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Motivation for Learning English and the Role of Cultural Identity: A Study of Bangladeshi Students' Perceptions

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of cultural identity on university students' motivation to learn English. Examining how various cultural factors influence students' motivation to learn English was the primary goal. The research employed a mixed-methods approach to conduct the study. In the quantitative phase, a survey questionnaire was administered to 60 students at Islamic University, Kushtia, to assess motivational factors. This study also selected 10 learners for semi-structured interviews in the qualitative part in order to elucidate the relationship between their culture and language acquisition. Survey data were collected using a Motivation Questionnaire derived from recognized scales, and the interviews were administered with a view to deeper understanding of the issues derived from the questionnaire survey results. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data were assessed through thematic analysis. Individuals with a robust sense of cultural identity expressed a greater desire to learn English for personal enrichment, perceiving it as a means to preserve and promote their culture globally. For students who had restricted cultural backgrounds, career and academic advancements were the primary determinants of their motivation behind learning English language. The study emphasizes that incorporating cultural identity into educational programs enhances student motivation and engagement.

Keywords: _Cultural identity, language learning, motivation, student Perception, Bangladesh_

I. INTRODUCTION

The world is now more connected and English is frequently used for communications, teaching and making progress in the economy (Hu, 2007). For Bangladesh, English language learning (ELL) is important as it greatly supports students' achievement, finding work and climbing the social or economic ladder (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Since English is not native to Bangladesh, what motivates learners to study it is guided by numerous social, psychological and community factors (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Among such diversity, cultural identity is particularly important. Cultural identity denotes an individual's affiliation with a specific cultural or social group, influenced by common traditions, language, values, beliefs, and experiences (Chakravarti et al., 1997). It affects individuals' self-perception and their interactions with the world, including their approach for acquiring new languages (Català, 2015). To put it briefly, a person's sense of belonging to a specific ethnic, national, or social group has a significant impact on how they learn and use a new language (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009). It influences motivation, cognitive processing, communication methods, and emotional reactions in language acquisition (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005). Research show that a learner's cultural identity influences the way they feel about English, how willing they are to use it at school and home and the reasons they have for studying it (Atkinson, 2002). Bangladesh's historical advocacy for its native language, particularly during the Language Movement of 1952, offers a compelling context for examining the influence of cultural identity on English language acquisition (Chowdhury et al., 2021). Despite the widespread perception of English as a progressive language, it can induce apprehension among learners who fear it may jeopardize their native language and cultural heritage (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008).Therefore, it is very important to know how cultural identity shapes learning English motivation in Bangladesh, when creating effective education programs and policies.

Bangladesh places much importance on English language skills in schools, colleges, and universities, yet learners commonly show different amounts of motivation and results. While English can open doors for some students globally, it causes others to face problems with who they are that lower their motivation (Chowdhury et al., 2021). The relationship between cultural identity and motivational patterns is not well studied, mainly in places with little English exposure. Such misunderstanding creates difficulties for educators and decision makers working on equitable and effective English language teaching (Rahman et al., 2019). Most research on English language learning in Bangladesh has concentrated on problems with language, designing the curriculum, teacher skills and infrastructure (Chowdhury & Ha, 2014; Rahman et al., 2019). On the other hand, the way learners' cultural backgrounds affect their motivation is rarely studied. Even though Global studies prove that identity matters in learning a new language (Norton, 2013), this is not well reflected in the Bangladeshi setting. This study attempts to bridge this gap by examining the impact of cultural identity on learners' English language motivation in various places across Bangladesh. There are many important aspects to this study. First, it supports research on the intersection of cultural background and the drive to learn another language in a non-Western postcolonial situation. Second, it outlines ways cultural factors can be used by teachers, designers and policymakers to increase learner participation. Lastly, it looks at how to promote English without losing

cultural and linguistic diversity, an important issue in developing just and inclusive education systems.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate how culture affects learners' desire to study English in Bangladesh.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural identity is dynamic, evolving, and deeply personal (Peng & Patterson, 2021). It enriches language learning but can also create tensions (Kramsch, 1998). Recognizing its role helps learners and teachers create more inclusive, effective language experiences (Peng & Patterson, 2021). It is well-known that researches discuss links between cultural identity and language learning motivation, but the meaning of these for countries like Bangladesh is rarely explored (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005). It was clear as the study went through the literature that culture plays an active role in influencing learners' progress in English. Norton (2013) claims that identity is made up of many aspects, changes over time and forms through social interactions, all of which have a big impact on language learning motivation. The study explores that in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, motivation for learning English is significantly influenced by personal culture and economic background. Many in Bangladesh regard English as allowing them to climb socially and communicate worldwide, but this idea brings tensions with their local heritage. Hamid and Baldauf (2008) show that since the Language Movement in 1952 and due to official colonialism, people have developed a mixed reaction toward English, respecting and standing against it at the same time. The combination of these views frequently creates unrest in students' sense of identity in rural or traditional communities. Because of cultural ambivalence, learners in Bangladesh may find their motivations for learning a foreign language challenging.

Another observation made by Chowdhury and Ha (2014) is that the use of English can be a symbol of high social status for a significant number of people in Bangladesh. They refer to this phenomenon as "symbolic competence." When individuals learn a language, they are also searching for who they are within the context of that society. This is consistent with the findings of another research (Shamim, 2008), which suggest that students who are born into wealthy households typically view English as a means of achieving elite status, whereas other students may perceive it as being suspicious or different. Many learners feel that being taught in English means leaving their native language behind. Kramsch says (1998) that because language carries culture, people may believe that learning a new language endangers their original cultural identity. As a result, it becomes clear that in various Bangladeshi classrooms, English is taught independently of culture which could remove students' interest if they feel separated culturally (Tasneem, 2021). According to Gardner (1985), people acquire a new language, because they want to take part in the target culture. In Bangladesh, this approach is less effective as students do not aspire to emulate Westerners; instead, they seek to preserve their own traditions while utilizing English. (Rahman et al., 2021). Because of this gap, it is clear that motivation needs to be seen from a local perspective. The authors criticize the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) used in Bangladeshi classrooms for failing to address what learners experience in society. CLT does not address the needs related to learners' identities, but prefers to teach skills without attention to different cultures (Kabir,

2016). As a result, learners may find them unmotivated and remember little about the language. Norton and Toohey (2011) present more evidence that learners are not simple recipients of instruction, but their identity decides how much they engage and why. Research shows that A number of factors, including social position and gender expectations, frequently make it more difficult for girls in Bangladesh to exercise their agency (Hamid et al., 2009). It is possible that girls who come from more traditional families will discover that they have less interest in learning English as a result of the influences of their surroundings. (Ushioda, 2011).

According to Canagarajah (2005), social inequality can be maintained by promoting English while downplaying the importance of regional languages. In Bangladesh, where mastering Bangla is essential to being a citizen, this is very important. As it stands, a person's motivation is likely to remain unfulfilled if learning English is perceived as competing with their native language (Chowdhury et al., 2021). According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), culturally responsive teaching in language means using the students' cultural experiences and backgrounds. This approach is promising because it stresses the link between identity and learning. If we blend traditional stories, the environment of Bangladesh and its cultural phrases into English, our students will feel more motivated (Chowdhury et al., 2021). In addition, Gao, Cheng and Kelly (2008) note that self-concept plays an important role in supporting learner motivation. When students feel they belong using English, they become more motivated. Many students in rural areas may feel that English in Bangladesh is something only city kids can enjoy (Kabir, 2016). Dealing with this problem is fundamental to ensure all languages are taught fairly. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009), the ways in which learners picture themselves using the language can encourage them to practice and improve for a long time. It gives particular insight into why some learners in Bangladesh continue to learn English with very few resources (Rahman et al., 2021). Many youth relate to goals such as teaching, working in a foreign country or gathering knowledge from other places (Tasneem, 2021). A review of the relevant literature for this study reveals that a substantial connection exists between cultural identification and a motivation to master English language skills. Despite this, a significant number of these literatures concentrate on Western nations and fail to effectively explain the difficulties that are present in Bangladesh. As a result of this, the purpose of the study is to investigate how the cultural identification of individuals influences their motivation to learn English by utilizing an informed perspective from the culture of the area.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed methods approach to investigate the influence of cultural identity on the motivations of students learning English at universities in Bangladesh. This study gathered quantitative data from a questionnaire survey administered to 60 undergraduate students at Islamic University, Kushtia. Participants in the study were randomly selected from each faculty and from different socio-cultural group. A modified Motivation Questionnaire, derived from the Language Learning Orientations Scale (Noels et al., 2000) and the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 1985), was employed to gather data. The research instrument assessed both internal and external motivation, incorporating inquiries regarding an individual's cultural identity and its impact on English language

acquisition. In the qualitative phase, ten participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their diverse cultural and regional backgrounds. Participants articulated their perspectives on the impact of culture on their motivation to learn English during semi-structured interviews. Interviews were initially audio-recorded, subsequently transcribed, and analyzed for themes in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) methodology. This study employed descriptive statistics to analyze the prevalence of each type of motivation exhibited by learners in our research. The integration of data from both sources facilitated comprehensive findings regarding cultural identity and motivational orientations.

V.   FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of the survey was to learn how learning English relates to students' cultural background. 60 participants responded to this study and gave their viewpoints on twelve statements using a 5-point scale. Percentages of those who picked "Agree" and "Strongly Agree," as well as the mean scores for every question, were considered to better understand what they believed and why.
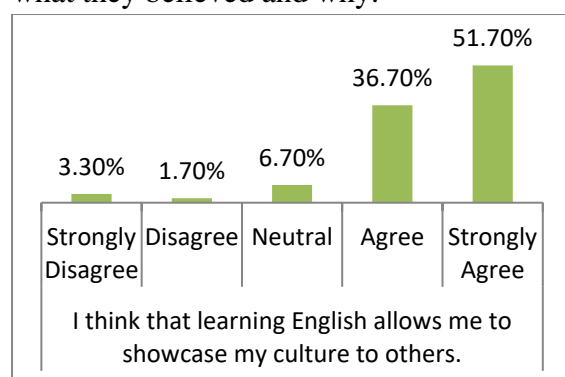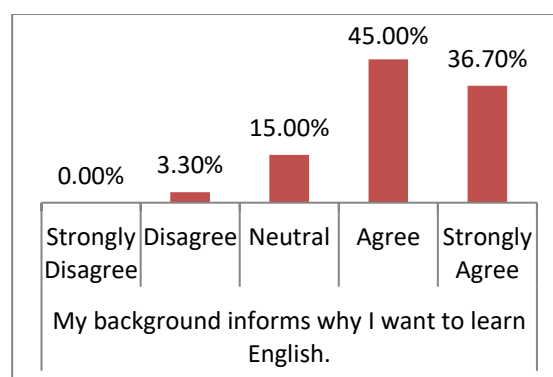

Chart One   **Chart Two**

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I think that learning English allows me to showcase my culture to others.	60	1	5	4.32	.930
My background informs why I want to learn English.	60	2	5	4.15	.799
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Table One

With the first statement, "I think that learning English allows me to showcase my culture to others," 51.7% strongly agreed and 36.7% agreed, making up 88.4% positive responses. The mean outcome was 4.32 which, together with the standard deviation of 0.930, shows there is strong agreement, but with some mismatches. In the same way, for the second statement "My background informs why I want to learn English," 45% of participants said they agreed and 36.7% said they strongly agreed, adding up to 81.7% positive responses. Average agreement was reflected in the mean of 4.15 and the low standard deviation of 0.799. The findings indicate that learners consider English as both a useful skill and a link to sharing who they are and where they come from.
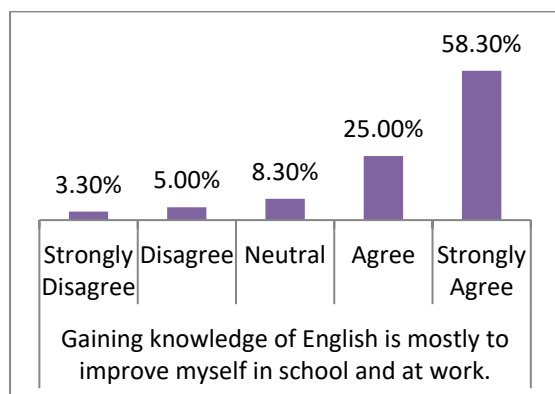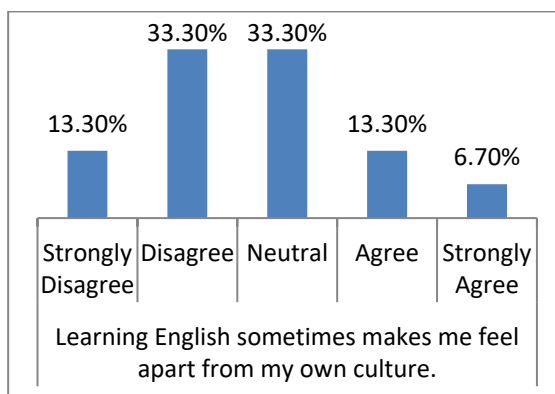
Statement Three and Statement Four

Chart Three

Chart Four

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gaining knowledge of English is mostly to improve myself in school and at work.	60	1	5	4.30	1.046
Learning English sometimes makes me feel apart from my own culture.	60	1	5	2.67	1.084
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Table Two

With the statement three, "Gaining knowledge of English is mostly to improve myself in school and at work," 58.3% strongly agreed and 25% agreed, for a total of 83.3% who showed agreement. People scored on average 4.30, with a standard deviation of 1.046 which shows they consider learning English necessary for their academic and work lives. With the statement four "Learning English sometimes makes me feel apart from my own culture", 6.7% strongly agreed and 13.3% agreed, giving a total of 20%. This statement showed an average value of 2.67 and a standard deviation of 1.084. For the standard deviations in both sets are high, it is found that the respondents differ, yet the main trend highlights strong motivation for English classes and less anxiety about culture differences.
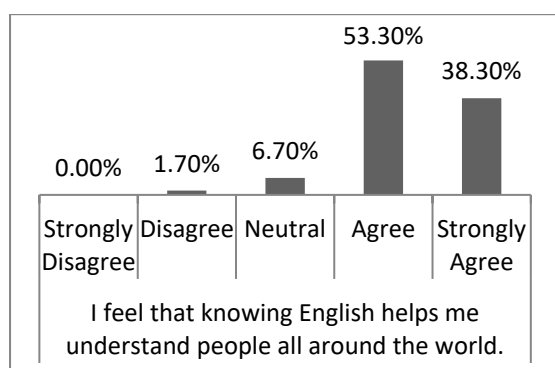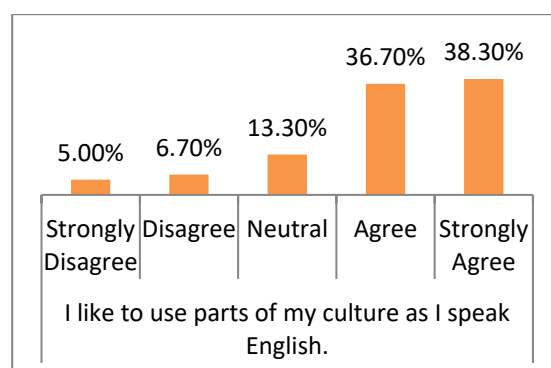
Statement Five and Statement Six

Chart Five

Chart Six

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel that knowing English helps me understand people all around the world.	60	2	5	4.28	.666
I like to use parts of my culture as I speak English.	60	1	5	3.97	1.119
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Table Three

With the statement five, " I feel that knowing English helps me understand people all around the world," 38.3% of participants strongly agreed and another 53.3% agreed that knowing English makes it easier to understand people from around the world, meaning about 91.6% of them agreed, giving an average score of 4.28 and a low standard deviation of 0.666. For the statement six, "I like to use parts of my culture as I speak English," the vast majority strongly approved (36.7%) or approved (38.3%), meaning that 75% think it is a good idea and the mean is 3.97 and standard deviation is 1.119, showing a positively trending, though not completely consistent, response. In general, the data show that English is appreciated as a way to connect internationally and also that people want to keep their cultural identity during the learning process.
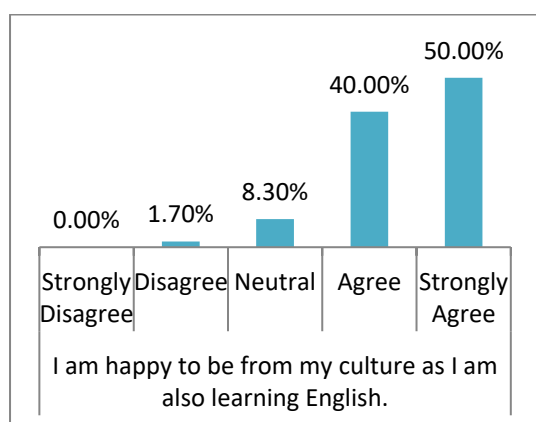
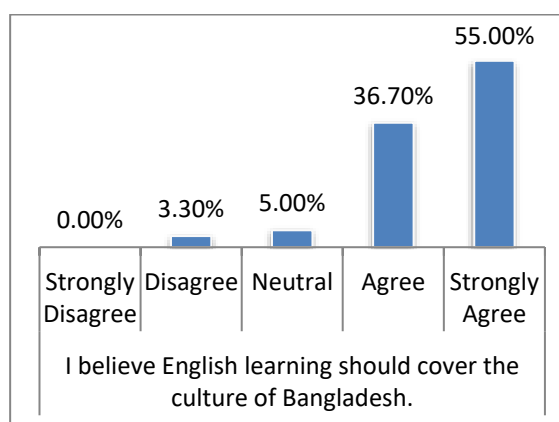**Statement Seven and Statement Eight**

Chart Seven

Chart Eight

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am happy to be from my culture as I am also learning English.	60	2	5	4.38	.715
I believe English learning should cover the culture of Bangladesh.	60	2	5	4.43	.745
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Table Four

Statement seven, " I am happy to be from my culture as I am also learning English," elicited responses from 90% who agreed, with 50% strongly agreeing, 40% agreeing and a total mean score of 4.38, so most participants feel proud of their culture as they practice English. Total of 91.7% of participants strongly agreed and agreed with the statement eight "I believe English learning should cover the culture of Bangladesh" which had a high mean of 4.43 and a low standard deviation of 0.745. A high degree of similar responses shows both groups see things in the same way. These findings indicate that people like to be multilingual and multicultural and see English mainly as a helpful tool that can be improved by their cultural background.
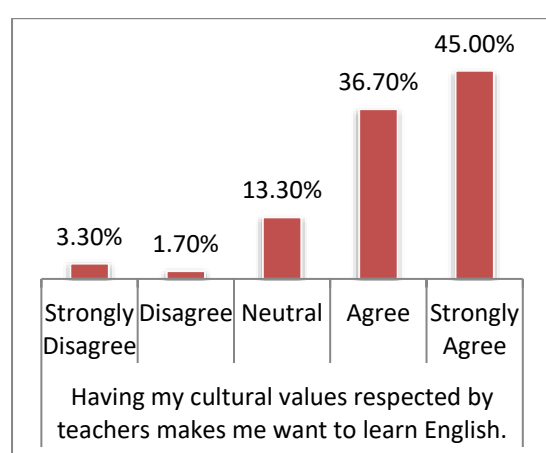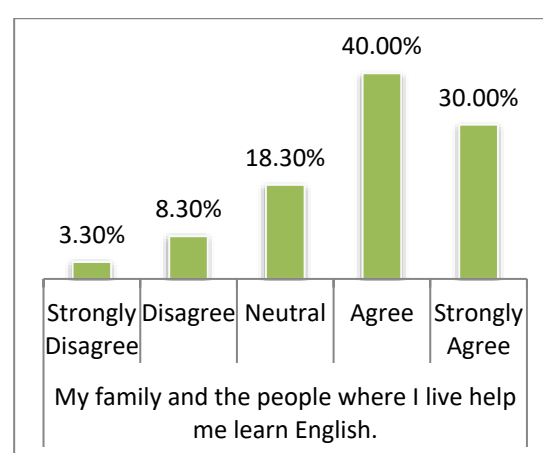
Statement Nine and Statement Ten

Chart Nine   **Chart Ten**

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Having my cultural values respected by teachers makes me want to learn English.	60	1	5	4.18	.965
My family and the people where I live help me learn English.	60	1	5	3.85	1.055
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Table Five

In response to the statement nine "Having my cultural values respected by teachers makes me want to learn English," 45% of students said they feel strongly and 36.7% agreed which led to an agreement score of 81.7% and a strong mean of 4.18 with a 0.965 standard deviation among the 60 respondents. The response to "My family and the people where I live help me learn English," was 30% strongly agreed and 40% agreed, giving a total of 70% and a mean of 3.85, though, with a higher standard deviation 1.055, reflects that there is some variation in the support received. Usually, when educators learn about a student's culture and the school supports them, students have an easier time learning language.
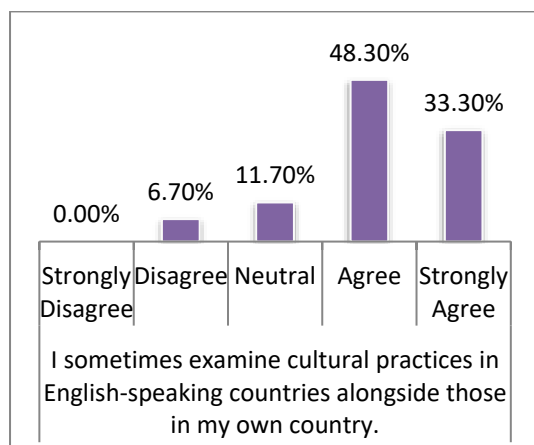
Statement Eleven and Statement Twelve
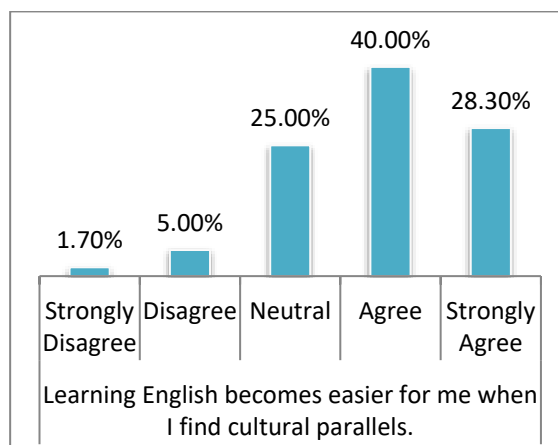

Chart Eleven

Chart Twelve

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I sometimes examine cultural practices in English-speaking countries alongside those in my own country.	60	2	5	4.08	.850
Learning English becomes easier for me when I find cultural parallels.	60	1	5	3.88	.940
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Table Six

With the statement eleven, "I sometimes examine cultural practices in English-speaking countries alongside those in my own country," 33.3% of students strongly agreed and an additional 48.3% agreed, so the total level of agreement reached 81.6%, indicates that many participants value and engage in comparing both cultures. The mean value for this statement was 4.08 and its standard deviation was 0.850. People within the study had positive reactions to Statement Twelve, "Learning English becomes easier for me when I find cultural parallels." Out of the responses, 28.3% of students felt it was true and 40% felt it was somewhat true, making up 68.3%. The mean value for this statement was 3.88 and its standard deviation was 0.940. The results indicate that bringing in cultural information and pointing out similarities can help students learn English more easily and enjoyably.

Findings from Interview

It was common for most respondents to say that being part of their culture acted as a strong reason for them to learn English. Several students said that their motivation came from wanting to promote and showcase Bangladeshi culture on a global basis, mostly through English in schools and workplaces. Someone in interview mentioned, "Being able to communicate in English means I can tell my friends from other countries about my background." Many participants suggested they wanted to be globally connected while still reaching out to their cultural foundations. They made English valuable for dealing with the world, yet they strongly declared their desire to keep their Bangladeshi culture intact. A

number of students mentioned that they believed English unites different cultures rather than threatens them. Students were more interested when the classroom material or talks brought in Bangladeshi culture, history or heritage. From what a participant said "Learning about our festivals or our past through English texts feels more meaningful and engaging." A few students saw English as an opportunity to bring traditionally unheard stories from their communities to light. People from tribal or rural areas said they hoped to raise awareness of local traditions by using English, since they felt these traditions were not given much attention in the media.

Most of the students were in favor, but a few expressed worries that their culture might be lost. One person who was interviewed admitted "At times, I think we are pushed to behave and communicate just like Westerners. This concerns me." There is tension here between communicating globally and holding onto the special qualities of local identity. A number of participants explained that their family's main reason for supporting them in learning English was economic and social, rather than for cultural reasons. Yet, students frequently understood this motivation in ways that were important to their culture such as earning respect by acting as representatives of their communities in English. Students liked being taught by teachers who understood and respected different cultures in their lessons. When teachers recognized what is important locally, students felt more comfortable and involved in class. Interviews show that having a cultural identity is very important for English learning motivation among local students. A lot of people find that knowledge of their cultural identity encourages them to learn a new language for a reason and with more enthusiasm. Yet, certain students find it challenging to keep their traditions while learning English. As a result of these findings, it is clear that English education in Bangladesh should use cultural responsiveness.

VI. DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS

A combined look at the survey and interview results shows how English language learning affects students' cultural identity in Bangladesh. There is a strong trend in the data that suggests most learners see English is value for showcasing and communicating their culture. For instance, 88.3% feel that understanding English brings them chances to represent their culture internationally and 81.7% say their own culture is important in motivating them to learn the language. Such high agreement (over 4.0) and agreement rates mean that students see English as a way to link their culture with the world, not as something that weakens their culture. People reported that instrumental motivation is the main reason they are learning English, as 91.7% agreed it was their leading factor for learning the language. This follows worldwide trends, where people tend to believe English opens doors to greater economic success. Yet, what makes this study special is the way students combine their extrinsic reasons with their core cultural principles. Apart from learning English for business, learners now see it as a way to share their traditions. And since just 20% of learners feel distance from their culture during English learning, together with the low mean of 2.32, this supports that learning English does not create cultural alienation in Bangladesh.

The interviews explained why students felt a certain way, adding important information to the figures in the data. Often, the people who participated said that speaking English allowed them to share their cultural background with visitors from other countries.

As a result, English does more than teach language, it becomes a way to share and support cultural ideas. They liked it when their English classes focused on events and aspects from Bangladeshi culture and society. By being involved, students liked the lessons more and learned more. According to one student, English gives them a chance to present stories about marginalized groups from tribal or rural areas. At the same time, the discussion exposes some challenges. A number of students were concerned that learning English could replace their own customs with ways from the West. That means while many students accept English, others question whether it could weaken their native culture. Most families push students to study English because they can use those skills at work, but for the students, learning the language carries a new sense of cultural significance. The research results demonstrate that learning English in Bangladesh is strongly related to students' cultural identity. Instead of separating people, English helps us celebrate our cultures, say what we think and connect with each other across cultures. Maximizing student motivation can be done by including cultural and local identity into the teaching practices in Bangladesh. As a result, students will learn language in a more inviting, important and supportive way.

The results indicate that the majority of students perceive English as a medium for cultural representation. The research further indicates that most students perceive their cultural background as a significant factor motivating their English language acquisition. Academic and professional motivations appear to be the primary factors driving individuals to learn English. The majority of learners do not perceive English as a factor contributing to their disconnection from their culture. Conversely, individuals generally concur that acquiring proficiency in English facilitates connections with diverse cultures, and most either want to integrate their own traditions into their English usage or convey aspects of their homeland to others while communicating in the language. This demonstrates that English and the indigenous culture coexist without obliterating anyone's authentic identity. English learners from Bangladesh exhibit considerable pride in their cultural heritage, with a consensus that English-taught subjects should encompass Bangladeshi culture, suggesting a demand for culturally responsive education. Moreover, it is evident that receiving respect for their cultural beliefs from educators significantly motivates pupils to exert greater effort in language acquisition. The majority of students appear to be intrigued by different cultures, and they assert that the parallels between their own culture and the target language culture enhance their motivation to study the language. Students demonstrate the efficacy of English in facilitating their exploration and understanding of many cultures. The findings also indicate that students view English as a valuable instrument for self-expression, acquiring global information, and achieving personal achievement. Consequently, it advocates for the incorporation of local cultural traditions into English education, positing that this will enhance equity in learning and facilitate the development of skills requisite for the global community.

VII.   CONCLUSION

It is shown in this study that learners' motivation to learn English in Bangladesh is largely shaped by cultural identity. It is clear from the findings that many students consider English as important for their careers and continuing education, but their own cultures continue to play a major role in their English usage. Students are encouraged to learn English

more when their cultural background is considered during education. Still, identity conflicts are common in traditional environments, as English sometimes appears different from the culture there. Making sure that students are valued for who they are culturally should be part of learning English in Bangladesh, as it helps them do well and finds meaning in what they study.

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