based on conjectures, over the years EMSs have subsequently contributed to better education and displayed distinct traditions that have attracted the upper and middle-income groups in Bangladesh. However, it is not sufficient to argue that these schools guarantee success in the future and improves future prospects in foreign countries for education and careers. Moreover, not all parents want to send their children to a foreign country; instead, they are making the children study in EMS, as higher education in Bangladesh demand English proficiency skills.

In this respect, we recapitulate that it plausibly reflects that clientele with more resources (wealth) have easy access to EMSs. In the previous sections of this article, it has been mentioned that there are some schools which charge lower tuition fees than the most elite schools, but in order to apply for the O level examination, students need to pay an exorbitant exam fees to the awarding bodies (CIE, and Edexcel) through British council. The clientele of English-medium education exhibits resistance to the traditional style of teaching and learning of Bengali-medium education that actually emphasise more on rote learning than understanding the concept of the subject matter. On the contrary, English-medium education affiliated to Edexcel and CIE focus on analytical and problem-solving skill. Therefore, besides having the foci to have better future, and more opportunities in a foreign country, the clientele also wanted to come out of the traditional education that could not represent them in the international community, international organizations, or compete in the global market. Moreover, one of the most selling points of UK qualifications is they aim to establish the students in the global market. Thus, it can be illuminated that English-medium schools are chosen for variegated purpose but the crux of the decision remains on having English proficiency skill, which is not emphasized in the mainstream education.

In the research parents and students have blamed the deteriorating quality of BMSs which has also created a divergence between these schools and the general population, who can afford to buy a better education. Sasaki (2004) also highlights the poor quality of government school drives the population to take up private schools. In the case of Bangladesh, the poor quality of mainstream education propels the socio-economically advantaged people to demand EMSs affiliated to international qualifications. Therefore, in the context of Bangladesh, EMSs students are receiving a high-cost private education which has a detrimental effect on the national educational system and the government is less criticized for providing low quality education. As these schools are growing in number, accountability and transparency are needed instead of operating as shadow institutions. In the future, rigorous study is needed on the English-medium schooling phenomena. These schools are operating as shadow institutions as neither the government nor the general population have detailed information on these schools. Further, a critical investigation is also needed on the EMSs principals and teachers.

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