

Economic Contribution, Crisis and Prospects of Bengali Language: An Analysis

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Abstract

Despite being the sixth most spoken language in the world, the economic contribution of the Bengali language has long been overlooked. This study explores the economic significance, current challenges, and future potential of the Bengali language through an analytical framework. The primary objective of the research is to identify Bengali as an economic asset and to contribute to policymaking based on its value. A mixed-methods approach has been employed in this research, incorporating interviews, case studies, secondary data analysis, and the use of statistical information. Sources include academic literature, government reports, and expert opinions. Findings reveal that the Bengali language plays a substantial role in sectors such as services, education, culture, and digital platforms—especially in enhancing customer satisfaction, generating employment, and expanding online education. However, technological limitations, the dominance of English, and the lack of professional training act as major barriers to realizing its full economic potential. Based on the proposal for including an economic chapter in the national language policy (Bangla Academy, 2023) and Grin's (2003) Language Economics Model, the study presents a proposed framework that can be applied to assess the economic value of language, its impact on productivity, and cost-benefit analysis for language policies. Overall, to strengthen and optimize the economic role of the Bengali language, an integrated language policy, technological inclusion of Bengali, and the development of training infrastructure are essential. The findings of this research may offer valuable guidance for policymakers, educators, and business sectors.

Keywords

Bangla Language, Economic Contribution, Language Policy, Digital Technology, Cultural Industries, Language Economics

Introduction

Bengali is recognized as the sixth most widely spoken language in the world, primarily used in Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. Additionally, millions of people speak Bengali in Tripura, Assam, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and various diaspora communities around the globe (Hasan, 2015). Bengali is not merely a means of communication; it is a bearer of rich cultural, historical, and

national identity. The thousand-year-old heritage of literature, poetry, music, and drama reflects the depth and magnitude of this language (Rahman, 2019).

The Constitution of Bangladesh declares Bengali as the state language, and 21 February is recognized as International Mother Language Day, symbolizing global respect for this language. The significance of Bengali extends beyond cultural dimensions; it also plays an important role in the economic and social spheres. Its use is steadily expanding across multiple sectors, including education, administration, media, and business (Chowdhury, 2016; Ahmed & Karim, 2017).

However, in the current global context—where English and other international languages are increasingly dominant—Bengali faces certain challenges. The expansion of digital technology, the dominance of English-oriented education systems, and declining parental interest in mother-tongue learning have contributed to a reduced focus on Bengali (Hossain, 2019; Nahar, 2020). As a result, while the usage and prominence of Bengali have somewhat declined, new opportunities are emerging, particularly in online education, software development, and the translation industry (Islam, 2022; Iqbal, 2021).

The primary objective of this research proposal is to analyze the economic contributions of the Bengali language, the existing challenges in its usage, and its future prospects. This study seeks to understand how Bengali contributes to the country's economic growth and how it can be transformed into an effective economic asset. In today's global economic context, understanding the position and potential of the Bengali language has become increasingly essential.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the economic contribution of the Bengali language. In addition, the research has been guided by the following specific objectives:

- To analyze the current challenges faced by the Bengali language.
- To identify the future prospects and potential pathways for its development.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to Bangladesh. Primarily, it aims to analyze the economic contribution of the Bengali language, along with its current challenges and future prospects within the country. The research examines the role and impact of Bengali in Bangladesh's labor market, service sector, local businesses, and other economic activities.

Specifically, the study evaluates the influence of language on job creation, entrepreneurship development, and overall economic growth. It also investigates the challenges facing Bengali, including the lack of technological advancement and digitalization, inadequate training in language proficiency, and the growing dominance of English in the global context.

The study further explores the future development of the Bengali language and its potential to access international markets. In addition, it examines the role of Bengali in local literature, music, and the film industry, as well as initiatives to preserve cultural and linguistic diversity.

Based on the findings, the research offers policy suggestions and practical recommendations for the development and economic utilization of the Bengali language in Bangladesh.

Literature Review

The importance of the Bengali language is notable in various fields, including education, commerce, and employment. Hasan (2015) highlighted that providing primary education in the Bengali language enhances students' intellectual development and maintains their connection with their mother tongue.

Proficiency in Bengali can contribute to the domestic economy, particularly in the service sector. Khondakar (2020) demonstrated that individuals proficient in Bengali are able to access high-quality jobs in

the local service sector. Furthermore, Bengali plays an essential role in literature, music, and the film industry.

However, with the growing influence of English in the modern world, the importance of Bengali has declined. Chowdhury (2018) observed that the rising trend of English-medium education reduces both proficiency in and usage of Bengali, which could have adverse cultural consequences.

Bengali also holds significant potential as a global language. Sharma (2022) indicated that Bengali can facilitate entry into global markets, particularly in the translation and language training industries. The prospects of Bengali in online education are also expanding, allowing Bengali-speaking students to access a variety of courses in their native language.

Bengali proficiency serves as an important element in the Bangladeshi labor market. Ahmed and Karim (2017) found that individuals proficient in Bengali are more competitive in local job markets, particularly in service sectors where native language skills are crucial for customer service. They further noted that knowledge of Bengali is an essential resource for domestic organizations, as it facilitates direct communication with clients.

Multilingual proficiency is becoming increasingly important in the modern world. Chowdhury (2018) observed that individuals proficient in both Bengali and English not only find more opportunities within Bangladesh but also in international contexts. Research has shown that such employees generally earn higher salaries and enjoy greater job stability (Chowdhury, 2018). Sen (2019) also emphasized that multilingual students are more culturally aware than their monolingual peers and have better prospects in multinational corporations.

Bengali exerts a profound influence not only in economic sectors but also in cultural spheres. Rahman (2019) highlighted that Bengali literature, music, and cinema are recognized and appreciated at international levels. This cultural output has an impact on global trade and the entertainment industry. For instance, Bengali films and music are widely showcased at international festivals and platforms.

In the digital age, Bengali-language education has opened new horizons. E-learning and online platforms are creating new opportunities for Bengali-speaking learners. Additionally, Bengali online courses and resources are growing in popularity, enhancing digital literacy among students (Islam, 2020).

The economic influence of the Bengali language plays an important role in the economies of both Bangladesh and India. Mazumdar (2018) demonstrated that Bengali-language education and promotion can be an attractive factor for foreign investors, particularly for connecting with local markets. The research also noted that the development of Bengali can support economic growth and increase commercial opportunities.

Regarding the challenges faced by the Bengali language, Rafiq (2019) observed that modern technology and globalization have placed traditional linguistic and cultural elements at risk of extinction. The study further indicated that while modernization and the digital adoption of Bengali are increasing, some traditional words and practices are on the verge of disappearing.

Sultana (2020) examined the global prospects of Bengali, showing that opportunities exist for the international expansion of the language, especially in global educational and cultural arenas. The research suggested that the internationalization of Bengali could open new avenues for cultural exchange and access to global markets.

Regarding technological development, Iqbal (2021) indicated that new technologies and software advancements are supporting the expansion of the Bengali language. Technological innovations have introduced new dimensions to Bengali usage and promotion, especially in language education.

From the above review, it is evident that very few significant studies have been conducted on the economic contribution of the Bengali language. The literature also suggests that the present research is both important and unique, which has motivated the researcher to undertake this study.

Rationale of the Study

Providing education to students in their local language, Bengali, facilitates intellectual development and enhances their cognitive abilities (Chowdhury, 2016). Through Bengali, the development of local literature, music, and the film industry has taken place, contributing significantly to cultural creativity (Khan, 2018).

However, the Bengali language faces certain structural barriers. There is a lack of sufficient technological infrastructure for Bengali, which hinders the process of digitalization (Ahmed, 2021). Additionally, the absence of adequate training programs to develop linguistic proficiency limits the effective utilization of the Bengali language (Nahar, 2020). Despite these challenges, Bengali offers advantages in global trade and intercultural communication (Karim, 2021). The importance of Bengali in online education is also increasing, especially for Bengali-speaking learners (Islam, 2022). Furthermore, the use of Bengali helps preserve and promote local linguistic diversity (Chakrabarti, 2017).

The role of Bengali in the economic development of Bangladesh is significant. This study examines how proficiency in the Bengali language relates to economic progress and identifies the driving forces behind this relationship. Moreover, it explores the use of Bengali in the global economy and its potential in international trade. Bengali plays an important role in education, business, and social communication.

Through this research, the economic contribution of the Bengali language is identified, shedding light on its widespread use and advancement. Additionally, the study aims to explore the current challenges and prospects of Bengali. In the present global context, where multilingual skills are considered valuable assets, the analysis of the importance and potential of the Bengali language is regarded by the researcher as highly significant.

Research Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. It utilized both primary and secondary sources of information. While the study primarily emphasized qualitative analysis, quantitative methods were also applied where relevant. No structured questionnaire was used; instead, insights from previous studies were incorporated to enrich the findings. Reports published in various newspapers and magazines were also reviewed. Additionally, efforts were made to enhance the practical relevance of the study through case studies.

Primary Data Collection

- **Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with experts from diverse fields, including educators, language specialists, and business leaders.
- **Case Studies:** Case studies were carried out on the use and impact of the Bengali language in different organizations and institutions.

Secondary Data Collection

- **Literature Review:** Various research articles, books, and reports were reviewed to build a theoretical foundation.
- **Document Analysis:** Data was collected from government and non-government sources, such as language education institutions and online platforms.

Analysis

The productivity of workers trained in the Bengali language is 18–22% higher (Ahmed, 2021). Ahmed (2021) documented this information in a survey conducted among workers in 200 garment factories in Bangladesh. The study found that workers trained in technical skills using Bengali acquired new skills

1.8 times faster compared to those trained in English. Additionally, the error rate in understanding instructions written in Bengali was 35% lower.

Customer satisfaction increases by 40% when services are provided in the local language (Karim & Islam, 2022). This finding is based on a survey of 5,000 customers in the banking and telecom sectors of Bangladesh. The research showed that institutions providing services in Bengali had a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of 72, significantly higher than the score of 52 for institutions offering services in English. The researchers also noted that the average problem resolution time decreased by 25% when services were delivered in Bengali.

The Bengali language is not only a medium of communication but also a representation of a nation's culture, history, and economic potential. This study examined the economic contributions, challenges, and future prospects of the Bengali language, highlighting its multifaceted role in Bangladesh's economic development and its potential for broader international application in the future.

Economic Contributions of the Bengali Language

Through case studies, interviews, and statistical analysis conducted in this research, it has been revealed that the Bengali language contributes both directly and indirectly to various sectors of Bangladesh's economy. Increased use of Bengali in the service sector, education, cultural industries, and digital media—including online education—has generated employment, income, and innovation opportunities. A sector-wise analysis is presented below:

Service Sector: The use of Bengali in Bangladesh's service sector has created significant economic opportunities. Providing services in Bengali in banking, telecom, healthcare, and customer support has played a crucial role in increasing customer satisfaction and boosting local employment (Ahmed & Karim, 2017). For example, Grameenphone, Robi, and Banglalink have connected more closely with customers by offering customer service in Bengali (Rahman, 2020). Similarly, digital payment platforms have improved rural inclusion by launching user interfaces in Bengali (Islam, 2021). TeleTalk and other service providers have expanded their markets by delivering services in the local language (Akter, 2021). In the healthcare sector, patients' understanding and access to information have improved as hospital information boards are now presented in Bengali, thereby enhancing service quality (Kabir, 2019). Employment opportunities have increased in helpdesks, language training centers, and virtual assistant development (Nahar, 2020). The inclusion of Bengali in government service portals has boosted citizen participation (Islam, 2022). Insurance companies have gained customer trust by communicating in Bengali (Hossain, 2019). In telemedicine and mobile health services, the growing use of Bengali has enhanced patient confidence (Sultana, 2020). As a result, new job categories such as translators, content moderators, and customer assistants have emerged.

Education Sector: The use of Bengali in primary, secondary, and higher education in Bangladesh has contributed not only to academic development but also to the creation of economic opportunities (Chowdhury, 2016). The production of textbooks and supplementary materials in Bengali has fostered the growth of a large publishing industry (Mazumdar, 2018). Employment has been created in areas such as teacher training, question paper preparation, and translation. Institutions have also developed new revenue streams by offering online courses in Bengali (Iqbal, 2021). According to UNESCO (2020), learning outcomes improve significantly when primary education is provided in the mother tongue. Integrating Bengali into madrasa education has enabled students to better participate in the mainstream economy (Islam, 2022). E-learning platforms such as 10 Minute School and local versions of Coursera have bridged Bengali with digital technology in education (Sarker, 2021). The use of locally delivered instruction has helped reduce student dropout rates (Karim, 2020). Furthermore, the introduction of Bengali-language curricula has increased demand for educational institutions, translation agencies, and PDF book producers (Ahmed, 2021). Both government and private entities have established dedicated research and training units for Bengali, contributing to job creation.

Cultural Industry: Bengali-language films, dramas, music, literature, and digital content have reached audiences beyond local markets, even gaining international recognition. Thousands of jobs have been created for actors, directors, editors, technicians, and marketing professionals (Rahman, 2019). Bengali dramas and films have attracted millions of views on platforms like YouTube, significantly boosting revenue (Islam, 2021). The annual Ekushey Book Fair generates billions of Taka in sales of Bengali publications (Ahmed, 2021). International festivals that showcase Bengali literature and drama have elevated the global profile of the language (Karim, 2020). Folk artists have gained professional exposure through events such as the Baul Folk Fest and stage productions (Kabir, 2019). Bengali YouTube channels, audiobooks, and web series have become increasingly popular (Chowdhury, 2018). Local designers and artists producing typography and literary-themed artworks in Bengali are now selling their work in both domestic and international markets. Theater groups, film schools, and institutes offering Bengali-language courses also contribute to employment.

Digital Media and Online Education: The digital use of Bengali has seen unprecedented growth in recent years. Online Bengali news portals, educational content, e-books, audiobooks, and YouTube videos have made access to information and knowledge more widespread (Sarker, 2021; Ahmed & Karim, 2017). The inclusion of Bengali in mobile app development has opened up new markets for software (Kabir, 2019). Freelancers are earning foreign currency by developing Bengali-language voice recognition systems, text-to-speech tools, and localized software (Hossain, 2023). Bengali typing software and keyboard apps have gained popularity (Mazumdar, 2018). Blogging and content creation in Bengali have driven online marketing and digital promotion (Islam, 2021). Sales have increased as advertisements for local products are now produced in Bengali (Rahman, 2020). Online coaching centers, virtual libraries, and digital schools offering services in Bengali have expanded educational access, especially in economically disadvantaged areas (UNESCO, 2020). Bengali-based digital publishing platforms such as Rokomari and Boibazar have also contributed significantly to economic growth.

Challenges of the Bengali Language:

In 73% of higher education institutions in Bangladesh, English is used as the sole medium of instruction (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2023). The UGC's 2023 annual report shows that out of 150 universities in Bangladesh, 109 use only English as the medium of instruction. Particularly concerning is the fact that 92% of science and technology courses are taught exclusively in English (UGC, 2023). This trend has increased by 15% compared to 2015 (UGC, 2023).

A report by the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (2022) states that Bengali language skills are deprioritized in 68% of corporate sector positions. Based on an analysis of human resource policies of 500 corporate organizations, the report found that English proficiency is mandatory in 85% of managerial positions, while only 12% of positions emphasize Bengali language skills.

This research identifies several challenges to the Bengali language that hinder its economic potential. These challenges primarily manifest in three key areas:

Dominance of English: The dominance of English in Bangladesh's corporate and higher education sectors presents a major challenge. Most advanced courses in public and private universities are conducted in English, which disadvantages students proficient in Bengali (Hossain, 2019; Chowdhury, 2018). In many private organizations, official communication is conducted in English, leading to an undervaluation of Bengali language skills (Nahar, 2020). The use of Bengali in corporate presentations, reports, and brand content is limited, weakening brand positioning in the local market (Rahman, 2019). Even some higher-level government job examinations prioritize English (Karim, 2020). The prevalence of English in media, advertising, and technology relegates Bengali to a secondary position (Ahmed, 2021). This diminished status has resulted in declining interest among students (Islam, 2021). The global dominance of English as an international lan-

guage further neglects the economic potential of Bengali (Chakrabarti, 2017; Bak & Mehmedbegovic, 2023).

Technological Limitations: Bengali remains inadequately integrated into many international software and digital platforms. Its functionality in tools such as Google Translate, voice recognition, and search engine optimization is still limited (Ahmed, 2021; Hossain, 2023). Issues with Unicode and fonts continue to trouble many Bengali users (Iqbal, 2021). Online education platforms and government digital services often lack sufficient content in Bengali (Islam, 2020). Artificial intelligence and chatbot services in Bengali are still underdeveloped, depriving local users of efficient services (Justice et al., 2018). Limitations in Bengali keyboard input systems and language processing software create further complications (Ahmed & Karim, 2017). Additional challenges include spelling standardization, dialect diversity, and the absence of authoritative dictionaries (Karim, 2020). Moreover, insufficient government investment in the technological advancement of Bengali further hinders progress (Khandakar, 2020). As a result, Bengali's digital utility and economic efficiency are significantly reduced.

Lack of Training: There is no established system for professional skill development in the Bengali language. Corporate training materials in Bengali are limited (Nahar, 2020). Colleges and universities lack courses in soft skills, business communication, and technology-based applications taught in Bengali (Chowdhury, 2016). No dedicated training modules exist for developing professional Bengali writers for freelancing and content creation (Sultana, 2020). Due to the lack of training opportunities, many government employees and educators exhibit weak language skills (Ahmed, 2018). Training in areas like digital marketing, software localization, and customer service using Bengali is rare (Iqbal, 2021). Students have limited institutional opportunities for practical language use (Islam, 2022). Furthermore, most institutional examinations do not evaluate Bengali proficiency, which contributes to waning student interest (Rahman, 2020). At the school level, there is an overall shortage of instructional materials and trained teachers for mother tongue education (UNESCO, 2020). Collectively, these factors prevent the Bengali language from evolving into a dynamic economic asset.

Potential of the Bengali Language:

The qualitative analysis of this research suggests that the economic potential of the Bengali language is likely to expand further in the future. In particular, the growth and use of Bengali in the following three sectors can significantly contribute to the evolving economic landscape:

International Translation and Language Industry: The global Bengali diaspora is increasing steadily, leading to a growing demand for Bengali translation in administrative, educational, and healthcare services (Sultana, 2020; Ahmed, 2018). International development agencies are producing training modules and guides in Bengali for various projects (Karim, 2020). Bengali is gradually gaining prominence in global content alongside English, Arabic, and Chinese translations (Sen, 2019). There is a rising demand for literary translations, scriptwriting, and subtitling in joint productions between India and Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2016). Employment opportunities for translators, language trainers, and localization experts are also expanding (Rafiq, 2019). Additionally, the introduction of Bengali courses on global language platforms like Duolingo and Memrise has opened new commercial avenues (Bak & Mehmedbegovic, 2023).

Growing Interest in Local Languages: Multinational companies are increasingly producing content in local languages to penetrate regional markets, which enhances the economic prospects of Bengali (Mazumdar, 2018). Tech giants like Google, Facebook, and YouTube are now offering advertisements in Bengali, creating opportunities for local digital marketing agencies (Ahmed, 2021). Major retailers have also begun using Bengali on product packaging and user manuals (Chowdhury, 2018). Bengali-language chatbots and voice assistants are being developed for customer service (Islam, 2020). Reviews, feedback, and user-generated content in Bengali are increasing,

leading to greater customer engagement (Kabir, 2019). Furthermore, educational institutions, NGOs, and banks are conducting awareness campaigns in Bengali, which positively influence socio-economic activities (UNESCO, 2020).

Language and Sustainable Development: Numerous awareness campaigns related to health, agriculture, environmental protection, and women's empowerment are being conducted in Bengali (Sen, 2019; Islam, 2022). Consequently, international organizations such as UNDP and UNICEF are investing in the development of content and training in Bengali (Ahmed, 2021). Information dissemination in the local language promotes economic inclusion by facilitating broader public participation (Hossain, 2023). Bengali-language training programs have proven particularly effective in enhancing the economic capabilities of rural and marginalized communities (Iqbal, 2021). Development initiatives are further supported when agricultural extension workers, healthcare professionals, and NGO staff are proficient in Bengali (Karim, 2020). Ensuring public awareness and participation in Bengali is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2020).

Overall Discussion

The Bengali language is not only a carrier of cultural identity but also plays a significant role in Bangladesh's economic structure. From the three main areas analyzed in this study—contributions, challenges, and potential—it is evident that Bengali is emerging as a strong socio-economic asset, although some structural and policy-related obstacles remain on its path to sustainable progress.

Firstly, in terms of contributions, the Bengali language has made notable impacts, particularly in the service sector, education, cultural industries, and digital media and technology. Providing services in the local language has increased customer satisfaction and trust, while the expansion of Bengali-language education has created employment opportunities, boosted the publishing industry, and extended online learning. Bengali cultural industries—including film, music, drama, and literature—have stimulated economic activity both domestically and among the diaspora. The digital transformation of the Bengali language, aligned with technological advancements, has opened new economic avenues benefiting online content creators, freelancers, and software developers.

Secondly, from the perspective of challenges, the dominance of English in higher education, corporate communication, and technology limits Bengali's potential. Additionally, technological constraints, lack of training, weak policy frameworks, and narrow social attitudes hinder the integration of Bengali into the economic mainstream. The absence of proper institutional mechanisms for Bengali content creation and language education creates uncertainty regarding future directions.

Thirdly, regarding potential, Bengali is increasingly recognized as a growing asset. Its participation in the international translation industry, rising demand for local language use in multinational companies, and its role in sustainable development campaigns have significantly enhanced its economic prospects. The importance of conducting business in local languages is increasing in both government and private sectors, which may help make Bengali more globally prominent in the long term.

Overall, the economic power of the Bengali language has not yet been fully harnessed, but with strategic planning, language policy reforms, and investment in technology, it can play a vital role at both national and global levels. Therefore, combined efforts from the government, policymakers, academics, and the business community can transform the potential of Bengali into an economic reality.

Recommendations

There is a need to include an economic chapter in the national language policy (Bangla Academy, 2023, Recommendation 4.2). Bangla Academy (2023) has stated in its proposal that the following issues

should be incorporated into the language policy. The researcher also believes that these aspects ought to be included in the policy:

- a) Economic evaluation methods of the Bengali language (Bangla Academy, 2023, p. 45)
- b) Standards for linguistic proficiency in the labor market (Bangla Academy, 2023, p. 46)
- c) Framework for measuring language-based productivity (Bangla Academy, 2023, p. 47)

The researcher recommends adapting Grin's (2003) model to the context of the Bengali language, particularly:

- i) Analysis of the economic impact of language education (Grin, 2003, Chapter 4)
- ii) Determination of the market value of multilingualism (Grin, 2003, Chapter 6)
- iii) Cost-benefit analysis of language policy (Grin, 2003, Chapter 8)

Conclusion

This study presents a multidimensional analysis of the economic contributions, current challenges, and future potential of the Bengali language. Based on qualitative, quantitative, and case study data, it is evident that Bengali is not merely a marker of cultural identity but also a promising component of Bangladesh's economic growth. The Bengali language plays a significant role in the country's service sector, education system, cultural industries, technology, and online education sectors. Through the use of the local language in customer service, organizations achieve greater business success, while the development of language-based content and digital media supports employment and entrepreneurship growth. Simultaneously, new markets are emerging in language education, translation services, and digital Bengali, contributing to the global expansion of the language.

However, among the challenges identified in this study, the limited participation of Bengali in technology, the exclusive dominance of English in corporate and higher education sectors, lack of training, social devaluation of the language, and the absence of a comprehensive government language policy are particularly significant. These obstacles hinder the realization of Bengali's full potential.

Nonetheless, based on the findings and interviews conducted in this study, it can be concluded that with appropriate language policy formulation, integration of Bengali in technology, establishment of language training infrastructure, and research-based planning, Bengali can be transformed into a valuable economic asset. By harnessing the intrinsic strength of the Bengali language, Bangladesh can benefit economically at the domestic level and establish Bengali as an effective economic language internationally. Achieving this requires coordinated efforts across governmental, private, and social sectors.

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