

Learning Needs for Standard Bangla among Tertiary-Level Native Speakers: A Qualitative Study of Dialect-to-Standard Transition in Bangladesh

Tasmia Nawrin, Md Munna Hosen Munna

Department of Language Education, Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Email: tasmanawrin.ier@du.ac.bd, mdmunnafhosen910@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Nawrin, T., & Munna, M. M. H. (2026). Learning Needs for Standard Bangla among Tertiary-Level Native Speakers: A Qualitative Study of Dialect-to-Standard Transition in Bangladesh. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 16, 375-393.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2026.164025>

Received: June 28, 2026

Accepted: August 16, 2026

Published: August 19, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Native speakers may command everyday Bangla while still needing explicit support to use its standard academic and professional register. This qualitative study examined the perceived learning needs for Standard Bangla among tertiary-level students whose home speech included regional varieties. Twenty students, aged 20 - 25, from different departments of the University of Dhaka were selected through convenience sampling and interviewed with a semi-structured questionnaire. The interview material was analyzed thematically. Eight themes were identified: becoming accustomed to Standard Bangla, limiting dialect use in formal contexts, learning the standard variety through education, using it in formal situations, accessing Bangla-language resources, developing writing skills, understanding formal instructions, and shaping confidence and social identity. Participants associated Standard Bangla with academic participation, professional credibility, access to disciplinary resources, and clearer public communication. At the same time, they reported difficulty with formal vocabulary, grammar, writing conventions, and rapid comprehension of instructions. Students from regional backgrounds described adaptation through repeated exposure and deliberate practice, but some also experienced pressure to suppress their dialects or felt that standard speech could be inauthentic in intimate settings. The findings suggest that universities should treat Standard Bangla development as academic literacy and register education rather than as correction of deficient native speech. An additive, dialect-inclusive approach can expand students' formal repertoires while respecting regional linguistic identities.

Keywords

Standard Bangla, Academic Literacy, Regional Dialects, Tertiary Education, Language Acquisition

1. Introduction

Bangla is central to education, public life, and national identity in Bangladesh, yet the language used in universities is not identical to the language used in every home and community. Students arrive at tertiary institutions with diverse regional varieties, local vocabularies, pronunciations, and interactional norms. Many are fully competent native speakers in everyday communication but have had uneven opportunities to develop the standardized forms expected in academic writing, formal presentations, institutional interaction, and professional communication. The resulting difficulty is not a lack of Bangla; it is a mismatch between established communicative repertoires and the specialized register demanded by higher education.

This distinction matters because native-speaker status does not automatically confer mastery of academic language. Academic literacy involves learning how knowledge is organized, argued, cited, and presented within institutional genres (Hyland, 2006; Lea & Street, 1998). Similarly, the difference between conversational fluency and cognitively demanding academic language can persist even when students use the same broad language across home and school domains (Cummins, 2000). For Bangla-speaking students, the transition to university may therefore require explicit development of formal vocabulary, genre knowledge, written syntax, pronunciation choices, and audience-sensitive register.

The standard variety also carries social value. Standard languages are not linguistically superior to regional varieties; they become authoritative through institutional selection, codification, schooling, and repeated use in high-status domains (Milroy & Milroy, 2012). Because institutions reward particular forms, speakers may experience the standard as linguistic capital that supports credibility and access (Bourdieu, 1991). At the same time, the pressure to avoid regional speech can reproduce standard-language ideology and turn legitimate linguistic difference into a perceived personal deficit (Lippi-Green, 2012). A study of learning needs must therefore consider both functional benefits and identity costs.

Bangladesh presents a particularly important context for this inquiry. Bangladesh is characterized by extensive regional dialect diversity, with speakers commonly using local dialects in everyday communication while Standard Bangla functions as the formal variety (Chowdhury et al., 2025). Bangla is foundational to national education and cultural life, while English has increasing importance in elite schooling, higher education, and employment (Imam, 2005). Debates over the medium of instruction show that Bangla continues to be valued for knowledge development and national participation even as English remains influential

(Karim et al., 2023). Within this broader bilingual ecology, less attention has been paid to variation inside Bangla itself and to the academic transition faced by students whose everyday speech differs from the standardized register used in formal settings.

The source study described Standard Bangla as a “second language” for native speakers. In the present manuscript, that phrase is used only as an analogy for structured learning. Standard Bangla and regional Bangla varieties are not treated as separate languages. Rather, the study concerns the acquisition of an additional register or standardized variety within a shared language. Concepts from second language acquisition—such as exposure, interaction, motivation, practice, and feedback—are useful interpretive tools, but they do not erase the participants’ existing native competence (Ellis, 2008; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

The study aimed to identify why tertiary-level native speakers perceive a need to learn Standard Bangla and to explore how educational exposure and language-learning processes shape functional communication. By focusing on students’ accounts, it contributes to language education, sociolinguistics, dialectology, and academic literacy—areas included within the scope of the Open Journal of Modern Linguistics.

Research Questions

The study addressed two research questions:

- Why do tertiary-level native speakers in Bangladesh perceive a need to develop Standard Bangla?
- How do formal exposure, repeated practice, and language-learning processes shape students’ functional communication in Standard Bangla?

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Orientation

2.1. Standard Varieties, Regional Dialects, and Functional Distribution

A standard variety is typically associated with codified grammar, orthography, schooling, mass media, administration, and public communication. Its authority is social and institutional rather than inherently linguistic. Milroy and Milroy (2012) describe standardization as an ideology of uniformity that obscures the normal variability of language. Trudgill (1999) similarly argues that “standard” refers primarily to a socially selected dialect and not to a form that is intrinsically clearer or more logical. These insights are important in Bangladesh, where regional Bangla varieties are culturally meaningful and structurally systematic even when they are not preferred in formal institutions. Recent research further shows that Bangladesh is characterized by considerable regional linguistic diversity, with systematic phonological differences across dialects that reflect the country’s rich linguistic landscape (Rahman et al., 2024). Another study has shown that students who predominantly use local dialects may encounter difficulties in understanding formal classroom language, participating in academic activities, and applying

Standard Bangla in educational contexts (Hasan et al., 2025). Likewise, speakers commonly use distinct regional dialects in everyday communication, while Standard Bangla functions as the shared variety in formal and institutional domains (Chowdhury et al., 2025). This diversity creates varying linguistic experiences for students entering higher education from different dialect backgrounds and highlights the importance of understanding how speakers negotiate the relationship between regional varieties and Standard Bangla in educational settings.

The allocation of varieties to different domains resembles functional differentiation described in research on diglossia, although the Bangla situation should not be reduced to a classic high/low binary (Ferguson, 1959). Students may use a regional variety with family and local peers, a more standardized spoken form with teachers, and a still more formal written register in assignments. Successful participation therefore depends on register flexibility: the ability to select linguistic resources according to audience, purpose, and genre.

Such flexibility can bring material and symbolic benefits. Bourdieu (1991) explains that institutions legitimate certain ways of speaking and convert them into social advantage. In the participants' accounts, Standard Bangla was linked with being understood, respected, and treated as educated. However, standard-language ideology can also generate shame, self-monitoring, and avoidance of regional speech. The educational goal should not be the elimination of dialect, but the expansion of students' repertoires so that they can participate confidently across domains.

2.2. Academic Literacy among Native Speakers

The National Curriculum of Bangladesh recognizes Bangla not only as a subject of study but also as the principal medium through which learners acquire knowledge across the curriculum (National Curriculum and Textbook Board [NCTB], 2023). As learners progress to higher education, they are therefore expected to use Standard Bangla effectively for reading, writing, classroom interaction, and academic communication.

Needs analysis in language education identifies the gap between learners' current abilities and the communicative demands of target situations (Richards, 2001). For tertiary students, the target situation includes reading disciplinary texts, interpreting instructions, writing assignments and research reports, participating in seminars, and presenting knowledge publicly. These practices require more than grammatical correctness. They involve genre awareness, rhetorical organization, technical vocabulary, stance, evidence, and audience expectations (Hyland, 2006).

The academic literacies perspective emphasizes that student writing is embedded in institutional practices and relations of power, not simply a transferable set of neutral skills (Lea & Street, 1998). A student may speak fluently but struggle to transform ideas into the compressed, explicit, and organized language expected in academic prose. Cummins (2000) likewise distinguishes everyday conversational

proficiency from academic language proficiency. Although developed in bilingual education, the distinction helps explain why native Bangla speakers can experience formal writing as “a whole different language”.

Assessment design is part of this literacy environment. In a mixed-method study of language learning in higher education, [Nawrin and Sadek \(2022\)](#) found that rubrics clarified performance expectations, supported self-evaluation, focused teacher feedback, and were associated with improved learner performance and positive attitudes. Applied to Standard Bangla, analytic rubrics could make the features of successful academic work visible by distinguishing argument, organization, genre, register, vocabulary, grammar, citation, and revision rather than treating language quality as a single undifferentiated judgment.

2.3. Exposure, Practice, Motivation, and Additional-Variety Learning

Second language acquisition research highlights the importance of meaningful input, opportunities for interaction, output, feedback, and sustained motivation ([Brown, 2014](#); [Ellis, 2008](#); [Gass & Selinker, 2008](#)). [Krashen \(1982\)](#) foregrounded comprehensible input, while later work has emphasized that learners also benefit from noticing form, attempting production, and receiving response from others. [Dörnyei \(2005\)](#) and [Graham \(2007\)](#) show that motivation and self-efficacy shape persistence and strategic learning. These principles can illuminate how students expand from a familiar regional repertoire toward a standardized academic one.

Informal digital environments may extend this exposure beyond scheduled classes. [Nawrin and Moon \(2024\)](#) reported that tertiary students perceived Facebook as supporting second-language vocabulary development, reading and writing practice, motivation, confidence, and access to authentic communication, while also identifying language mixing, distraction, and technological constraints. Although their study addressed second-language learning, the findings suggest that carefully moderated digital spaces could provide repeated, low-stakes opportunities to read, write, and interact in Standard Bangla.

The quality of participation is as important as the quantity of exposure. [Nawrin and Rahman \(2020\)](#), in a comparative analysis of English classroom discourse across six secondary schools in Dhaka, observed predominantly one-way communication, extensive teacher initiation, feedback, and evaluation, and limited student turn-taking and response. Their findings underline that learners need structured opportunities for output, dialogue, peer interaction, and feedback rather than exposure that remains mainly teacher controlled.

The analogy must nevertheless remain limited. The participants were not beginners acquiring an unrelated language. They already possessed extensive Bangla linguistic knowledge. Their task involved re-mapping familiar meanings onto new lexical, phonological, grammatical, and genre conventions. For this reason, terms such as register development, academic literacy, bidialectal competence, and additional-variety learning are more precise than treating Standard Bangla as an ordinary second language.

2.4. Conceptual Model

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model used to interpret the findings. Regional varieties and everyday speech form the learners' existing repertoire. Structured exposure and deliberate practice in school and university support movement toward the standardized academic and professional register. The expected outcomes include stronger writing, clearer comprehension, wider access to Bangla-language resources, confidence, and formal participation. Social evaluation and identity pressure shape this movement and may either motivate adaptation or make it psychologically costly.

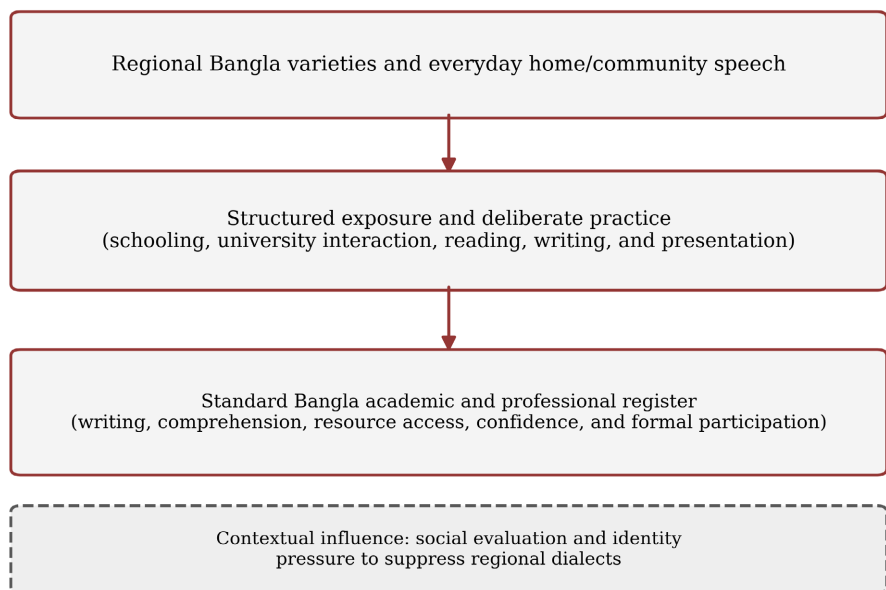


Figure 1. Conceptual model of dialect-to-standard register development in tertiary education.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design and Setting

The study used a qualitative descriptive design to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and reported language practices. This paper reports findings from a primary qualitative study, and the interview data were collected specifically for the purposes of this research. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate when a study seeks detailed accounts of meaning and context rather than numerical estimation (Creswell, 2013). The research was conducted among students from different departments of the University of Dhaka.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

Twenty tertiary-level students were selected through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling provides practical access to information-rich participants when time and resources are limited, although it constrains transferability (Etikan et al., 2016). Participants were 20 - 25 years old and included undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Dhaka. To be eligible for the study,

participants had to be native speakers of a regional variety of Bangla and have experience using Standard Bangla in academic settings and formal communication. The sample comprised 14 male and 6 female students. Approximately twelve participants were in their fourth year of undergraduate study, while the remaining participants were enrolled in their third year or master's programmes. Participants represented several disciplines, including education, political science, history, international relations, philosophy, management, Arabic, and mathematics. Their home districts included Jessore, Chattogram, Rangpur, Kushtia, Sylhet, and other regions, representing the broader divisions of Khulna, Chattogram, Dhaka, Rangpur, Rajshahi, and Sylhet. This diversity brought different local vocabularies, accents, and speech norms into the study and enabled the exploration of dialect-to-standard language experiences across varied regional backgrounds. The complete study design and participant profiles are summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Study design and participant profile.

Feature	Description
Design	Qualitative descriptive interview study
Setting	University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
Sample	20 tertiary-level students
Age	20 - 25 years
Academic level	Undergraduate and postgraduate
Disciplines represented	Education, political science, international relations, philosophy, management, Arabic, mathematics, and others
Regional backgrounds	Jessore, Chattogram, Rangpur, Kushtia, Sylhet, and other districts
Sampling	Convenience sampling
Instrument	Semi-structured interview questionnaire
Analysis	Six-phase thematic analysis

3.3. Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected through a semi-structured interview questionnaire. The instrument included demographic questions and prompts about home and institutional language use, perceived differences between regional and standard forms, the contexts in which Standard Bangla was used, pressure to adopt the standard, comfort with speaking and writing, confidence, identity, experiences of judgment, and views on university-level instruction. Participants received information about the purpose of the study and were invited to continue only after agreeing to participate.

The interviews were conducted directly with the selected students in Bangla, their preferred language, to facilitate natural and in-depth discussion of their experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 25 - 30 minutes. With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recording device. The second author also maintained field notes throughout the interviews

to document contextual observations and emerging reflections that complemented the audio recordings. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim in Bangla by the second author, and the first author subsequently reviewed all transcripts against the original recordings to ensure their accuracy and completeness. For the purposes of this English-language manuscript, interview excerpts were translated collaboratively by both authors from Bangla into English. Quotations in this manuscript have been lightly edited for punctuation and minor grammatical errors without changing their substantive meaning. The authors took care to preserve the participants' intended meanings while maintaining clarity and readability in the translated quotations.

3.4. Data Analysis

The interview material was analyzed thematically following the six broad phases described by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#): familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The study identified eight themes. In the present article, those themes are retained and organized into four higher-order domains to improve analytical coherence: educational socialization, management of dialect in formal contexts, academic literacy and comprehension, and confidence and identity. Thematic analysis is flexible, but transparent links between themes, quotations, and interpretations are necessary for trustworthiness ([Nowell et al., 2017](#)).

3.5. Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, several strategies were employed throughout the research process ([Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#)). Thematic analysis followed [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) six-phase approach. After repeated reading of the interview transcripts to achieve familiarity with the data, the first author generated the initial codes inductively from participants' responses. Related codes were subsequently organized into broader categories and refined into themes through an iterative process of analysis.

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, the second author independently reviewed the preliminary themes and their supporting data extracts. Any differences in interpretation were discussed between the authors until a shared understanding of the thematic structure was reached. Throughout the coding process, the first author maintained analytical notes and reflexive memos to document emerging ideas, coding decisions, and reflections, thereby enhancing the transparency and consistency of the analysis. Member checking was not conducted; however, the iterative coding process, collaborative review of themes, and use of reflexive memoing contributed to the overall trustworthiness of the findings.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the institutional policy of the University of Dhaka, formal eth-

ical approval was not required for this interview-based study. Nevertheless, the research adhered to established ethical principles for research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary. Before each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the academic use of their responses, the voluntary nature of their participation, confidentiality, and their right to decline any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. Identifying information was removed from the interview transcripts and findings, and participants are represented by numerical identifiers to protect their anonymity. The study was designed to avoid academic, psychological, or social harm, and all data were handled confidentially throughout the research process.

4. Findings

The analysis produced eight themes. **Table 2** summarizes the themes and their relationship to the research questions. The findings are then presented under four analytic domains. Because the study was qualitative and did not report coded frequency counts, terms such as “participants”, “several”, and “many” indicate patterns in the narratives rather than statistical prevalence.

Table 2. Themes identified in the interview data.

Theme	Interpretive summary
1. Becoming accustomed to Standard Bangla	Repeated school exposure, imitation, and daily use made the standard variety increasingly habitual.
2. Reducing dialect use in formal contexts	Students monitored regional vocabulary and pronunciation because they anticipated judgment or inappropriateness.
3. Learning Standard Bangla academically	School and university courses introduced standard vocabulary, pronunciation, and communication conventions.
4. Using Standard Bangla in formal situations	The standard was preferred with teachers, in group work, offices, presentations, and public functions.
5. Accessing Bangla-language resources	Proficiency supported reading disciplinary materials, literature, history, and archival resources.
6. Developing writing skills	Students found grammar, sentence structure, and academic assignment writing more difficult than conversation.
7. Understanding instructions clearly	Formal vocabulary increased processing time and prompted rereading, keyword focus, and dictionary use.
8. Shaping confidence and identity	Standard speech increased perceived seriousness and respect, but could also feel forced in intimate settings.

4.1. Educational Socialization into Standard Bangla

Getting accustomed to Standard Bangla. Participants commonly described familiarity with the standard variety as the outcome of repeated exposure in school. For students educated in urban or highly regulated settings, standard speech had become habitual before university. Participant 11 recalled attending a private urban school where “everyone spoke in Standard Bangla”, leading the participant to

imitate peers and become accustomed to the form. Participant 5 similarly connected fluency to classroom rules governing speech, communication, and public presentation. These accounts show that standardization was learned through social participation as much as through explicit grammar instruction.

The transition was more visible for students from rural or strongly regional backgrounds. Participant 16 reported completing primary and secondary education in the home region and having little reason to use another form. University interaction initially made Standard Bangla difficult, but daily effort gradually produced greater comfort. “In my village, everyone spoke our local dialect. Before coming to Dhaka, I rarely needed to speak Standard Bangla outside textbooks. At first, I felt uncomfortable, but gradually I became used to it by speaking with classmates every day”. The account highlights habituation: repeated use in a new communicative environment can make an initially effortful register increasingly automatic.

Learning Standard Bangla academically. Participants also emphasized formal instruction. Schooling introduced vocabulary and conventions that differed from home speech. Participant 5 described learning unfamiliar standard words from the beginning of school and developing fluency over time. At the tertiary level, Participant 19 remarked, “The compulsory Bangla course helped me understand pronunciation, formal vocabulary, and how to communicate appropriately in academic contexts”. Formal courses were therefore perceived as useful when they connected language form with authentic academic tasks.

4.2. Managing Dialect in Formal Contexts

Reducing dialect use in formal situations. Students frequently reported monitoring or avoiding regional features when speaking with teachers, participating in group work, or communicating in institutional settings. Participant 12 explained, “I try to avoid my dialect and local words because I think I may be judged differently”. Participant 17, who used a Dhaka regional variety, similarly felt that local speech sounded inappropriate in university formality. “Sometimes I change the way I speak before entering the classroom because it was awkward to me to talk in typical Dhakaiya (local) language in my university”. These comments indicate that the transition was driven not only by communicative clarity but also by anticipated social evaluation.

Mobility contributed to language change. Participant 7 moved from a village to Dhaka for college and gradually shifted toward the standard variety in the new environment. The participant described this as partly “forgetting” the local language. He reflected, “After living in Dhaka for several years, I noticed that I was speaking less in my own dialect. Sometimes my family even tells me that I sound different now”. Such statements show the double edge of adaptation: it can expand access to formal settings, but it may also weaken attachment to a regional repertoire when students believe that the two cannot coexist.

Using Standard Bangla for formal participation. Participants generally asso-

ciated the standard variety with teachers, academic tasks, offices, public functions, and other formal situations. Participant 14 reported not using the local variety when communicating with teachers or completing group work. Participant 5 stated that Standard Bangla in family functions and office-related settings increased confidence and helped engage a wider audience. The standard was thus treated as a shared institutional code that facilitated participation across regional backgrounds.

4.3. Academic Literacy, Comprehension, and Resource Access

Access to Bangla-language resources. Participants linked Standard Bangla proficiency with reading books, manuscripts, historical documents, and disciplinary materials. Participant 2 described using Bangla-language library resources while preparing a newspaper article on national history. He noted, “Many historical books and newspapers are written in Standard Bangla. If someone cannot understand it well, they will miss important information”. A history student, Participant 8, noted that much of the required reading was in Bangla and that proficiency supported both learning and grades. The theme suggests that Standard Bangla is not merely a spoken prestige form; it is also the gateway to written knowledge.

Writing skill development. Formal writing emerged as one of the clearest areas of need. Participant 1 explained, “I can speak Bangla easily with my friends, but writing assignments in Standard Bangla feels like a different language. I get stuck on grammar and structure”. Participant 4 made a similar point: the rules learned in class were difficult to apply because formal written Bangla was rarely used in daily life. Students therefore needed more than correction of isolated errors. They needed repeated practice with academic genres, sentence organization, vocabulary choice, and revision.

Understanding formal instructions. Several participants struggled to process instructions delivered in highly formal vocabulary. Participant 6 said that Standard Bangla instructions could feel different from home language and could produce a sense of being “lost in translation”. “Sometimes teachers use very formal Bangla words that I have never heard in daily conversation. I understand the topic later, but not immediately”. Participant 19 similarly observed, “When lectures include many formal terms, I have to think for a while before understanding what the teacher means”, while Participant 7 reread instructions, focused on keywords, and consulted meanings. These strategies show active learner agency, but they also reveal a processing burden that can interfere with task completion.

4.4. Confidence, Personality, and Identity

Participants described Standard Bangla as a resource for presenting a competent and professional self. Participant 5 said, “When I speak in Standard Bangla, I feel I am taken more seriously”. Participant 7 believed, “When I use standard form of Bangla in a group conversation, I get full attention of the others”. Participant 11 associated, “If I speak Standard Bangla, people assume I am educated. It gives me

confidence when talking to teachers or during presentations”. These quotations suggest that participants associated Standard Bangla with competence, credibility, and social acceptance in formal settings. Their experiences indicate that confidence was shaped not only by linguistic proficiency but also by the belief that speaking the standard variety would lead to more positive evaluations from teachers, peers, and other audiences. For many participants, the ability to use Standard Bangla appropriately enhanced their willingness to participate in academic discussions, deliver presentations, and engage in professional interactions. At the same time, the findings suggest that language functioned as an important marker of social identity and personality. Participants perceived Standard Bangla as projecting confidence, professionalism, and educational attainment, thereby influencing how they presented themselves and how they expected to be perceived by others. These perceptions link language choice to confidence, authority, and social identity.

The relationship was not uniformly positive. Participant 16 reflected, “When I am with my family, speaking Standard Bangla feels unnatural. My dialect reminds me of where I come from, so I don’t want to lose it”. Similarly, participant 2 commented, “I always speak my dialect at home because it feels natural and also my parents would find it strange if I spoke Standard Bangla with them”. It illustrates using Standard Bangla in every situation could feel forced, especially with friends and family. This concern is analytically important. It indicates that students did not simply replace an inferior variety with a superior one; they negotiated between repertoires associated with different relationships and identities. Participant 9 stated, “My dialect is part of who I am”. This quotation highlights that participants viewed their regional dialect as more than a means of communication; it was closely tied to their personal identity, cultural background, and sense of belonging. It suggests that while they recognized the value of Standard Bangla in academic and professional settings, they did not wish to abandon the dialect that reflected their roots. The present findings are consistent with recent sociolinguistic research emphasizing that regional dialects represent important expressions of cultural identity and linguistic diversity in Bangladesh rather than deficient forms of the standard language (Rahman et al., 2024). Competence therefore involves knowing when the standard is useful without treating regional speech as a problem to be erased.

5. Discussion

5.1. Why Students Learn Standard Bangla

The first research question concerned why native speakers perceive a need to learn Standard Bangla. The answer is primarily functional and institutional. Participants needed the standard to write assignments, understand formal instructions, read disciplinary resources, communicate with teachers, deliver presentations, and participate in professional situations. These needs closely resemble target-situation needs in language curriculum design (Richards, 2001). They also support the academic literacies view that higher education requires students to enter spe-

cialized discourse practices rather than merely demonstrate general fluency (Lea & Street, 1998).

The findings also show that formal Bangla has symbolic value. Students expected standard speech to increase respect, seriousness, and professional credibility. This pattern is consistent with Bourdieu's (1991) account of legitimate language as linguistic capital. Institutions create a market in which particular forms are rewarded. The participants' desire to master Standard Bangla was therefore both communicative and social.

However, the fear of being judged for dialect features confirms that linguistic capital can be unequally distributed. Standard-language ideology encourages speakers to interpret institutional preference as evidence that nonstandard forms are defective (Milroy & Milroy, 2012). The participants' regional varieties were not barriers in all contexts; they became barriers when institutional expectations were narrow or when listeners attached social stereotypes to them. This interpretation is also consistent with recent sociolinguistic research demonstrating the considerable phonological diversity of Bangladeshi regional dialects and highlighting the importance of recognizing these varieties as legitimate linguistic resources rather than deficient forms of Standard Bangla (Rahman et al., 2024). A publishable interpretation of the findings must therefore avoid equating standardization with linguistic superiority.

5.2. Exposure, Practice, and Language-Learning Processes

The second research question addressed how learning and acquisition processes shape communication. Participants repeatedly described exposure, imitation, practice, schooling, and immersion in new settings. Urban schools, classroom rules, university courses, peer interaction, and daily communicative necessity all contributed to greater ease. These experiences are compatible with language acquisition research emphasizing input, interaction, output, and sustained engagement (Ellis, 2008; Gass & Selinker, 2008). Motivation also mattered: students practiced because they wanted to be understood, succeed academically, and avoid negative evaluation, reflecting the role of goals and self-efficacy in language learning (Dörnyei, 2005; Graham, 2007).

These findings also help specify what productive exposure should look like. The teacher-dominated discourse documented by Nawrin and Rahman (2020) indicates that being present in a formal language environment does not automatically ensure substantial learner production. Standard Bangla development should therefore combine comprehensible input with presentations, guided discussion, peer exchange, rehearsal, and responsive feedback. Digital participation can supplement these opportunities: the perceived benefits and challenges identified by Nawrin and Moon (2024) support moderated online tasks that promote purposeful vocabulary use, short-form writing, reading, and interaction while limiting distraction and uncritical language mixing.

The data do not, however, test a specific acquisition theory, and the participants

were already native Bangla speakers. Their development is better understood as additional-variety learning. Existing phonological, lexical, and grammatical knowledge reduced the distance between home and standard forms, while differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, and formal syntax still required attention. Recent descriptions of Bangladeshi dialects likewise demonstrate systematic lexical and structural differences between regional varieties and Standard Bangla, while also highlighting the country's rich linguistic diversity (Chowdhury et al., 2025). Theoretical language-learning concepts are therefore most useful when combined with sociolinguistic analysis of register, identity, and power.

5.3. Academic Writing and Instructional Comprehension as Priority Needs

Although speaking confidence was important, the strongest pedagogical need concerned academic literacy. Participants who communicated easily in conversation still struggled with formal grammar, organization, vocabulary, and the transfer of classroom rules into assignments. This finding mirrors the distinction between conversational and academic proficiency (Cummins, 2000). It also supports genre-based approaches in which students examine models, identify communicative purposes, practice stages of a text, receive feedback, and revise (Hyland, 2006).

The assessment process can reinforce this development when expectations are transparent. Nawrin and Sadek (2022) demonstrated the value of rubrics for clarifying criteria, supporting self-assessment, and directing feedback in higher-education language learning. For Standard Bangla assignments, rubric-guided teaching could show students how content, argument, organization, genre, formal register, vocabulary, grammar, citation, and revision contribute separately to overall quality, enabling feedback to become developmental rather than merely corrective.

Difficulty understanding formal instructions deserves equal attention. When students must reread directions or decode unfamiliar vocabulary before beginning an academic task, language becomes an avoidable source of cognitive load. Teachers can preserve disciplinary precision while using clearer syntax, defining technical terms, and providing examples. Instructional clarity should not be mistaken for lowering academic standards; it is a condition for equitable access to those standards.

5.4. Toward Additive and Dialect-Inclusive Pedagogy

A central implication is that Standard Bangla should be taught additively. Students should gain a formal repertoire without being asked to abandon the language of home, locality, and intimate relationships. Additive instruction treats regional varieties as resources for contrastive awareness: learners can compare vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax, and pragmatic choices across contexts, then select forms strategically. This approach can reduce shame and make explicit that register choice is contextual rather than a measure of intelligence.

Dialect-inclusive pedagogy also protects authenticity. Participant 16's sense that standard speech could feel like "putting on an act" shows that constant mon-

itoring may distance speakers from their identities. Teachers can respond by distinguishing formal appropriateness from universal correctness, allowing regional voices in discussion, and evaluating academic work according to transparent genre criteria rather than accent prejudice. The aim is flexible bidialectal competence: the ability to move across varieties while maintaining respect for each.

Theoretical and Practical Contribution of the study:

Beyond interpreting the findings through established theories of language learning and sociolinguistics, this study makes several contributions to the literature. First, it contributes to Bangla sociolinguistics by demonstrating how native speakers from diverse regional dialect backgrounds negotiate the use of Standard Bangla within higher education while maintaining strong attachment to their home varieties. Rather than presenting regional dialects as linguistic deficiencies, the findings show that students perceive them as important markers of identity alongside the institutional value of Standard Bangla. Second, the study contributes to research on academic literacies by showing that proficiency in Standard Bangla influences not only formal communication but also students' access to academic resources, comprehension of classroom instruction, and participation in disciplinary practices. Finally, the findings extend discussions of bidialectal education by providing empirical evidence that students prefer an additive approach to language learning, in which competence in Standard Bangla is developed without diminishing the social and cultural significance of regional dialects. In doing so, the study highlights the need for language policies and pedagogical practices in Bangladeshi higher education that support flexible bidialectal competence rather than linguistic replacement.

6. Implications for Tertiary Language Education

The findings support a coordinated university response rather than a single remedial course. **Table 3** outlines practical interventions. These recommendations are designed for first-year transition programs, Bangla language courses, writing centers, and discipline-specific teaching.

Table 3. Recommended university-level responses.

Intervention	Illustrative action
Academic writing support	Workshops and writing-center consultations on paragraphs, argument, genre, citation, and revision.
Explicit register instruction	Contrast everyday, regional, formal spoken, and academic written forms using authentic examples.
Oral communication practice	Structured presentations, debates, group discussions, and supportive feedback in Standard Bangla.
Dialect-inclusive teaching	Frame regional varieties as legitimate; teach strategic code/register choice without accent shaming.
Instructional clarity	Define formal vocabulary, model task expectations, and provide written examples of complex instructions.
Targeted transition support	Peer mentoring and first-year modules for students who report difficulty adapting to university language practices.
Resource development	Expand accessible Bangla academic texts, glossaries, digital corpora, and discipline-specific writing models.

Implementation should begin with a need analysis rather than assumptions about students from particular regions. Diagnostic tasks can examine academic reading, instruction comprehension, paragraph organization, referencing, and oral presentation. Results can guide short modules or embedded support. Because needs differ by discipline, general instruction should be linked with authentic texts from history, education, social sciences, business, and other fields.

Teacher development is equally important. Instructors need strategies for providing language feedback without humiliating students or treating regional pronunciation as evidence of low ability. Feedback should prioritize meaning, organization, genre, and audience before minor surface features. Public speaking, debate, peer review, and guided revision can build confidence when the classroom is psychologically safe.

Assessment and learning environments should be aligned with these principles. Analytic rubrics can provide common criteria for writing and oral presentation and can support self- and peer assessment, consistent with Nawrin and Sadek (2022). In addition, moderated digital discussion, reflective posts, vocabulary activities, and peer response can extend practice beyond the classroom, while the cautions raised by Nawrin and Moon (2024) should guide task design. Within class, teachers should deliberately increase student turn-taking and dialogic exchange in response to the limited learner participation identified by Nawrin and Rahman (2020).

7. Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This study was exploratory and has several limitations. It involved only 20 students from one university and used convenience sampling, so the findings cannot represent all tertiary students in Bangladesh. The participant profile was broad but not reported in enough detail to compare experiences by gender, discipline, academic level, or region. The study relied on self-reported experience and did not include observed classroom interaction, recorded speech analysis, writing samples, or proficiency tasks. The original report also did not document interview duration, transcription procedures, coding decisions, or independent review in sufficient detail for a full audit trail.

Future research should include multiple public and private universities, purposeful sampling across dialect regions, and mixed methods. Writing and comprehension tasks could compare self-perception with demonstrated performance. Longitudinal studies could follow students from entry to graduation to examine how repertoire flexibility develops. Further work should also investigate the role of television, social media, digital dictionaries, and online learning resources in exposure to Standard Bangla. Comparative studies could explore how students manage Standard Bangla alongside English, Arabic, or other academic languages.

Intervention studies should also test whether rubric-guided writing, dialogic classroom tasks, and moderated social-media activities improve Standard Bangla accuracy, genre control, confidence, and transfer across academic contexts. Such

work would extend the assessment, classroom-discourse, and digital-language-learning issues examined in Nawrin & Sadek (2022), Nawrin & Rahman (2020), and Nawrin & Moon (2024), respectively.

Finally, future research should examine institutional attitudes. Students' fear of judgment suggests that learning needs are partly created by how teachers and peers respond to dialect. Interviews with faculty, classroom discourse analysis, and experimental studies of accent evaluation could identify where support is needed and where discriminatory expectations should change.

8. Conclusion

Tertiary-level native speakers may need explicit support to develop Standard Bangla for academic and professional purposes. The students in this study valued the standard variety because it enabled formal participation, access to written resources, clearer public communication, and professional confidence. Their most substantial difficulties involved academic writing, formal vocabulary, and rapid comprehension of institutional instructions. Repeated exposure, schooling, university interaction, and deliberate practice supported adaptation.

At the same time, the data caution against a deficit model. Regional Bangla varieties are not failed versions of the standard. They are legitimate linguistic systems tied to place, family, and identity. Effective language education should therefore add the standard academic register to students' repertoires rather than replace what they already know. A dialect-inclusive approach can combine access and equity: students gain the linguistic resources required by higher education while retaining respect for the diversity of Bangla.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the participating students for sharing their experiences.

Data Availability

The interview materials are not publicly available because participant consent emphasized confidentiality and academic use. Requests may be considered by the author subject to ethical and institutional requirements.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (6th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Chowdhury, S., Remal, D. R. A., Pasha, S. T., Islam, A., & Noori, S. R. H. (2025).

- ChatgaiyyaAlap: A Dataset for Conversion from Chittagonian Dialect to Standard Bangla. *Data in Brief*, 59, Article 111413. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dib.2025.111413>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Multilingual Matters.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The Psychology of the Language Learner: Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5, 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Ferguson, C. A. (1959). Diglossia. *Word*, 15, 325-340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00437956.1959.11659702>
- Gass, S. M., & Selinker, L. (2008). *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Graham, S. (2007). Learner Strategies and Self-Efficacy: Making the Connection. *Language Learning Journal*, 35, 81-93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571730701315832>
- Hasan, M. J., Mimi, S. S., & Islam, S. (2025). The Impact of Local Language on Learners Academic Performance and Overcoming Language Blockades. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5281973>
- Hyland, K. (2006). *English for Academic Purposes: An Advanced Resource Book*. Routledge.
- Imam, S. R. (2005). English as a Global Language and the Question of Nation-Building Education in Bangladesh. *Comparative Education*, 41, 471-486. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050060500317588>
- Karim, A., Kabilan, M. K., Ahmed, Z., Reshmin, L., & Rahman, M. M. (2023). The Medium of Instruction in Bangladeshi Higher Education Institutions: Bangla, English, or Both? *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 22, 232-246. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2020.1871353>
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Lea, M. R., & Street, B. V. (1998). Student Writing in Higher Education: An Academic Literacies Approach. *Studies in Higher Education*, 23, 157-172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079812331380364>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage Publications.
- Lippi-Green, R. (2012). *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Milroy, J., & Milroy, L. (2012). *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- National Curriculum and Textbook Board (2023). *National Curriculum Framework 2021: Pre-Primary to Grade 12*. Ministry of Education, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- Nawrin, T., & Moon, N. N. (2024). Understanding Students' Perception on the Use of Facebook for Second Language Learning. *Teacher's World: Journal of Education and Research*, 49, 117-136. <https://doi.org/10.3329/twjer.v49i1.70265>
- Nawrin, T., & Rahman, M. F. (2020). Comparative Classroom Discourse Analysis among

Excellent, Good and Average Secondary Schools of Dhaka City in Bangladesh. *Teacher's World: Journal of Education and Research*, 46, No. 1.

Nawrin, T., & Sadek, A. (2022). Role of Rubric in Assessment of Language Learning in Higher Education. *Teacher's World: Journal of Education and Research*, 48, 112-129. <https://doi.org/10.3329/twjer.v48i2.67555>

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>

Rahman, M. M., Barman, B., Sharmin, L., Uddin, M. R., Yusuf, S. B., & Rasool, U. (2024). Phonological Variation and Linguistic Diversity in Bangladeshi Dialects: An Exploration of Sound Patterns and Sociolinguistic Significance. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, 6, Article 1188. <https://doi.org/10.59400/fls.v6i2.1188>

Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511667220>

Trudgill, P. (1999). Standard English: What It Is Not. In T. Bex, & R. J. Watts (Eds.), *Standard English: The Widening Debate* (pp. 117-128). Routledge.