



Khwaja Yunus Ali University Journal

ISSN: 2791-3759 (Online) | 2521-3121 (Print)

Essay

Higher Education in Bangladesh and the Needs of English

Md. Aminul Haque

Department of English, Khwaja Yunus Ali University, Sirajganj-6751, Bangladesh.

ABSTRACT

Education is the key-sector to develop a nation. From the immemorial time education plays a vital role to enrich a country like Bangladesh. Higher education is inseparable part to the scientific and technological development, artistic and scholarly enrichment, and trade and commercial progress of a country. This paper tries to find out the academic gaps and fill up the gaps specially at the tertiary level of education. Different sectors of higher education in our country are gradually contributing to the development of human resources liberally and professionally. In spite of repeated awareness at the tertiary level of education in the country, there are some lacks or gaps due to the unknown situations in the lingua franca i.e. English which is, in general, the gateway to the scientific and technological skills-development, trade and business-related thought, and finally artistic and human resource development. English is needed to alleviate these lacks and gaps as it is the main entrance to science, technology, agriculture, medical science, trade, commerce, arts, human resource and so on. As a result, our higher education sector will be able to build a country like Bangladesh based on skilled manpower in all spheres of life.

Key-words: Higher education, lingua franca, awareness, impart, specialized, needs, tertiary, resources, aesthetic values, sensibilities

Correspondence:
Md. Aminul Haque
aminhaque97@gmail.com

Received: 15 March 2026
Revised: 20 May 2026
Accepted: 28 May 2026
Published: 30 June 2026

Cite as:
Haque, M. A., (2026).
Higher Education in
Bangladesh and the Needs of
English. KYAU. Journal.
9(1):113-120. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.61921/kyau.j.v09i01.011>

1. Introduction

Bangladesh has been trying and experimenting with education since independence for an effective education system. In the initial stage of the British rule in India, education was considered a matter of social prestige. During the British rule educational institutions were established in some selected urban areas and English was used as the medium of instruction (The International Institute for Educational planning, Paris and the National Foundation for Research on Human Resource Development, Dhaka, 1983: 45). In the Indian sub-

continent, the administration of Lord Hastings founded the Sreerampore and the Bishop's Colleges for higher education from 1817 to 1837 (Laird, 1972: 133). Afterwards Indian scholars took western rationalism for modern education as the guide for modern Indians. That is why people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Ram Ram Basu and many others welcomed the move to introduce English education in India. In course of time the spirit of higher education in the medium of English spread all over India. English language

occupied the central stage of higher education in India. The Hindu College, Presidency College and later on, the Universities were established in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857 to impart higher education through English in the sub-continent (Krishnaswamy, N. & T. Sriraman. 1995. 34; Shahidullah, August 2, 2002: 15).

When the British left India in 1947, English remained as the second language of both India and Pakistan. Since Bangladesh became independent in 1971, it put special emphasis on education. The education in Bangladesh is divided into three levels, i.e. primary education, secondary education and higher education. Secondary education consists of two parts, i.e. secondary and higher secondary. Primary education ranges from class I to V, secondary education from VI to X, higher secondary education from XI to XII and higher education includes undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (*The World Bank, Bangladesh, Education Sector Review, Volume 1, 2000: 39 & The International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris and the National Foundation for Research on Human Resource Development, Dhaka. 1983: 46-54*).

2. Dimensions and Characteristics of Higher Education

Higher education in Bangladesh now consists of bachelor and master's courses (Molla, The Observer Magazine, September 13, 2002: 5). Degrees offered in higher education are: (a) Pass degree (HSC + 3 years), (b) Honours degree (HSC + 4 years), and (c) technical (HSC + 4 years). At present only the Honours programmes have been changed into 4-year ones (Ibid, P.3). A master's programme is of one year's duration after honours and two years' duration after pass degree. There are two separate systems of higher education in Bangladesh: (1) General education imparted by 58 public universities, 116 private universities and a large number of degree colleges affiliated with the National University (ugc-universities.gov.bd.2026), (2) Technical or professional education of different types imparted by Medical Colleges, Agricultural Universities and Universities of Engineering and Technology etc. (*The World Bank, Bangladesh, Education Sector Review, volume III 2000: 59*). General education is taught at

the general universities among others. The disciplines of general education are of several kinds, i.e. Humanities, Social Science, Law, Business Studies, Science and Biological Science, and so on.

The major areas of humanities are English, Bengali, History, Islamic History, Arabic, Philosophy, languages; those of social science are sociology, Social Work, economics, social welfare, political science, Anthropology; those of business studies are Accounting, Management, Finance & Banking and Marketing; those of basic and applied sciences are physics, Applied Physics, chemistry, Applied Chemistry, Mathematics, Computer Science, statistics; and those of biological science are Fisheries and Aquaculture, Botany, Zoology. The faculty of law includes the discipline of Law and Justice.

Technical or professional education is taught at the technical or professional institutions such as BUET, RUET, CHUET, KUET, IUT, and many other technical Universities, and Private Universities like Ahsanullah University of Engineering and Technology, Chittagong Islamic University, BRAC University, North South University, Khwaja Yunus Ali University and other private universities, and also at the public universities like Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh, Hazi Danesh Agricultural University, Patuakhali Agricultural University, Sher-E-Bangla Agricultural University, 37 Govt. Medical Colleges and 68 Private Medical Colleges, and 6 Medical universities in Bangladesh and the like (Wikipedia). Technical or professional education in the country has the major areas like Medical, Engineering and Agricultural Sciences. The disciplines of Medical Science are Physiology, Anatomy, Surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedics, Medicine, Dermatology, Pharmacology and Pathology. The major disciplines of Engineering are Civil Engineering, Water Resources Engineering, Architecture, Electrical Engineering, Computer Science, Chemical Engineering, Materials and Metallurgical Engineering, Petroleum and Mineral Resources Engineering and Naval Architecture & Marine Engineering and those of Agriculture are Soil Science, Agronomy, Animal Nutrition, Animal Husbandry, Surgery and Obstetrics, Forestry, Food Technology & Rural Industries and Agricultural Economics.

There are two kinds of general universities in Bangladesh (1) the public and (2) the private. The public universities are those, which are autonomous, but the salary of the teachers and other employees are given by the government. The private universities are those, which are also autonomous, but the salary of the teachers and other employees are not given by the government. A Board of Directors bears all expenses including the salary of the teachers and other staff.

3. The University Grants Commission (UGC)

The University Grants Commission (UGC), established in 1972, is an intermediary body to act between the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and the universities. The UGC performs six main functions: (i) assessing the needs and evaluating and recommending development plans to the Education Ministry; (ii) identifying financial requirements of the universities; (iii) allocating development funds from the GOB to various institutions; (iv) evaluating use of funds and implementation of development programmes; (v) advising the GOB in the establishment of new universities, including private universities, or expansion of existing institutions; and (vi) collecting and disseminating statistical information (The World Bank, *Bangladesh, Education Sector Review*, volume III, 2000 : 59). It is a supervisory body to monitor academic, administrative and financial matters of the Universities.

4. Institutions of Higher Education

A large number of institutions/universities offer both Honours and master's degrees. Generally, degree colleges (both govt. and non-govt.) offer Pass courses three-year BA, BCom & BSc degrees). Honours courses are offered by universities and some big colleges. But these colleges are affiliated with and guided by the National University. Except the National University and the Open University, the nine government universities have approximately 195,000 students studying in the higher section of education. About 6,15,482 students are studying in the colleges affiliated with the National University ([www.facebook.co...+4](#)) and 368,000 students are at various levels at Bangladesh Open University ([www.bou.ac.bd+3](#) & [www.daily-sun.com+2](#)). The private universities are also meeting the demand of

higher education of more than 310,000 students of the country (Ibid).

The major public universities imparting higher education are Dhaka University, Rajshahi University, Chittagong University, Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Bangladesh Agricultural University, Islamic University, Khulna University, Shah-Jalal Science and Technology University, Bangladesh Open University, National University, Bangladesh Medical University, Islamic University of Technology (IUT), Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology, Khulna University of Engineering and Technology, Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology, Hazi Danesh Agricultural University, Sher-E-Bangla Nagar Agricultural University, Patuakhali Agricultural University, Gazipur Agricultural University, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Noakhali Science and Technology University and Jagannath University and so on. The leading private universities in the country are North South University, BRAC University, East West University, Independent University, American International University of Bangladesh (AIUB), Asian University, Queen's University, Liberal Arts University, Chittagong Islamic University, Northern University, Eastern University, Stamford University, City University, South East University, Ahsanullah University, Khwaja Yunus Ali University, United International University, Premier University and so on. Educational expenses in the private universities are very high. The medium of instruction and examination at these universities is English.

The Private University Act, 1992 added a new dimension to the expansion of higher education in Bangladesh. Since then, private universities have been operating in Bangladesh and awarding degrees to many students. Both public and private university education has the reputation of being reasonably good in quality, but it is, sometimes, badly affected by serious under funding and student unrest. The Bangladesh Open University (BOU), established in 1992, provides practical formal and non-formal education and training by distance modes. It provides three-year pass degree programmes and instruction

leading to a master's degree in business administration and education.

Except BUET there were three specialized technological universities namely CHUET, KUET and RUET. These universities used to impart technical education to students at the higher level. There is also an international university for technical education named IUT (Islamic University of Technology) at Gazipur. Foreign students especially from OIC countries and students from Bangladesh study at this university. The medium of instruction in this university is English. There is also an Institute of Leather Technology affiliated with Dhaka University, which offers a B. Sc Degree in leather technology. There is an Institute named Bangladesh Institute of Glass and Ceramics in Dhaka that offers a diploma equivalent to B. Sc engineering. There are two marine academies namely Bangladesh Marine Academy, Chittagong and Bangladesh Marine Academy, Pabna which offer a degree named Marine Engineering.

There are 37 medical colleges in Bangladesh. They are Dhaka Medical college, Salimullah Medical College, Dhaka, Dental College, Dhaka, Rajshahi Medical College, Rangpur Medical College, Mymensingh Medical College, Barisal Medical College, Chittagong Medical College, Sylhet Medical College, Bogra Medical College, Khulna Medical College, Dinajpur Medical College, Jamalpur Medical College and so on. These colleges offer the graduation degree (MBBS) in medical science. The duration of the course is five years. The course is taught in English.

Previously there were three agricultural colleges in Bangladesh. These agricultural colleges turned into public universities namely Patuakhali Agricultural University, Hazi Danesh Agricultural University and Sher-E- Bangla Nagar Agricultural University. There was also a higher Agricultural Research Institute, located at Gazipur, which turned into public university namely Gazipur Agricultural University.

The Arts and Crafts College is presently a part of Dhaka University. The duration of its course is four years. After four years, the successful students obtain the bachelor's degree from Dhaka University.

There are ten Teachers' Training colleges and one college of Education. These colleges offer four-year B Ed course. One of the Training colleges, situated at Mymensingh, is exclusively for women. The other Training College at Mymensingh offers B.A. and M.A. programmes in Education. There is a separate Technical Teachers' Training College. This college offers a one-year diploma course and a two-year degree course in technical education. There is an Academy for Fundamental Education at Mymensingh. This Academy for Fundamental Education offers in-service training facilities to teachers of Primary Training Institutes. There is a College of Physical Education in Dhaka, which offers a degree named Bachelor of Physical Education.

Besides these institutions, there is an Institute for Education and Research in Dhaka. It is a part of Dhaka University. This Institute offers both bachelor's and master's degrees in education. There are two commerce colleges at Chittagong and Khulna. The Khulna Commerce College offers both Bachelor's and master's programmes. The Chittagong commerce college offers Pass and Honours programmes.

There is an Institute of Business Administration in Dhaka University. This Institute offers a two-year master's programme in Business Administration according to the pattern of business schools in the U.S.A Universities. The Institute of Business Administration has also a 4-year Undergraduate programme and 1-year master's programme of international standard and organises special courses in business management.

5. Govt. & Non-Govt. Colleges

There are 708 govt. and 2,371 non-govt. colleges in Bangladesh. So, the total number of colleges (general) in Bangladesh is 3,079. (National University & Directorate of Secondary & Higher Education, Dhaka). A survey shows that about 80% of students after passing their H.S.C examination in 1993 went for higher education (A.D.B., Higher Secondary Education Project, 1998: P.2). Students attending govt. and non-govt. colleges receive their degrees from the National University, established in 1992. So, most of the govt. and non-govt. colleges

offer Pass, Honours and master's programmes under National University.

At present National University (NU) has more than 2,275 affiliated degree colleges and institutions. Of these, 1922 are general education institutions, and 353 provide professional education (National University).

6. Standard of Higher Education offered by the Universities in Bangladesh

The UNDP Post-Primary Sector Review includes some description and analysis of higher education from the early 1990s. The UGC produces annual reports that analyse developments of the university system. The NU does not collect regular enrolments by field survey. Inadequate analysis has been made on the key-problems faced by higher education. So, the condition of degree colleges remains undocumented. The condition of higher education management for both universities and degree colleges needs proper analysis. But education at the tertiary level imparted by some universities both general and technical are significant for producing skilled manpower in the country.

7. Strengths

Higher education in Bangladesh has many strengths and advantages. In higher education there are some instances of excellence in teaching in the key institutions. The main functions of higher education are to (i) prepare high-level manpower for professional, technical and administrative positions in the labour market; (ii) generate new knowledge through research; and (iii) extend that knowledge to the benefit of the society at large (The World Bank, 2000: 25).

In the field of higher education, university and college teachers need to be well qualified in their respective fields or disciplines because they have to teach students properly (Miller 1989: 3). Efficient private sector management is an important factor for higher education in Bangladesh. This includes 80% of degree colleges and all the private universities. Through this private sector higher education is offered to a very large number of students. It relieves the pressure on the government for higher education.

8. Weaknesses

Teaching and learning in higher education in the 1990s are facing numerous intra-and extra-institutional pressures. The learning outcome of students is poor because of a restless social situation. The shortage of resources including teachers and books is responsible for students' poor knowledge and skills in English especially at the level of higher education and it causes the downslide of the standard of higher education in Bangladesh. Due to critical conditions of funding procedures, the instigation of widespread teaching assessment, the transition to modular, semester, and grading systems and the rise of student/staff ratios, teaching and learning of English in higher education are not fruitful (Jarvis 1995: 127). The medium of instruction in general education is Bangla, and for the technical education, it is a mixture of English and Bangla. So, students lack competence in English required for the higher education of an international standard.

Every society expects that persons with higher education should have several vital functions. But due to lack of Knowledge and skill in English they cannot keep pace with the world. Higher education ensures the development and transfer of technology and science essential for economic growth and development (Johanson 2000: 63). Technological and scientific Knowledge cannot progress without the knowledge of English.

It is widely believed that in the university and higher education level the gaps and lacks knowledge in English are widening gradually. Creation of new knowledge does not reach its potential and societal expectations. Distortions exist in the allocation of fund for students. So, the present system of higher education cannot successfully cater for the requirements of the time.

9. The Needs of English in Higher Education

English is undisputedly the no. 1 library language in the world. In Bangladesh English is also the no. 1 library language because most of the text and reference books and journals are found in English. For the purpose of this study, it is essential to understand the importance of English in higher education in Bangladesh. English is a pre-requisite for higher education in any country of the world. It

was one of the reasons for emphasizing English. English language teaching and learning started in the colonial times. With English becoming the official language of the sub-continent based on Macaulay's recommendation in his minutes '*On Indian Education*' in 1835, it became an important area of study in the academia (Shahidullah August 2, 2002: 15).

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 the situation changed. Bengali was made the official language, and the medium of instruction, and examination. Without enough books and materials in Bengali, there is a serious problem with the standard of Bengali medium higher education in Bangladesh. Now it is seen that when the products (students) of the present system of education go abroad for higher studies and research, they face problems with the enormous amount of reading and writing they have to do in English. Even many students having first class with first position are having problems with English when they go overseas or face any English medium competition in the country. For this situation, Policy planners, intellectuals and the conscious section of people of Bangladesh and the civil society have started rethinking about the role and needs of English in higher education.

English is very important for higher education in Bangladesh. Although Bengali is slowly making headway in some select areas in Bangladesh, large areas of higher education especially as far as reading materials are concerned and dominated by English (Shahidullah 1995: 144). To make up for the deficiency, if any, measures are to be taken to prepare students for the required level of English. So, measuring the target or required level of English language is essential for students in higher education in Bangladesh. (Shahidullah September 6, 2002: 15).

The report of the National Curriculum Committee submitted in 1977 emphasised the study of English as a language. The committee held that the study of English should be related to the roles assigned to education in the National Development Plan, namely, producing skilled manpower needed to increase productivity and equipping students with tools necessary in higher education. In this way this process would be able to contribute to the socio-economic progress of the country (Raqib 1986: 33).

At the tertiary stage the study of English is needed to develop and extend students' control of the four skills for contributing to national development.

This study argues that in today's world education is largely dominated by studies in different branches of science and technology like medical, engineering and agricultural, and business studies along with the disciplines in humanities and social science for which proficiency in English is essential. Study of English has also been a part of higher education in the sub-continent for a long time, but it was basically the study of English and, partly, American literature with little or no emphasis on English of everyday communication, situational, notional-functional English or the English that people need today for business, and professional purposes and for science and technology, though there is a shift towards these in recent times. The curriculum, as already mentioned, was meant to produce liberal values and attitudes, refining and polishing aesthetic values and sensibilities.

In Bangladesh people increasingly feel the need of English. English is important in today's global world for economic growth, for trade and commerce, for tourism and diplomacy, for aviation, for science and technology, for computer and the internet, for meaningful higher education, and for the existence as a nation (Shahidullah August 2, 2002: 15). Job seekers need English and even Cricketers need English to communicate well with foreign coach and umpires. For good jobs in Bangladesh English is important. A graduate with an average result but with a good command of written and spoken English can easily beat graduates with better results but poor English language proficiency in the job market. All employers, especially in the lucrative private and multinational sectors, now value communication skills in English, and prefer graduates who can communicate well in English.

Poor English language proficiency of the graduates from the universities is evident from the annual reports of Bangladesh Public Service Commission. The reports show that most of those who qualify in the B.C.S. (Bangladesh Civil Service) examination do so with a very low score in English. In the 18th B.C.S. examination only 1.09 per cent of the total candidates appearing at the B.C.S.

examination qualified with 61 and above marks in compulsory English of 100 marks. The data show that out of 16,388 candidates, 3,295 scored less than 25, of them 83 qualified in the written test, 63 passed the oral test (viva-voce), and five were finally recommended for appointment. Out of the total number of candidates only 71 candidates scored 71 marks or above, of whom 27 were finally recommended for appointment. A total of 1,757 candidates were recommended for appointment of whom only 179 got 61 marks and above. The test comprises grammar of 50 marks, which should be very easy even for the average students to score good marks (Bangladesh Public Service Commission Report cited in Shahidullah August 9, 2002: 15). This picture shows the depressing state of English in Bangladesh.

According to Waresi (2000), the performance in the government sector is far from satisfactory because of poor English language proficiency. According to him, many government officials cannot avail themselves of the opportunities of foreign training and higher studies for their poor English proficiency. In this regard, average proficiency in English is still a necessity in all sectors of Bangladesh. For the purpose, it is necessary to prepare graduates for higher education obtaining proficiency in English. To ensure English proficiency in all skills for learners especially at the tertiary level, there is a great need for the establishment of a National English Language Centre in Bangladesh. The neighbouring countries like India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Malaysia have English language centres at national as well as regional level. Learners of these

countries are immensely benefited by such centres. So, the National English Language Centre, if established, will monitor and guide the total affairs of English language education especially at the tertiary level in Bangladesh (Islam, September 2005).

It seems that students joining universities or institutes of higher education are not prepared to face the challenges of English language proficiency required for the country. Presumably there is a big gap between the present level and the required (target) level of proficiency. Among other probable reasons, inadequate exposure, inappropriate curriculum, teaching methods and testing may also be some of the reasons for this. As some studies report that students' proficiency level in Bangladesh is three to five years lower than the expected level, but many others think that it is far more than that. Students need to try to get out of this situation for national development and progress. So, the needs of English in all sectors of Bangladesh need a close and careful analysis especially in higher education.

10. Conclusion

For qualitative improvement of higher education immediate steps need to be taken in Bangladesh. If necessary, the curricula need to be designed in accordance with students' needs. Along with change in curriculum, teacher training, testing and other related areas may also require immediate change so that all of these together can help develop required level of English proficiency in students for effective higher education. As a result, students will be proficient in English for effective education at the tertiary level in Bangladesh.

Author Contributions: Prof. Dr. Md. Aminul Haque: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Analysis and interpretation, Original Draft preparation, Thematic synthesis, Discussion, Manuscript Finalization;

Funding: This research received no external funding.

References

Islam, Jahurul. September 1995: *Praxis*, Volume 2. Convened by Prof. Aali Areefur Rehman.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not relevant.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Published by the Department of English, Rajshahi University, Bangladesh.

- Krishnaswamy, N and T. Sriraman. 1995. "English Teaching in India: Past, Present and Future". *English Language Teaching in India*. Ed. By R.K. Agnihotri and A.L. Khanna. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Laird, M.A. 1972. *Missinaries and Education in Bengal 1793-1837*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Molla, Abdus. Satter. September 13, 2002. *Observer Magazine*. Ed. Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury. Dhaka.
- Rakib, M.A. 1986. "English and Higher Education". *The state of English in Bangladesh Today*. Ed. Dr. Nurul Islam. Bangladesh: English Association of Bangladesh.
- Rahman, Muhammad. Habibur. Friday, 4 October 2002. "Distracted higher education in Bangladesh". *The Independent*. Ed. Mahbubul Alam. Dhaka: Free Press Ltd.
- Shahidullah, M. 1995. "ESP and the concept of Needs Analysis: Usefulness and constraints". *Praxis*. Volume 2. Ed. By Prof. Aali Areefur Rehman, Rajshahi : Department of English, Rajshahi University.
- Shahidullah, Dr. M. August 2, 2002. "Need for English in Bangladesh: now and then". *Holiday*. Ed. Enayetullah Khan. Dhaka: Holiday Publications Ltd.
- Shahidullah, Dr. M. August 9, 2002. "The present state of English teaching and learning in Bangladesh". *Holiday*. Ed. Enayetullah Khan. Dhaka: Holiday Publications Ltd.
- Shahidullah, Dr. M. September 6, 2002. "Teaching grammar: some major issues". *Holiday*. Ed. Enayetullah Khan. Dhaka: Holiday Publications Ltd.
- The International Institute for Educational planning, Paris and the National Foundation for Research on Human Resource Development, Dhaka: 1983. *Higher Education and employment in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited.
- The World Bank. *Bangladesh Education Sector Review*. Volume 1. 2000. Mohiuddin Ahmed published by. Dhaka: The University Press Limited.
- The World Bank. *Bangladesh Education Sector Review*. Volume III. 2000. Mohiuddin Ahmed published by. Dhaka. The University Press Limited.