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Marma Students' Well-being with EMI in Higher Education in Bangladesh

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Abstract: While learning a second language (L2) is already challenging, facing a third language (L3) in the medium of instruction (MOI) in higher education is even worse for Marma community students in Bangladesh. This study investigated the well-being of Marma students through existing dual MOI practices, with a particular focus on the effects of English medium instruction (EMI) in higher education, where the context is English as a foreign language (EFL). The purpose of this research was to identify the challenges and unique perspectives not documented in earlier studies. Marma is an influential ethnic community in Bangladesh. Having unique mother tongue (L1) and distinctive culture, Marma students often encounter linguistic and cultural anxieties in different academic levels and settings due to their compulsory learning of Bengali (L2) and English (L3) languages. The researchers conducted an in-depth focus group interview (FGI) with seven Marma students from five higher education institutions (HEIs) and a focus group discussion (FGD) with five teachers from the same institutions. The findings revealed that the most important wellbeing issues Marma students frequently face are English medium instructions in higher education, learning English as a third language (L3), interactions in academic presentation and communication, classroom conversations, weak foundation at the secondary level, minority feelings or isolation, cultural challenges and mental anxieties. The study's novelty lies in its focus on a marginalized ethnic community in Bangladesh, offering useful findings for reconsidering teaching and learning practices with a more inclusive higher education curriculum. While there is a scarcity of literature regarding Marma students' education, this study advocated that innovative methods, culturally sensitive curricula, and adaptive MOI approaches are necessary for Marma students' well-being to overcome linguistic and cultural challenges and cope better with languages of instruction in higher education.

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Keywords: Dual MOI, third language (L3), well-being, Marma community, EMI, higher education

孟加拉国高等教育中 Marma 学生的幸福感与 EMI

摘要:

学习第二语言 (L2) 已经很有挑战性,但对于孟加拉国 Marma 社区的学生来说,在高等教育中面对教学语言 (MOI) 的第三语言 (L3) 更是雪上加霜。本研究通过现有的双重 MOI 实践调查了 Marma 学生的幸福感,特别关注英语教学 (EMI) 在以英语为外语 (EFL) 的高等教育中的影响。本研究的目的是确定早期研究中未记录的挑战和独特观点。Marma 是孟加拉国一个有影响力的族群。Marma 学生拥有独特的母语 (L1) 和独特的文化,由于必须学习孟加拉语 (L2) 和英语 (L3),他们经常在不同的学术水平和环境中遇到语言和文化焦虑。研究人员对来自五所高等教育机构 (HEIs) 的七名 Marma 学生进行了深入的焦点小组访谈 (FGI),并与来自同一机构的五名教师进行了焦点小组讨论 (FGD)。研究结果显示,Marma 学生经常面临的最重要的幸福问题是高等教育中的英语教学、英语作为第三语言 (L3) 的学习、学术演讲和交流中的互动、课堂对话、中学阶段的基础薄弱、少数民族情绪或孤立感、文化挑战和心理焦虑。这项研究的新颖之处在于它关注的是孟加拉国的一个边缘化少数民族社区,为重新考虑更具包容性的高等教育课程的教学和学习实践提供了有用的发现。虽然关于 Marma 学生教育的文献很少,但本研究主张创新方法、文化敏感的课程和适应性的 MOI 方法对于 Marma 学生的幸福感是必不可少的,以克服语言和文化挑战,更好地应对高等教育中的教学语言。

关键词: 双语教学、第三语言 (L3)、幸福感、Marma 社区、EMI、高等教育。

1. Introduction

Marma is the second-largest ethnic group in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. It mainly lives in the hilly districts of Khagrachari and Rangamati and is most dominant in Bandarban (Nowshin, 2015). The Marma language is considered a slight variation of Arakanese/Rakhine (Davis, 2014). This is identical to that of the Rakhine or Raking of Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali districts in Bangladesh (11 Major Tribes, n.d.). Marmas, like several other Bangladeshi ethnic communities, have an inadequate exposure to education. Marmas very often lack mainstream schooling. Research has revealed that most Marmas do not attend school and have low literacy rates (UNPO, 2011). The MOI in the education system for Marmas and other ethnic groups in the CHT region of Bangladesh is generally Bengali (Rashid, 2020). Bengali is the national language of Bangladesh, and it is spoken by most population. Therefore, Marma students learn Bengali and English other than their native language (L1) to continue their studies toward higher education. Even Bengali is sometimes difficult for them because they learn it as their second language (L2). Hence, being a third language (L3) for them is even more challenging in higher education classrooms. As "there is no explicit MOI policy available for higher education in Bangladesh" (Rahman & Singh, 2019, p. 2), Marma students face language tensions in the educational setting as the medium of instruction (henceforth, MOI)

remains in English in most higher education institutions (henceforth, HEIs) in Bangladesh, which affects their social and mental health. Therefore, it often becomes challenging for Marma students to cope with the dominant languages in university classrooms because Bengali and English are primarily used as MOIs in Bangladeshi higher education (henceforth, HE). This can create a significant barrier to education because students may not be able to fully understand or participate in the classroom for whom Bengali is close to a foreign language. Moreover, many ethnic students face socioeconomic barriers such as poverty, lack of access to basic services and discrimination that can make it difficult for them to pursue HE (Rashid, 2020). Additionally, the lack of good quality primary and secondary education in the region makes it difficult for them to meet the academic requirements for HE (UNPO, 2011). English medium instruction (henceforth, EMI) is rapidly becoming mainstream in HEIs, where by tradition, English holds a foreign language status (Dafouz & Camacho-Miñano, 2016).

2. Context: MOI in English as A Third Language (L3) in HE

English has become a mandatory subject in every sphere of education (Karim et al., 2021a). English is adopted as the MOI in privately run institutions with a view to internationalizing higher education (hereafter,

HE) in Bangladesh to enable students to be active participants in the global market (Sarkar et al., 2021). EMI in the HE classroom appears as one of the stumbling blocks, creating resistance to knowledge acquisition (Karim et al., 2021b). Since most HEI students received their primary, secondary, and higher secondary education in Bengali medium instruction, the sudden shift to EMI offers several challenges to them (Sarkar et al., 2021). Because of linguistic capitalism, English in certain ways intensifies disparities between students from Bengali and English medium backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1997).

While students from mainstream communities suffer from EMI, the suffering of students belonging to ethnic communities is worse. They frequently encounter psychosocial anxiety in the classroom. Since Marma students come from a Bengali medium secondary education background, they usually possess insignificant exposure to English and often feel alienated in the EMI context of HE when they are admitted to universities. Several studies in Bangladesh have demonstrated the language ideology, language management, and language practice of mainstream teachers and students regarding EMI in higher education (Rahman & Singh, 2020). However, a significant scarcity of literature is found regarding the wellbeing issues or implications of MOI in HE for Marma students. Given this, this study aimed at (i) investigating the impact of dual MOI practices on Marma students' academic performance and mental health, (ii) identifying the challenges Marma students encounter when adjusting to EMI in higher education in Bangladesh, and (iii) exploring the pedagogical effects of EMI in higher education among Marma students.

3. Literature Review

Wellbeing is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various psychological, social, and contextual factors (Brey, 2012; Francis et al., 2021). Psychological perspectives on well-being center around individuals' personal and internal experiences, including their emotions, overall pleasure with life, and mental health (Dodge et al., 2012). Emotions are transitory social attitudes formed as a result of an individual's assessment of a certain situation (Ngo et al., 2021). In this study, the emotional well-being of Marma students with EMI is the focal issue. Sociological techniques are used to analyze the impact of social dynamics, for example, educational environments, on individual well-being (Gillett-Swan & Sergeant, 2015). The Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group (WeD) focuses on the tangible, interpersonal, and individual aspects of well-being, emphasizing the interdependence of resources, social connections, and personal perspectives (White, 2010). The use of this comprehensive framework is significant for

understanding the complex nature of students' well-being in this study among minority populations such as the Marma people in Bangladesh.

Cultural differences also have a significant impact on students' well-being, particularly in multicultural environments and multilingual. Gao (2006) argued that language learning and cultural assimilation are closely intertwined. Marma students who switch from their mother tongue to Bengali and English frequently encounter cultural conflicts that affect their academic and personal well-being. Li et al. (2012) asserted that culture shock causes confusion, seclusion, and inadequacy among language learners. Kramersch (1993, p.68) considered 'culture' as the 'fifth skill' to master for learning a language. Li (2007) argued that cultural differences have always been a fundamental reason for the challenges faced by second-language learners. Cultural difficulties are intensified by the requirement to maintain fluency in Marma students' native language (L1) while also becoming proficient in Bengali (L2) and English (L3). This creates a complex linguistic and cultural setting that substantially impacts the overall wellbeing.

Empirical studies have established a robust correlation between academic well-being and educational achievements (Bardach et al., 2021; Dreer, 2021). However, the education system frequently places greater importance on academic achievement than students' well-being (Soutter, 2011). Access to educational resources, social support, and cultural integration are among the elements that influence students' well-being, including members of the Marma community. Studies have suggested that wellbeing comprises various aspects, such as physical, social, and psychological resources. Focusing on these dimensions can improve academic performance and general life satisfaction (Dodge et al., 2012; Wyn et al., 2015). Marma students face distinctive obstacles in higher education due to the dual MOI system. These problems involve managing academic requirements in several languages alongside cultural and social adjustments. Simbolon et al. (2020) emphasized that a key driver for adopting EMI is improving proficiency in the English language. Nevertheless, studies conducted in Indonesia and Nepal have shown that students frequently experience difficulties with EMI because of their limited exposure to the English language and interference from their home tongue (Ibrahim, 2001; Khatri, 2019; Sukardi et al., 2021). Similarly, conventional instructional approaches in Taiwan have impeded efficient language acquisition under EMI (Parlindungan & Sitorus, 2015).

Rouf (2012) discovered that students attending a private university in Bangladesh encountered challenges in English communication because of insufficient opportunities for practice and linguistic mistakes. Sultana (2014) observed that EMI can result in students

experiencing a sense of exclusion from classroom conversations. These findings are relevant to Marma students who are compelled to manage three languages—Bengali, English, and their home language—within one educational system that may not completely cater to their distinct linguistic and cultural requirements. Learning a third language (L3) may worsen feelings of loneliness and inadequacy, which can negatively impact students' academic well-being.

The umbrella of available studies envelopes the shifting of MOI from Bengali to English of the mainstream students (Rouf, 2012; Rahman et al., 2017; Naznin & Hassan, 2016). Nevertheless, the voices of Marma students are less explored and thus remain unheard about their wellbeing issues regarding the practice of dual MOI and EMI effects in HE.

4. Methods

This study was conducted among tertiary students in the Marma community and five teachers who directly taught them in the EFL context of Bangladesh. The Marma community students were chosen because this community is still underrepresented in existing studies that require exploring their experiences to better recognize and address their dilemmas in mainstream schooling. This study used qualitative tools to address the study objectives.

The participants for this study were seven Marma students (two females, five males) and five teachers (two females and three males) from five HEIs. The student participants were selected using snowball sampling due to their limited availability, as the total number of Marma people in Bangladesh is about 0.2 million only (Oakes, 2023). The researchers approached three participants whom the first author directly taught and asked them “to identify others to become members of the sample” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 143). Five teacher participants were selected using convenience sampling as per their “convenience and availability” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 211). All the teachers were from the same HEIs where the student participants studied. Busetto et al. (2020) stated that qualitative research is required to discover reasons for observed patterns, especially invisible or surprising ones. The researchers informed the participants of the study's purpose, how the findings would be disseminated, their rights, their withdrawal, how they would benefit from the study, and the guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality, as guided by Creswell and Poth (2017).

Data collection methods represent contextual, theoretical, demographic, and perceptual information of the subject matter (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researchers used a two-phase data collection method. As Dilshad and Latif (2013, p. 192) stated that focus group interview (FGI) “provides a setting for the relatively homogeneous group to reflect on the questions asked by

the interviewer”, in ‘phase one’, an FGI was conducted with seven student participants to gather the firsthand experience and considerations of the participants on wellbeing issues in a similar setting. FGI was moderated by the second author and co-moderated by the first author where the student participants responded to the structural questions about their wellbeing with EMI and dual MOI practices where no language is their L1.

In ‘phase two’, an FGD was conducted among five available teachers by the first author to attain teachers' perspectives on Marma students' emotional and academic wellbeing in relation to linguistic and cultural issues for dual MOI practices in HE. Nyumba et al. (2018) considered FGD as a commonly employed qualitative tool to acquire an ample understanding of social issues. The authors transcribed and translated the recorded data into English verbatim and shared with other researchers to evaluate the quality of the data. Other authors contributed to the literature review, data analysis, discussion, and the following intellectual inputs.

Validating findings in research means gaining accuracy through different strategies. Accuracy is vital to establish a study's credibility and gain acceptance among the academic community. However, all research conclusions are approximate and subject to further investigation because validity can only be demonstrated through debate (LaCoursiere, 2003). In this study, ‘member checking’ was used to verify research findings by consulting with the participants to ensure that their experiences and opinions were appropriately portrayed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is to be noted that the researchers avoided leading personal or sensitive inquiries and archived data securely for future use. The study documented diverse perspectives of the participants, who were also allowed to evaluate data interpretation and presentation consistency.

5. Results

The data were analyzed, and issues affecting Marma students' well-being with dual MOI practices and EMI effects in Bangladeshi higher education are listed below. The authors followed a data-driven thematic analysis rather than a theoretical interest in the subject matter (Sultana et al., 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.1 Students' Attitudes toward EMI: FGI Results

The conceptual foundation of the study organized findings by contextual, material, physical, social and psychological resources in relation to Marma students' wellbeing with EMI and dual MOI practices in HE.

4.1.1 Access to Academic Resources

Marma students encounter substantial difficulties in adapting to dual MOI practices, which involve the use of both Bengali and English in higher education other

than their mother tongue. The main challenge is to understand intricate academic concepts in English, which is their tertiary language, following their native tongue and Bengali. A participant (S1) expressed the following:

I find it challenging to understand complex concepts when they are explained in English. It would be more convenient if certain resources were instructed in Bengali.

Another participant (S2) echoed a similar sentiment, underscoring a multilingual approach:

Sometimes I feel I would comprehend the textbooks or study materials better if they were partially or completely taught in Bengali. However, I also feel the importance of English for academic and professional development.

4.1.2 Language Concern in Academic Involvement

Marma students' academic involvement is hindered by language obstacles. Many students struggled with English language class discussions and presentations. A student (S3) noted:

I can actively participate in class discussions when they are conducted in Bengali, but I encounter difficulties during English discussions.

S1 added:

In official or academic communications, I respond or reply less than others when English is frequently used. I can understand but cannot gain the confidence to respond in English.

This challenge is intensified in academic evaluations and competitions, where a high level of proficiency in English is essential. S4 shared her view in this way:

My ability to participate in various academic activities such as English debates, English festivals, essay writing, and research projects is sometimes hindered by language barriers.

4.1.3 Quality and Relevance of Instructional Materials

Concerns were raised by students about the quality and usefulness of the teaching tools and the English language curriculum as a whole. Students thought the materials were not well suited to their needs, which made it inflexible for them to understand and use the information in English. As illustrated by S5:

I am not fully satisfied with the content of the syllabus and curriculum intended to enhance my proficiency in English.

S2 and S3 also shared similar opinions. S3 mentioned:

We need more fundamental courses in English skills, particularly to acquire communication and professional skills. Only two English courses in a four-year program cannot help develop our language skills.

This view is supported by all students. However, S7 is expounded as follows:

Seminars and workshops are held, but an intensive language course for ethnic students who learn English as their third language can be supportive to adjust to the EMI context.

4.1.4 Multilingual Context

Adapting to EMI while acquiring English as a third language presents significant obstacles for students who find it difficult to balance learning in multiple languages while preserving their cultural identity at the same time. S2 is again mentioned:

Adapting to the EMI environment while learning English as a third language (after my mother tongue and Bangla is a significant challenge. It places additional psychological pressure on us.

4.1.5 Physical and Cognitive Tension

The process of adapting to EMI imposes a cognitive liability on Marma students, which has a detrimental impact on their physical and psychological well-being. Students reported feeling tired and having less concentration in understanding information during L3. S5 commented:

I can realize the importance of EMI, but studying in English is exhausting and takes more time and effort to understand the material, which makes me mentally drained.

4.1.6 Cultural Identity and Social Integration

The concurrent implementation of the two MOI practices significantly influenced the cultural identity and social integration of Marma students. Some students indicated a preference for a multilingual approach to safeguard their cultural identity while acquiring knowledge. S6 emphasized the significance of cultural diversity:

Incorporating our mother tongue alongside Bengali and English would not only preserve our cultural identity but also enhance the effectiveness of academic learning.

S5 added in the same vein:

Sometimes a minority feeling, loneliness, or hesitation arise when I do not find my native language anywhere in an academic setting.

4.1.7 Support Systems

While some students informed their classmates and teachers that they are approachable to support clarifying doubts, there was a sense of meagerness in the available support systems for Marma students. S1 noted:

Although the teachers are approachable, I still feel there is a need for more structured support to address language and cultural barriers. It is almost impossible for students to receive one-on-one continuous support from teachers as they are engaged with their hectic schedule.

4.1.8. Stress and Emotional Discomfort

The implementation of dual MOI practices led to increased stress and anxiety levels among Marma students. The combination of the pedagogical expectations placed on individuals who are not native speakers of any of these languages, along with the challenges of adapting to a different culture, intensifies their psychological pressure. S6 articulated,

The continuous struggle to keep up with English classes worsens my nervousness and affects my overall well-being. Sometimes, we feel isolated and less confident participating in different academic and social activities in the desire of proper guidance and inspiration.

Other participants also agreed with this view. However, it is to be noted that this study excluded any participants from a medium English background in their secondary education because they were habitually comfortable with English.

4.1.9. Motivation and Academic Satisfaction

Notwithstanding these difficulties, few students recognize the enduring advantages of EMI for their career growth and ability. Nevertheless, there is still a substantial need for additional educational methods that are friendly and inclusive to improve their academic satisfaction and motivation. In this regard, S7 expounded

Learning in the EMI context is challenging, but we believe it will be advantageous for our professional and academic growth. However, we need additional assistance and pedagogical approaches that are appropriate for our linguistic, cultural, or social backgrounds to augment our English skills in higher education.

S5 and S2 conveyed similar views agreeing with S7.

4.2 Teachers' Observations: FGD Data

FGD revealed some views regarding the wellbeing issues of the Marma students with the MOI practices prevailing at universities in Bangladesh, indicating the absence of a definitive MOI policy (Rahman & Singh, 2019). Teachers observed that English is predominantly used in science, engineering, medicine, and business

disciplines, but a combination of English and Bengali is employed in humanities and social sciences. It was emphasized that certain universities started using English as the language of instruction, as encouraged by the Private University Act of 1992 (Sarkar, 2019). However, T1 stated that

We frequently interpret lectures in Bengali to augment Marma students' understanding, even though English is the primary language of instruction in HE.

Nevertheless, except in language-specific departments, all tests and materials were presented in English. T2 noted

Most Marma students typically achieve average academic achievement and face difficulties in using advanced vocabulary and understanding complex directions in class. Although there are some fundamental English courses, they do not work effectively. More practical courses could help students adjust to EMI in higher education.

It has been revealed that Marma students need more interaction with teachers primarily because of cultural gaps, insufficient English language skills acquired throughout secondary education, and difficulties in studying English as a third language (L3). A teacher (T3) opined that:

The most significant hurdle faced by Marma students is their difficulties with academic presentations. They often feel hesitation, nervousness, and shyness when standing before a class. This is primarily because they learn English as a third language and frequently encounter English when EMI is the preferred or popular context in higher education.

T4 admitted:

Most students are found inactive in academic interactions in classroom. They feel shy or hesitate to speak. However, an exception is found who are extra ordinarily qualified and even exceed the mainstream fellow mates, but that is only an exception.

T5 added:

Sometimes, one or two students with English medium background have no issues with EMI in higher education. However, on average, they fail to achieve the expected academic success. It may happen as students start studying English in higher education at the end of their puberty when they do not have the capability to spontaneously receive a new language.

Despite these obstacles, all teachers unanimously acknowledged the significance of EMI in HE for its impact on overall proficiency and professional progress. All the teachers acknowledged the necessity of providing customized assistance to overcome the language and cultural obstacles experienced by Marma students, for which institutions should take initiatives first. The teachers also unanimously believed that intensified language training programs or sessions that are in tune with Marma cultures are required to enhance students' academic achievements and wellbeing.

6. Discussion

The research findings emphasize the multifaceted issues associated with EMI for Marma students enrolled in HE. Consistent with prior research, the study demonstrated that teachers highly support the use of EMI for global connectedness and career progression. However, Marma students encounter substantial obstacles related to language and culture, as Dafouz and Camacho-Miñano (2016). The findings from the FGD highlighted the absence of a standardized MOI policy in Bangladesh, which resulted in diverse implementation across institutions. According to Rahman and Singh (2019), teachers have observed that EMI is commonly observed in science, engineering, medicine, and business courses. However, in humanities and social sciences, a combination of English and Bengali is frequently employed to enhance understanding.

The study's data on linguistic concerns suggests that Marma students face difficulties in comprehending course content in English and prefer using Bengali for better understanding and active engagement. These results are consistent with Rahman et al. (2020a), who noted the frequent use of both languages in classroom interactions. The moderate discontent with the curriculum aimed at enhancing English proficiency and major language obstacles in academic pursuits underscored the pressing need for improved language assistance and culturally responsive instructional approaches. Furthermore, the cultural difficulties encountered by Marma students, such as experiencing a sense of isolation and inadequacy as a result of cultural disparities, align with Gao's (2006) claim that language acquisition is equivalent to acquiring cultural knowledge.

According to the teachers, Marma students demonstrate moderate improvements in their academic performance, while others encounter notable difficulties. It is noteworthy that Marma students frequently have difficulties with study materials and face challenges in participating in class owing to linguistic and cultural limitations. This is a common scenario for non-English-speaking backgrounds who frequently have challenges in adjusting to EMI, which has a negative effect on their academic performance and engagement (Ibrahim, 2001;

Khatri, 2019; Sukardi et al., 2021). The consensus about the efficacy of fundamental English courses and the profound value placed on using English for formal correspondence in academic settings indicates that EMI can yield advantages if provided with sufficient support. The findings support other related literature in non-English-speaking countries where it is claimed that effective adaptation of EMI in HE benefits students in the long run and creates several opportunities for them (Hu & Lei, 2014; Botha, 2015; Evans & Morrison, 2017; Rahman & Singh, 2019).

The FGD emphasized the need for personalized interventions to assist Marma students in overcoming obstacles. Teachers emphasized the need for intensified language instruction and culturally appropriate resources to promote academic achievements and facilitate their incorporation into the HE. One teacher mentioned the problem of tertiary Marma students studying in English at the end of their adolescence. This matches Lenneberg's (1967) theory of critical period hypothesis (CPH), which delineates that there is a biologically determined period of language acquisition most effectively, which is from early infancy to adolescence, where Marma students encounter L3 for the EMI in HE at the end of their puberty. However, the teachers agreed that some exceptional students did really well, which cannot be generalized to all Marma students. For example, Rani Ukhengching Marma is an exception, who is the first person from a Bangladeshi ethnic group to attend an MIT master's degree program (Oakes, 2023).

These findings are vital for university administrators to adopt enhancements that establish a more inclusive educational environment for Marma students, target areas of significant discontent, and augment EMI's overall efficacy.

EMI offers a worldwide connection and professional progress. However, it also creates substantial obstacles for Marma students. To encourage Marma students' academic and professional growth, it is essential to address these problems by implementing supportive policies in HE. This study added to the wider discussion on emotional intelligence in countries where English is not the primary language, underlining the importance of an inclusive approach that considers language skills and cultural responsiveness.

7. Recommendations

The current study recommends the following steps to minimize classroom language challenges for Marma students.

a. Learner motivation must be ensured through suitable educational strategies and effective classroom practices (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Role playing, discussions, group discussions, and peer work can effectively motivate students.

b. An academic counselor from Marma community

may be appointed to support the nervous or weak in English.

c. Technology is now playing a crucial role in language learning by offering personalized instruction and materials, allowing learners to customize their learning experience (Bećirović et al., 2021).

d. More intensive fundamental English courses with familiar content and a flexible approach are required to develop language skills as “the interface of language and content” is “the most important pedagogical issue” (Stoller, 2004, p. 276).

e. Teachers should demonstrate pro-social behaviors to Marma students, as Khan (2020) emphasized, and take responsibility to create an inclusive EMI classroom environment. They may go beyond English or content area, if necessary, to integrate both to make the integration palpable to students (Kong & Hoare, 2010). Frequent interactions with teachers can enhance students' confidence (Rouf, 2012).

g. Most importantly, the curriculum must foster the basics of learning English in Marma students at the primary and secondary levels to create a strong foundation for HE. In such cases, Chan's (2006, p. 171) proposal of a “culturally-sensitive curriculum” can help that truly recognizes and appreciates the cultural identities of all students.

8. Conclusion

Since Marma students have their own unique mother tongue and come from a Bengali medium background at the secondary level, they usually have minimal exposure to English. Consequently, they feel alienated in the EMI setting. This small-scale study demonstrated that the most important EMI issues that Marma students frequently face are classroom interactions in English, English textbooks or other study materials, academic presentations, classroom conversations, a communication gap, a weak foundation, a secluded feeling in the classrooms, cultural challenges, and mental anxieties. However, some exceptional performers perform excellently. Although the government of Bangladesh has taken several steps to improve educational facilities for ethnic students, this study suggests that an adaptive and culturally sensitive MOI policy is required to prepare Marma students for HE in Bangladesh to become global citizens. This work contributes to the existing literature by offering in-depth insights regarding Marma students' wellbeing under EMI in HE. The findings can serve as a basis for future studies and inform educationalists and policymakers about the specific needs of Marma students, such as tailored support programs or inclusive curricula to adjust to the EMI environment in HE.

9. Limitations and Further Study

This small-scale study was not without limitations. A large-scale mixed-method study with qualitative and quantitative tools patronized by recognized NGOs or governments could be more explorative about Marma students' educational issues and outcomes. Further studies can consider the diffidence, indecision, and discomfort levels of Marma students in higher education and resolve these issues. A study based on neuro-linguistic programming can be conducted among successful Marma students whose tactics can be beneficial for all students of the community.

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Authors' Contributions

The study concept is excerpted from the PhD data of the second author, who is currently a PhD candidate in sociolinguistics and working on educational issues related to Bangladeshi ethnic students at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). However, the first author took the lead in conducting the study. The data were collected by the first and second authors. They also developed the introduction, background, and methodology. The third author worked on data analysis and interpretation in collaboration with the first, second, and fifth authors. The fourth author developed the literature review and discussion in collaboration with the first author. The fifth author wrote the recommendations, conclusions, and limitations of the study. The first and second authors formatted the citations and references according to the APA 7th guidelines.

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