P-ISSN 2708-6453	Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review	Sep-Oct2026, Vol. 10, No.5
O-ISSN 2708-6461	https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2026(10-V)02	[18-40]

Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review
www.plhr.org.pk

RESEARCH PAPER

The Vanishing Literature Student: Employability Problematisation and the ELT Turn in Bangladeshi English Departments

Dr. Shah Mohammad Sanaul Karim

Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC), Kumira, Chattogram-4318, Bangladesh

***Corresponding Author** | shahkarim@iiuc.ac.bd

ABSTRACT

This article examines how Bangladeshi policy and programme texts make reorganising English departments around English language teaching and employability seem necessary, and how literature's position changes. Literature long anchored Bangladeshi English departments. Since the 1990s, privatisation, outcome-based education and accreditation have reshaped higher education around graduate employability. The study uses a mixed documentary design. Qualitative analysis applies governmentality and Bacchi's WPR approach. The population comprises national policy texts and English departmental programme documents. The purposive sample includes six national and nine departmental documents (2010–2026). Descriptive credit analysis quantifies literature's share in six curricula. National texts frame unemployment as a skills deficit, leaving literature unnamed. Outcome and accreditation templates translate literary study into generic competencies. Literature still holds 44–61% of credits. Yet it vanishes from governing discourse and, where streams exist, enrolment. Regulators should permit discipline-specific outcomes within outcome-based frameworks. Departments should articulate literature's purposes before outcome mapping.

KEYWORDS Governmentality, WPR Policy Analysis, Neoliberal Higher Education, English Literature, English Language Teaching, Graduate Employability

Introduction

Few academic units in Bangladesh carry as much symbolic weight as the English department. For much of the twentieth century it was where the colonial and then the national elite learned to read Shakespeare, the Romantics and the Victorian novel, and where a postcolonial critical tradition later took shape (Alam, 2007, 2021). Over the last 30 years, however, the department has somewhat changed its purpose. Literature has been consolidated or offered as one of several "streams", while ELT, applied linguistics and professional communication courses have increased, particularly in the private sector (Alam, n.d.; Hamid & Rahman, 2019). The literature student — one who chooses English to read, interpret and argue about literary texts — has not gone away but is less visible in programme documents, accreditation templates and national policy.

This article asks how that change has been made to appear reasonable, even inevitable. It does not assume that ELT has displaced literature, or that the two are natural rivals. ELT and applied linguistics are serious fields, and literary study has long been entangled with language teaching (Carter, 2007; Paran, 2008). The question is under what institutional and discursive conditions the relative positions of these fields are reorganised.

OPEN ACCESS
© 2026 Author/s. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Our argument is that the reorganisation is driven less by disciplinary competition than by a governmental rationality that represents graduate unemployability as the central problem of higher education and then defines legitimate knowledge as whatever can be shown to remedy it.

Three questions structure the analysis. The first concerns representation: how national policy and regulatory texts portray graduate unemployment as a problem, and what assumptions and omissions make this representation convincing. The second concerns translation: through which technologies — qualifications frameworks, curriculum templates, accreditation standards and programme architectures — these representations reach English departments, and what they do to the place of literature, including its share of the curriculum. The third concerns response: how departments themselves accommodate, negotiate or contest these representations in their own texts, and what this reveals about neoliberal governmentality in postcolonial higher education.

To answer these questions, the article applies Bacchi's WPR approach (Bacchi, 2009; Bacchi& Goodwin, 2016) to a corpus of national policy, regulatory and departmental texts, read through Foucault's account of governmentality as the shaping of conduct (Foucault, 1982, 1991; Rose, 1999). Departmental documents are especially revealing because academics write them: they show how a policy rationality is taken up, translated and occasionally contested by those it governs. A credit analysis of six full curricula tests how far the discursive shift is matched by changes in curricular weight. The article reports the documentary phase of a larger project; a collaborative autoethnography with literature academics forms its second phase.

The article offers one of the few sustained analyses of literature's changing position in Bangladeshi English departments read through policy problematisation rather than through curriculum description or language-policy debate. It first sets out the historical context and reviews the relevant scholarship, then develops the theoretical framework and identifies the gaps the study addresses. After describing the corpus and analytical procedure, it presents four themes and discusses them in relation to international debates on the neoliberal university and the humanities. It closes with a conclusion that acknowledges the study's limitations and sets out directions for further research, followed by recommendations for departments, universities, regulators and policymakers. Appendix A records the WPR analysis document by document, and Appendix B the classification rules for the credit analysis.

English Studies in Bangladesh: From Colonial Canon to Market Choice

English literary study arrived in Bengal as an instrument of colonial rule. Viswanathan (1989) showed that English literature was institutionalised in colonial India partly to cultivate a loyal, morally reformed administrative class. After independence in 1971, Bangladeshi English departments inherited this legacy but repurposed it as a humanistic field, focusing on postcolonial readings of the colonial encounter and on South Asian writing in English (Alam, 2007, 2021). The commitment to Bangla gave English an ambivalent status, and English-in-education policy shifted repeatedly across successive education commissions (Chowdhury &Kabir, 2014; Hamid &Erling, 2016).

The first curricular change came from within the discipline. Alam (n.d.) recalls reform at the University of Dhaka, where by the late 1980s colleagues believed that a purely literary syllabus did not meet the needs of students with less experience of English. This

reflected several factors, including that many BA (Honours) graduates would teach in schools and colleges; an ELT stream was later developed at master's level. Alam (2021) has since argued that globalisation has left English studies in a shambles and that English is a powerful commodity. This first expansion, however, rested on educational and professional considerations rather than the market.

The second shift was structural. From the early 1990s, market-oriented reform supported by international financial institutions expanded private provision under the Private University Act of 1992 (Kabir, 2013; Kabir& Chowdhury, 2021). Language-in-education policy moved from linguistic nationalism towards neoliberalism (Hamid & Rahman, 2019), and private universities adopted English-only instruction justified through internationalisation and market positioning (Rahman & Hu, 2025). The World Bank-funded Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP), with an outlay of US$238.1 million between 2009 and 2018, introduced quality assurance cells and self-assessment and supported a new strategic plan (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh [UGC], 2018).

The third shift is regulatory. The Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework (BNQF) for higher education was published in January 2021 (UGC, 2021). The Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC), created by an Act of 2017, began functioning in 2020 and published its accreditation manual in 2022, revised in 2024 (Bangladesh Accreditation Council [BAC], 2024). The UGC approved an outcome-based education (OBE) curriculum template in February 2020 (UGC, 2020). After the 2024 change of government, the UGC drafted a five-year action plan for 2026–2030 (Business Standard, 2026). Graduate unemployment forms the public backdrop: the Labour Force Survey 2022 reported unemployment among the tertiary-educated at 12%, the highest of any education level (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], 2023; Star Business Report, 2023).

Literature Review

The neoliberal university, employability and outcomes

A large literature describes how universities have been reorganised around markets and measurable performance. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) analyse academic capitalism; Olssen and Peters (2005) show that neoliberalism, unlike classical liberalism, treats the market as something the state must actively construct; and Marginson (2013) explains why marketisation in higher education relies on proxies such as indicators and accountability regimes. Shore (2008) and Lorenz (2012) argue that audit culture redefines academic work by making visible only what can be counted, and Ball (2003, 2012) names the resulting self-judgement against external indicators performativity.

Two strands are especially relevant here. The first treats employability as a construct with a politics. Boden and Nedeva (2010) argue that employability has become a performative function of universities shaped by the state; Holmes (2013) shows that policy overwhelmingly treats employability as the possession of skills; Tomlinson (2012) notes the neglect of labour-market structure. In Bangladesh, by contrast, employability research is largely instrumental, identifying skills employers want and recommending closer curriculum–industry alignment (Alam et al., 2022; Hoque et al., 2023). The second strand critiques learning outcomes. Hussey and Smith (2002) argue that precisely specified outcomes misrepresent how understanding develops, especially in interpretive disciplines, and Biesta (2010) warns that an age of measurement tends to value what is measured rather

than measure what is valued. Recent WPR studies show how higher education policy in Asia constitutes its problems in technical and managerial terms (Woo, 2023), and Salmon (2024) applies WPR to a skills agenda in England. No comparable analysis exists for Bangladesh.

The humanities, English studies and academic identity

Debates on the value of the humanities are long-standing. Readings (1996) argued that the university had replaced culture with an empty idea of excellence; Collini (2012) and Nussbaum (2010) defend the humanities as necessary to public life; and Ashton et al. (2023) observe that humanities scholars are now expected to argue in the vocabulary of employability. Research on academic identity shows how such reform reshapes self-understanding (Archer, 2008; Ylijoki& Ursin, 2013), with affective costs (Davies &Bansel, 2007; Gill, 2009), and collaborative autoethnographies document compliance and resistance (Gair et al., 2021). Most of this work, however, is grounded in Northern institutions and treats discipline as secondary.

The closest regional precedent is the Indian debate on the "crisis" of English studies. Sunder Rajan's (1992) edited volume and Joshi's (1991) *Rethinking English* questioned the colonial formation of the discipline, its class politics and its relation to language teaching, and argued for rethinking rather than simply defending it. Those debates were driven mainly by postcolonial critique. The Bangladeshi case adds a second pressure — the market and audit rationality of the 2010s and 2020s — and so allows us to ask how decolonial and neoliberal critiques of English literature intersect.

English in Bangladesh: rich on language policy, thin on literature

Scholarship on English in Bangladesh concentrates on language policy, medium of instruction and ELT practice: inconsistent policy (Chowdhury &Kabir, 2014; Hamid &Erling, 2016), the limits of communicative language teaching (Rahman & Pandian, 2018), institutional divides produced by medium of instruction (Hamid et al., 2013) and the neoliberal turn in language policy and private higher education (Hamid & Rahman, 2019; Rahman & Hu, 2025). Studies of privatisation trace how market reform entered the sector (Kabir, 2013; Kabir& Chowdhury, 2021), and the *Routledge Handbook of English Language Education in Bangladesh* includes reflections on English studies and literature in language teaching (Sultana et al., 2021). Saleque (2024) argues that liberal arts education is being devalued in the tertiary sector. What is missing is a systematic analysis of English literature as a discipline under restructuring and of the policy mechanisms that shape its position.

Theoretical Framework: Governmentality and Problematisation

Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality directs attention from sovereign command to the ways populations and individuals are guided to conduct themselves; power acts on the field of possible actions of free subjects (Foucault, 1982). Rose (1999) and Dean (2010) developed an analytics of government with three dimensions: the *rationalities* that make some problems thinkable, the *technologies* — plans, templates, indicators, audits — through which government is exercised, and the *subjectivities* that government invites people and institutions to adopt. This suits our object because restructuring in English departments rarely arrives as an order to close literature courses. It arrives as templates, matrices, budgets and vocabularies through which academics learn to describe their own work.

Foucault (2008) analysed neoliberalism as a rationality that extends market reasoning to all domains and reimagines the individual as an entrepreneur of the self. Brown (2015) shows how it translates educational values into economic terms, and Harvey (2005) reminds us that it is also a class project, which in Bangladesh intersects with stratification by medium of instruction (Hamid et al., 2013). Bacchi (2009, 2012) builds on Foucault's notion of problematisation to argue that policies constitute the problems they claim to solve. Her WPR approach asks what the problem is represented to be; what presuppositions underlie this; how it has come about; what is left unproblematic; what effects it produces; and how it is disseminated and could be questioned. A seventh step turns these questions on the researcher's own representations (Bacchi& Goodwin, 2016).

We combine these strands in the concept of *employability problematisation*: the process by which graduate unemployability is represented as the central problem of higher education, so that the legitimacy of disciplines depends on their demonstrable contribution to solving it (Table 1).

Table 1
Analytical framework: employability problematisation

Dimension	What it involves in Bangladeshi English departments	Analytic source
Rationality	Graduate unemployability represented as a deficit of quality and skills; higher education as human capital formation	Foucault (2008); Brown (2015); Bacchi (2009)
Technologies	Strategic plans, qualifications frameworks, OBE templates, accreditation standards, outcome-mapping matrices, enrolment-linked budgets	Rose (1999); Dean (2010); Shore (2008)
Subjectivities	Students as investors; departments as providers of employable graduates; academics as producers of measurable outcomes	Ball (2003, 2012); Davies &Bansel (2007)
Disciplinary effects	Literature repositioned as optional, generic or skills-based; communicative English and ELT positioned as the employable core	Boden &Nedeva (2010); Hussey & Smith (2002)
Counter-discourse	Departments redescribing, negotiating or refusing these representations in their own texts	Foucault (1982); Archer (2008)

The framework does not predict that literature will disappear. It predicts that literature will be retained to the extent that it can be redescribed in the vocabulary of skills, and that this redescription will change what literary study is.

The first gap is geographical and theoretical. Critical scholarship on the neoliberal university and on employability as a policy construct is concentrated in the Global North (Boden &Nedeva, 2010; Holmes, 2013; Shore, 2008), and poststructural analyses of higher education policy in Asia remain few (Woo, 2023). No study has applied WPR to Bangladeshi higher education. The study's first objective is therefore to examine how graduate unemployability is represented as a problem in Bangladeshi national policy and regulatory texts between 2010 and 2026, and to identify the presuppositions, genealogies and silences that sustain that representation, including its continuity across the 2024 change of government.

The second gap concerns the object of research on English in Bangladesh. That scholarship is rich on language policy, medium of instruction and ELT practice (Chowdhury &Kabir, 2014; Hamid &Erling, 2016; Hamid & Rahman, 2019), but English literature has rarely been analysed as a discipline under institutional reorganisation; existing accounts are largely reflective or historical (Alam, n.d., 2021; Saleque, 2024). The second objective is to trace how national representations are translated into English

departments through qualifications frameworks, OBE templates, accreditation standards and programme architectures, and to measure, through a credit analysis of published curricula, how far the discursive shift is matched by changes in the weight given to literature.

The third gap is conceptual. Employability research in Bangladesh largely accepts the skills-gap framing and asks how curricula can be aligned with employer demand (Alam et al., 2022; Hoque et al., 2023), leaving the framing itself unexamined. The third objective is to make that framing visible as the employability problematisation defined above and to show what it leaves unproblematic, notably labour demand and the purposes of interpretive disciplines (Biesta, 2010; Hussey & Smith, 2002).

The fourth gap links policy and disciplinary self-understanding. Research on academic identity under neoliberal reform rarely relates the shifting status of a discipline to the texts that govern it (e.g., Archer, 2008; Ylijoki& Ursin, 2013), and the regional debate on English studies in India was primarily postcolonial rather than a market critique (Joshi, 1991; Sunder Rajan, 1992). The fourth objective is to analyse how departments' own documents respond to the problematisation of employability, and how this reflects, resists or challenges decolonial and neoliberal pressures on English studies in a postcolonial, donor-shaped system.

Material and Methods

Design and Corpus

The study adopts a qualitative, poststructural design based on WPR policy analysis, supplemented by a descriptive credit analysis. Following Bacchi and Goodwin (2016), documents are treated as governing texts that produce problems, objects and subjects rather than as neutral descriptions.

The corpus comprises fifteen publicly available documents (Table 2). Six are national: the National Education Policy 2010, the Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2018–2030 (SPHE), the BNQF for higher education (2021), the UGC OBE template (2020), the BAC accreditation manual (2024) and, as the only post-2024 national text available, a press report of the UGC's draft 2026–2030 action plan. Nine are programme documents of English departments, selected purposively for variation in sector (three public, six private), age and location (Dhaka, Kushtia, Comilla, Rajshahi and Sylhet). Public-university curricula were harder to obtain online, which explains the imbalance. All documents were accessed between 10 and 11 November 2026.

Table 2
Document corpus

Document	Issuer and year	Type	Extent analysed
National Education Policy 2010	Ministry of Education (2010)	National policy	Full text
Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2018–2030	UGC (2018)	Strategic plan	Full text
BNQF Part B: Higher Education (Levels 7–10)	UGC (2021)	Qualifications framework	Full text
Template of OBE Curriculum	UGC (2020)	Curriculum template	Full text
Accreditation Manual, 2nd ed.	BAC (2024)	Accreditation standards	Chapters 1–3

Draft action plan 2026–2030 (press report)	Business Standard (2026)	Policy report	Full report
BA Honours Handbook	University of Dhaka (2020)	Public; handbook	Objectives, structure, course list
OBE Curriculum, BA (Hons) in English	Islamic University, Kushtia (2021)	Public; OBE curriculum	Parts A–B
OBE Curriculum, BA in English	Comilla University (2022)	Public; OBE curriculum	Parts A–B
Department web pages	North South University (n.d.)	Private; programme pages	Full pages
BA in English programme page	East West University (n.d.)	Private; programme page	Full page
BA in English programme page	BRAC University (n.d.)	Private; programme page	Indexed extract
OBE Curriculum, BA (Hons) in English	North East University Bangladesh (n.d.)	Private; OBE curriculum	Parts A–B
BA (Hons) in English curriculum	Varendra University (2023)	Private; OBE curriculum	Parts A–B
OBE Curriculum, BA (Hons) in English	Sylhet International University (n.d.)	Private; OBE curriculum	Parts A–B

Analytical procedure

The WPR analysis proceeded in four stages. Each document was first read closely and memoed for its stated purposes, problems and proposed solutions. Each was then interrogated with the six WPR questions, working backwards from proposed solutions and attending to key terms (quality, skills, employability, job market, human capital, outcomes, English, literature, humanities, liberal arts), binaries (skills/knowledge, practical/theoretical) and absences. Third, a genealogical reading traced the problem representation from the 2006 strategic plan (as summarised in UGC, 2018) through the 2010 policy, the 2018 plan, the 2020–2021 template and framework, the 2024 manual and the 2026 draft plan. Fourth, departmental texts were read as sites of translation and contestation. Themes were developed iteratively and reflexively (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Appendix A records, for each document, the evidence for each WPR question, providing an audit trail.

For the credit analysis, every course in the six curricula with complete course lists was classified as literature, language (skills, linguistics, ELT and professional communication) or other (general education, history, philosophy, Bangla, translation, creative writing, media, cultural studies and research methods). The thesis and project credits and the viva voce were not included. Classification rules are given in Appendix B. The analysis is descriptive—that is, it demonstrates the importance of literature in curriculum documents, not what is taught or selected.

Reflexivity, trustworthiness and ethics

The study is carried out from within the context of English studies in Bangladesh, where familiarity with these genres makes for a positive review but may simultaneously lead to a negative review of their decline. Using the seventh step from Bacchi, we pose the question: What does the image of the "vanishing literature student" presume, and does it romanticise a curriculum that has been formed by colonial and class privilege (Viswanathan, 1989)? This credit analysis was included in part to test that story, and it didn't; it passed. Trustworthiness is based on the documents being publicly available, the audit trail that is included in Appendix A, and the purposeful search for disconfirming

documents. Under common institutional policies, this study does not require ethical review as no human subjects are involved and only publicly available documents are analysed. Institutions are named because their documents are public, and what is analysed are discourses and structures, not individuals or departments.

Results and Discussion

Four themes emerged (Table 3). The first two concern how the problem is represented in national texts; the third and fourth concern how that representation is translated into departments and how departments respond.

Table 3
Themes, main evidence and WPR questions

Theme	Main evidence
Unemployability as a deficit of quality and skills	SPHE; BNQF; OBE template; BAC manual; 2026 draft plan; NEP 2010 (genealogy)
A hierarchy of useful knowledge	SPHE on intake, competencies, budgets and communicative English; 2026 draft plan
Technologies of translation	OBE template; BNQF domains; BAC Standard 4; departmental outcomes and mapping matrices
Credits, streams and counter-discourse	Credit analysis; stream structures; NSU enrolment figures; departmental vision statements

Unemployability as a deficit of quality and skills

The SPHE locates the problem of graduate unemployment in the quality of higher education. It links low labour productivity, unemployment and underemployment to sub-optimal quality, an absence of skills and the low technological intensity of education, and proposes converting a large population into human capital (UGC, 2018, §A.4). It commits to incorporating elements of employability into every degree programme and to awarding degrees on the acquisition of substantive skills as well as knowledge (UGC, 2018, p. 23). The OBE template states that curricula should be driven by the goal of "bridging the gap between Job market demand and supply of skilled Graduates" (UGC, 2020, Preface). The BNQF presents itself as a means to "narrow the gap between the worlds of education and work" (UGC, 2021, p. 13). The BAC manual lists skill mismatch among the issues institutions must address (BAC, 2024, p. iii) and describes an outcome-based system "focusing on what a graduate can do rather than what she/he has learnt" (BAC, 2024, p. 2).

In WPR terms, these solutions imply a supply-side problem: graduates lack the skills employers want, and universities fail to produce them. What the representation leaves unproblematic is demand. Tertiary unemployment reached 12% in 2022, the highest of any education level (Star Business Report, 2023), which raises questions about graduate job creation and about the rapid expansion of enrolment that the SPHE itself documents (UGC, 2018, §A.5). Neither appears in the texts as part of the problem. Responsibility is assigned to universities, departments and ultimately graduates — the move from structural conditions to individual investment that Foucault (2008) and Brown (2015) associate with neoliberal reason.

The genealogy shows that this representation was not inevitable, and that it has persisted across political change. The National Education Policy 2010 frames higher education largely in humanistic terms: inquisitiveness, free thinking and a scientific, secular, liberal and humane outlook (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 23). It commits the state to "resist use of education as a commodity to reap profits" (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 2), while also defining higher education's purpose as building skilled manpower

(p. 23). By 2018 the humanistic vocabulary survives mainly in vision statements; by 2020–2024 it has become the technical language of outcomes and attainment. The UGC's draft 2026–2030 plan, prepared after the 2024 change of government, lists graduate job readiness through "demand-driven education" as its first priority, alongside university–industry ties, AI-enabled teaching and outcome-based education in all universities by 2030; the humanities are not mentioned (Business Standard, 2026). The rationality is therefore not the policy of one government but a durable governmental settlement.

A hierarchy of useful knowledge and the silence of literature

The SPHE ranks knowledge by usefulness. It proposes rationalising public-university intake so that students do not crowd into "subjects and disciplines which do not impart the required skills" (UGC, 2018, §A.7). Its list of the competencies graduates will need runs from science and technology, business, communication and ICT to agriculture and the life sciences (UGC, 2018, §A.9); the humanities are absent. This hierarchy acquires financial force: the plan recommends linking budget allocations to enrolment by discipline and to the importance of course offerings for the job market, rationalising smaller departments, and setting tuition by subject demand (UGC, 2018, p. 48). In private universities, which depend on tuition as their only earnings (UGC, 2018, §D.13), enrolment already performs this function.

Humanistic value is relocated rather than erased. The 2006 plan, as summarised in 2018, called for due emphasis on liberal arts education to prepare creative leadership (UGC, 2018, §1.3). The 2018 plan assigns a cultural role to a future flagship university (§E.4) and asks curricula to reflect liberation-war history, cultural diversity and ethics (§B.12). Culture and ethics reappear as national values and as the mission of an elite future institution, not as disciplinary knowledge such as literature. English, meanwhile, enters policy as communicative skill. The 2010 policy makes English a compulsory three-credit subject at degree level (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 24), and the SPHE calls for courses in communicative English to make graduates globally competitive (UGC, 2018, §B.13). In policy terms, the ELT turn is written into the national plan while English literature is left unnamed.

Technologies of translation

The template, framework and manual carry this rationality into departments. The OBE template requires programme educational objectives (PEOs), programme learning outcomes (PLOs) and course learning outcomes mapped onto one another and onto the university mission, using Bloom's taxonomy, whose capabilities it describes as not restricted to any subject area (UGC, 2020, Appendices A–C). Its worked example is a management programme, and its drafting committee came from education, veterinary pathology, naval architecture, law, management and evaluation (UGC, 2020). The BNQF requires every programme to express its outcomes through four domains — fundamental, social, thinking and personal — and sets 140 credits for a four-year bachelor's degree (UGC, 2021, pp. 10, 13–14); the accreditation manual's description of the social domain draws on the World Economic Forum's categories of social skills (BAC, 2024, p. 2). The manual's curriculum standard requires curriculum committees with employer and alumni representatives (Criterion 4.1), graduate attributes derived from stakeholder needs (4.2), PLOs that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (4.4) and work-integrated learning (4.9) (BAC, 2024, pp. 25–27).

Departmental documents show these technologies at work. Islamic University names one of its nine PLOs "Employability" and aims to equip graduates with soft skills for the fourth industrial revolution (Islamic University, 2021, pp. 5–7); its mapping matrix links almost every core course, including *Introduction to Poetry* and *Romantic Poetry*, to all nine PLOs (pp. 8–9). The mapping functions less as a claim about what each course teaches than as a ritual of compliance — the performativity Ball (2003) describes and the specification problem Hussey and Smith (2002) identify. Comilla University justifies its first-semester course *Learning Language Through Literature* by reference to the local job market and links its listening-and-speaking laboratory to graduate employability (Comilla University, 2022, pp. 23, 48). North East University Bangladesh describes its university mission as career-oriented and its degree as a gateway to journalism, information technology and management (North East University Bangladesh, n.d., pp. 4–5). East West University's objectives include training IELTS and TOEFL assessors and ELT materials designers (East West University, n.d.), and North South University states that its curricula focus on preparing students for employment and leadership (North South University, n.d.). All three public curricula include a course in English for Professional Purposes (Comilla University, 2022; Islamic University, 2021; University of Dhaka, 2020).

These translations are not false; literary study does develop communication and critical thinking. But they are reductive. They present literature as a generic means of producing transferable skills, detached from particular texts, histories and forms, and they invite departments to describe themselves as producers of employable graduates — the subjectifying effect governmentality analysis anticipates (Rose, 1999).

Credits, streams and counter-discourse

The credit analysis qualifies any simple story of decline. In all six curricula with complete course lists, literature remains the largest category, holding between 44% and 61% of classified credits (Table 4). Language, linguistics, ELT and professional communication hold 18–35%, with the highest shares at the University of Dhaka and Islamic University. The fastest-growing category in the private curricula is neither literature nor ELT but professionalised general education: Sylhet International University requires courses in career planning, entrepreneurship and "psychology and profession", and North East University Bangladesh requires introductions to business, economics and law (North East University Bangladesh, n.d.; Sylhet International University, n.d.).

Table 4
Credit shares by category in six English BA curricula (% of classified credits)

Curriculum (sector)	Credits classified	Literature	Language, linguistics and ELT	Other
University of Dhaka (public; compulsory core only)	80	55.0	35.0	10.0
Islamic University, Kushtia (public)	141	46.8	31.9	21.3
Comilla University (public)	132	61.4	22.7	15.9
North East University Bangladesh (private)	144	47.9	18.8	33.3
Varendra University (private)	132	61.4	18.2	20.5
Sylhet International University (private)	130	43.8	20.8	35.4

Note. Viva-voce, thesis and project credits excluded. Dhaka figures cover the compulsory core (semesters 1–6); in semesters 7–8 students take eight of ten electives, six of them literary. Classification rules are given in Appendix B.

Where students choose, the picture changes. The University of Dhaka offers an MA in Applied Linguistics and ELT (University of Dhaka, 2020, p. 29) and an MA in English with a literature specialisation (University of Dhaka, n.d.). BRAC University offers specialisations in literature, ELT and applied linguistics, and media and cultural studies (BRAC University, n.d.). East West University offers an MA in TESOL and an MA in English, the latter also with a literature specialisation (East West University, n.d.). The department at North South University reports that nearly 85% of its undergraduates major in linguistics and almost 95% of its graduate students choose TESOL (North South University, n.d.). This figure comes from one undated departmental page and cannot be generalised or causally explained: student preference, advising and staffing may all play a part. It shows, however, that where programme architecture turns disciplinary commitment into a menu, literature can become a minority choice even in a large department. Combined with enrolment-linked funding (UGC, 2018, p. 48), the menu makes enrolment the measure of a stream's legitimacy.

The same documents contain counter-discourse. The University of Dhaka aims to develop a "liberal humanistic attitude" in its graduates (University of Dhaka, 2020, p. 47). East West University lists among its general objectives to "Promote humanitarian causes in a world dominated by commercial motives" (East West University, n.d.), naming the rationality its specific objectives otherwise serve. Varendra University states that its programme offers a concentration in English literature and gives more than three-fifths of its credits to it (Varendra University, 2023), and Comilla University's mission speaks of nurturing humanity through thoughtful ideas (Comilla University, 2022, p. 10). Curricula increasingly include Bangladeshi and South Asian writing in English, migration and environmental literature, African and Caribbean literature, human rights and literature, and translation (Comilla University, 2022; Islamic University, 2021; University of Dhaka, 2020; Varendra University, 2023), and North South University's department is hosting a 2026 conference on the future of the human and the humanities (North South University, n.d.). We read these as counter-discourses inscribed in governing texts. Whether they shape teaching and choice is a question for the next phase of the project; within outcome matrices and accreditation criteria, humanistic purposes must still be translated into the domains those instruments recognise.

Discussion

Employability problematisation in a postcolonial, donor-shaped system

International research shows that employability discourse makes universities instruments for producing employable subjects (Boden &Nedeva, 2010) and that skills agendas rest on contestable problem representations (Salmon, 2024; Woo, 2023). The Bangladeshi case extends this in three ways. First, the rationality arrived through a distinctive route: market reform promoted by international financial institutions and domestic elites (Kabir, 2013; Kabir& Chowdhury, 2021), a strategic plan prepared with World Bank support (UGC, 2018) and internationally circulating technologies such as qualifications frameworks and Bloom-based mapping. Second, it has survived a change of government and remains intact in the 2026–2030 draft plan. This indicates that the problematisation of employability is a governmental settlement rather than a partisan

policy. Third, it meets a discipline with a colonial past. English in Bangladesh is a former colonial language, a class marker and a commodity (Hamid et al., 2013; Hamid & Rahman, 2019; Phillipson, 1992). Policy focuses on the communicative and test-oriented aspects of English and omits those related to interpretation, history and critique. This can be termed a 'selective commodification of English' rather than an 'invasion' of one discipline by another, that is, by ELT.

Where literature vanishes

The credit analysis enhances the argument. There is no literature being taken away from these curricula; indeed, the largest part of literature subjects is literature-led. The literature student is lost in the other texts that construct the meaning of higher education: the national ones that frame the purpose of higher education; the outcome matrices that prescribe a language of employability for all courses available; and, if there is a menu as part of programme architecture, from enrolment. A discipline can thus be retained without any justification. This is the more accurate meaning of "vanishing" that the evidence supports, and it suggests that defending literature by counting courses misses the point.

Beyond disciplinary rivalry and governing through templates

ELT initially grew for pedagogical reasons (Alam, n.d.), which still hold true. What has changed is the rationality under which both fields operate. ELT fits the dominant problem representation more readily, since its objectives can be expressed as skills; however, ELT is also redefined, as objectives oriented towards international test preparation show (East West University, n.d.). The line of division runs between forms of knowledge that translate readily into measurable outcomes and those that do not (Biesta, 2010; Lorenz, 2012). No document orders the closure of literature courses; a template asks for outcomes, a criterion asks for employer representation and a budget recommendation links funds to enrolment. Mapping poetry to employability is a small example of performativity at the level of the department (Ball, 2003, 2012), extending research on academic subjectivity (Archer, 2008; Ylijoki& Ursin, 2013) from individual academics to the institutional self that departments must perform.

The humanities question from the South

Defences of the humanities by Collini (2012) and Nussbaum (2010) assume public funding and secure academic employment that are uneven in Bangladesh, where most English programmes are fee-funded. The Indian debates of the early 1990s (Joshi, 1991; Sunder Rajan, 1992) asked English studies to justify themselves against postcolonial critique; Bangladeshi departments now face that critique and an audit regime at once. The counter-discourses found here suggest a Southern response that answers both: reframing literary study through Bangladeshi, South Asian and postcolonial writing, environmental and human-rights concerns, and translation. This responds to the colonial critique of the canon (Viswanathan, 1989) and offers a case for literature's local relevance that does not depend on the employability frame.

Theoretical Implications

The study makes three theoretical contributions. First, the concept of *employability problematisation* names a mechanism through which neoliberal rationality reorganises disciplines without explicitly targeting them: legitimacy is conferred on knowledge to the

extent that it can be shown to remedy a problem defined elsewhere. Second, the study shows how WPR can be extended from national policy to departmental self-description and, combined with a simple credit analysis, to curricular weight, so that the discursive and material effects of a problem representation can be read together. Third, it adds a postcolonial dimension to debates on the humanities by showing how decolonial and market critiques of English studies intersect, and why a defence of literature in the Global South cannot simply reproduce the defence of the canon.

Conclusion

This article set out to explain how the reorganisation of Bangladeshi English departments around ELT and employability has been made to appear necessary. Its answer is that the changing position of English literature is best understood not as the defeat of literature by ELT but as the effect of a governmental rationality that represents graduate unemployability as the central problem of higher education. In the 2018 strategic plan, literature is not mentioned at all, communicative English is mentioned as a skill, and labour demand is not mentioned at all, even in the draft 2026–2030 plan, which includes communicative English. Literary study is turned into generic competencies by templates and qualifications frameworks, as well as accreditation standards; and enrolment is a criterion of the legitimacy of a stream through menu-based programme architectures. This rationality is partially captured by the departments, which partly embody it and partly challenge it through humanistic and postcolonial goals set in the same documents that position poetry in relation to jobs.

The credit analysis further elucidates the main illustration in the article. Literature continues to be important in literature-led curricula, with most credits still allocated to it. The "vanishing literature student" is thus less a vanishing than a redefining – students who read to understand are slowly being replaced, in policy and programme documents, by students who acquire skills to compete. It is at the level of rationale, where the pressure on literature is greatest, that a discipline can retain its credit without retaining its rationale.

The results from this study must be interpreted with some cognisance of the study's limitations. The analysis is based on public documents which reveal the representation and justification of restructuring, but not the negotiations that take place in committees, classrooms and careers. The departmental sample is purposive, includes more private than public institutions and contains one programme page that is only available in indexed form. The national enrolment figures are from a post-2024 national press report of a draft plan, while the North South University figures are from one undated page. Credit shares reflect published curricula, not teaching or student selection, and the classification of mixed courses is subjective.

These limitations suggest three possible areas for future research. This project's second phase will involve a collaborative autoethnography with literature academics, examining how the problematisation of employability is lived, negotiated and resisted within day-to-day academic practice (Chang et al., 2013; Gair et al., 2021). Enrolment figures by discipline and stream, combined with research findings about why students select disciplines of study (literature or ELT), would provide an opportunity to examine the extent to which a student's decision on a discipline is influenced by labour-market signals. Comparative studies—of English departments in other parts of South Asia or of other humanities disciplines in other higher education systems—would determine whether the same problematisation is found in other disciplines and systems.

Recommendations

The findings suggest recommendations at four levels.

For English departments, strategic redescription in the language of skills carries costs, because each translation narrows what can be said about the discipline. Departments should state the purposes of literary study in their own terms — interpretation, historical understanding, ethical imagination, and multilingual and translational competence — before mapping them onto required outcome domains. Literature and ELT colleagues should develop integrated courses that draw on both fields (Paran, 2008) and a shared critique of mechanical outcome mapping, rather than competing for enrolment.

For universities, programme reviews should record the intellectual purposes of each stream alongside enrolment and graduate destinations. Fee-dependent institutions can protect small but intellectually central fields through shared cores, cross-subsidy and advising that presents literature as a substantive option rather than a residual one.

For the UGC and the Bangladesh Accreditation Council, OBE guidance and the 2026–2030 action plan should recognise discipline-specific outcomes alongside BNQF domains, provide humanities exemplars alongside the existing management example, and include humanities academics in the committees that draft templates and standards. Accreditation reviewers should be guided to assess the coherence of a programme's intellectual purposes, not only the completeness of its mapping matrices.

For national policymakers, graduate unemployment should be addressed as a labour-market and development problem as well as an educational one. Policies that seek to close the "gap between education and work" should attend to the demand for graduate labour and should not rank disciplines by short-term employability alone.

Declarations

Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Considerations

No human subjects or personal information was used in this study. It is based exclusively on published books that are accessible to the public (and publisher descriptions and epitexts) cited in the references. Ethical approval was not necessary.

AI Use Statement

Generative AI (ChatGpt and Grammarly) was used for language editing and condensing text. It was not used for the data collection, coding the corpus and drawing

findings. All text generated by AI is reviewed and edited by the author, and the author is responsible for the article's content.

Data Availability Statement

The data analysed are all published data, as mentioned in the references. The 39 corpus books are listed verifying, with the verification sources. The coding frame and coded dataset are available on reasonable request from the author

References

Alam, F. (2007). *Imperial entanglements and literature in English*. Writers.ink.

Alam, F. (2021). *Reading literature in English and English studies in Bangladesh: Postcolonial perspectives*. Writers.ink.

Alam, F. (n.d.). English studies in Bangladesh. *LitWrite BD*. Retrieved November 10, 2026, from https://litwritebd.com/english-studies-in-bangladesh/

Alam, M. J., Ogawa, K., & Islam, S. R. B. (2022). Importance of skills development for ensuring graduates employability: The case of Bangladesh. *Social Sciences, 11*(8), Article 360. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11080360

Archer, L. (2008). The new neoliberal subjects? Young/er academics' constructions of professional identity. *Journal of Education Policy, 23*(3), 265–285. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930701754047

Ashton, D., Bennett, D., Hope Bulaitis, Z., & Tomlinson, M. (2023). In the name of employability: Faculties and futures for the arts and humanities in higher education. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 22*(2), 103–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/14740222231160409

Bacchi, C. (2009). *Analysing policy: What's the problem represented to be?* Pearson Education.

Bacchi, C. (2012). Why study problematizations? Making politics visible. *Open Journal of Political Science, 2*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2012.21001

Bacchi, C., & Goodwin, S. (2016). *Poststructural policy analysis: A guide to practice*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-52546-8

Ball, S. J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy, 18*(2), 215–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043065

Ball, S. J. (2012). Performativity, commodification and commitment: An I-spy guide to the neoliberal university. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 60*(1), 17–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2011.650940

Bangladesh Accreditation Council. (2024). *Accreditation manual* (2nd ed.). https://juniv.edu/center/4169/file/11695

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Labour force survey 2022*. Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning.

Biesta, G. J. J. (2010). *Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics, democracy*. Paradigm Publishers.

Boden, R., &Nedeva, M. (2010). Employing discourse: Universities and graduate "employability". *Journal of Education Policy, 25*(1), 37–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930903349489

BRAC University. (n.d.). *Bachelor of Arts in English (BA in English)*. Department of English and Humanities. Retrieved November 10, 2026, from https://www.bracu.ac.bd/avilable-program/bachelor-arts-english-ba-english

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Brown, W. (2015). *Undoing the demos: Neoliberalism's stealth revolution*. Zone Books.

Business Standard. (2026, July 23). UGC drafts 5-year roadmap to transform higher education. *The Business Standard*. https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/education/ugc-unveils-draft-five-year-higher-education-reform-plan-1495856

Carter, R. (2007). Literature and language teaching 1986–2006: A review. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 17*(1), 3–13. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2007.00130.x

Chang, H., Ngunjiri, F. W., & Hernandez, K.-A. C. (2013). *Collaborative autoethnography*. Left Coast Press.

Chowdhury, R., &Kabir, A. H. (2014). Language wars: English education policy and practice in Bangladesh. *Multilingual Education, 4*, Article 21. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13616-014-0021-2

Collini, S. (2012). *What are universities for?* Penguin.

Comilla University. (2022). *OBE curriculum of Bachelor of Arts in English (sessions 2022–23, 2023–24, 2024–25)*. Department of English. https://cou.ac.bd/storage/app/public/upload/academic/1783581607.pdf

Davies, B., &Bansel, P. (2007). Neoliberalism and education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 20*(3), 247–259. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390701281751

Dean, M. (2010). *Governmentality: Power and rule in modern society* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

East West University. (n.d.). *Undergraduate programs: Department of English*. Retrieved November 10, 2026, from https://flass.ewubd.edu/english-department/undergraduate-programs

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry, 8*(4), 777–795. https://doi.org/10.1086/448181

Foucault, M. (1991). Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (pp. 87–104). University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979* (G. Burchell, Trans.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Gair, S., Hager, T., & Herzog, O. (2021). *Compliance and resistance within neoliberal academia: Biographical stories, collective voices*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66318-6

Gill, R. (2009). Breaking the silence: The hidden injuries of neo-liberal academia. In R. Flood & R. Gill (Eds.), *Secrecy and silence in the research process: Feminist reflections* (pp. 228–244). Routledge.

Hamid, M. O., &Erling, E. J. (2016). English-in-education policy and planning in Bangladesh: A critical examination. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *English language education policy in Asia* (pp. 25–48). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-22464-0_2

Hamid, M. O., Jahan, I., & Islam, M. M. (2013). Medium of instruction policies and language practices, ideologies and institutional divides: Voices of teachers and students in a private university in Bangladesh. *Current Issues in Language Planning, 14*(1), 144–163. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2013.771417

Hamid, M. O., & Rahman, A. (2019). Language in education policy in Bangladesh: A neoliberal turn? In A. Kirkpatrick & A. J. Liddicoat (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of language education policy in Asia* (pp. 382–398). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315666235-27

Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.

Holmes, L. (2013). Competing perspectives on graduate employability: Possession, position or process? *Studies in Higher Education, 38*(4), 538–554. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.587140

Hoque, N., Uddin, M., Ahmad, A., Mamun, A., Uddin, M. N., Chowdhury, R. A., &Alam, A. H. M. N. (2023). The desired employability skills and work readiness of graduates: Evidence from the perspective of established and well-known employers of an emerging economy. *Industry and Higher Education, 37*(5), 716–730. https://doi.org/10.1177/09504222221149850

Hussey, T., & Smith, P. (2002). The trouble with learning outcomes. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 3*(3), 220–233. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787402003003003

Islamic University. (2021). *Outcome-based education curriculum for Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in English, session 2021–2022*. Department of English, Islamic University, Kushtia. https://apa.iu.ac.bd/public/images/notice/9e71b9ba3bf3b6d83736170c3c069814.pdf

Joshi, S. (Ed.). (1991). *Rethinking English: Essays in literature, language, history*. Trianka.

Kabir, A. H. (2013). Neoliberalism, policy reforms and higher education in Bangladesh. *Policy Futures in Education, 11*(2), 154–166. https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2013.11.2.154

Kabir, A. H., & Chowdhury, R. (2021). *The privatisation of higher education in postcolonial Bangladesh: The politics of intervention and control*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429266607

Lorenz, C. (2012). If you're so smart, why are you under surveillance? Universities, neoliberalism, and new public management. *Critical Inquiry, 38*(3), 599–629. https://doi.org/10.1086/664553

Marginson, S. (2013). The impossibility of capitalist markets in higher education. *Journal of Education Policy, 28*(3), 353–370. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2012.747109

Ministry of Education. (2010). *National education policy 2010*. Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. https://www.share-netbangladesh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/28-National-Education-Policy-2010-English.pdf

North East University Bangladesh. (n.d.). *Outcome-based education (OBE) curriculum: B.A. (Honors) in English*. Department of English. https://www.neub.edu.bd/files/syllabus/obe/BA(Hons)_ENG.pdf

North South University. (n.d.). *Department of English and Modern Languages*. Retrieved November 10, 2026, from https://northsouth.edu/academic/shss/lml.html

Nussbaum, M. C. (2010). *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities*. Princeton University Press.

Olssen, M., & Peters, M. A. (2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy, 20*(3), 313–345. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930500108718

Paran, A. (2008). The role of literature in instructed foreign language learning and teaching: An evidence-based survey. *Language Teaching, 41*(4), 465–496. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480800520X

Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford University Press.

Rahman, M. M., & Hu, G. (2025). From hypernationalism to neoliberalism: A multi-level policy analysis of English medium instructional practices, management, and ideologies in Bangladeshi (private) higher education. *English Today, 41*(2), 137–142. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078424000221

Rahman, M. M., & Pandian, A. (2018). A critical investigation of English language teaching in Bangladesh: Unfulfilled expectations after two decades of communicative language teaching. *English Today, 34*(3), 43–49. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026607841700061X

Readings, B. (1996). *The university in ruins*. Harvard University Press.

Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge University Press.

Saleque, S. (2024). Disinvesting and devaluing the humanities: The precipitous decline of a liberal arts education in the tertiary sector. *Critical Insights, 3*(1).

Salmon, M. (2024). Skills mismatch or skills mishmash? Problem representation in England's Lifelong Loan Entitlement policy. *Higher Education Policy, 37*, 494–511. https://researchportal.bath.ac.uk/en/publications/skills-mismatch-or-skills-mishmash-problem-representation-in-engl/

Shore, C. (2008). Audit culture and illiberal governance: Universities and the politics of accountability. *Anthropological Theory, 8*(3), 278–298. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499608093815

Slaughter, S., & Rhoades, G. (2004). *Academic capitalism and the new economy: Markets, state, and higher education*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Star Business Report. (2023, October 26). Nearly 8 lakh graduates unemployed. *The Daily Star*. https://www.thedailystar.net/node/3453156

Sultana, S., Roshid, M. M., Haider, M. Z., Kabir, M. M. N., & Khan, M. H. (Eds.). (2021). *The Routledge handbook of English language education in Bangladesh*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429356803

Sunder Rajan, R. (Ed.). (1992). *The lie of the land: English literary studies in India*. Oxford University Press.

Sylhet International University. (n.d.). *Outcome-based education (OBE) curriculum: BA (Hon's) in English*. Department of English. https://siu.edu.bd/download/OBE%20Syllabus,%20Department%20of%20English%20B.A%20Hons%20Program_1780756018.pdf

Tomlinson, M. (2012). Graduate employability: A review of conceptual and empirical themes. *Higher Education Policy, 25*(4), 407–431. https://doi.org/10.1057/hep.2011.26

University Grants Commission of Bangladesh. (2018). *Strategic plan for higher education in Bangladesh: 2018–2030*. Ministry of Education. https://iqac.baiust.ac.bd/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Strategic-Plan-for-Higher-Education-in-Bangladesh-2018-2030.pdf

University Grants Commission of Bangladesh. (2020). *Template of outcome based education (OBE) curriculum*. https://www.ewubd.edu/storage/app/media/IQAC/Manuals/OBE%20Templete-UGC.pdf

University Grants Commission of Bangladesh. (2021). *Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework (BNQF) Part B: Higher education (Level 7–10)*. https://archive.sust.edu/uploads/documents/BNQF-Bangladesh-2021-1662520122.pdf

University of Dhaka. (2020). *BA Honours handbook (from session 2020–2021)*. Department of English. https://ssl.du.ac.bd/fontView/images/syllabus/1655100276EnglishDept.SyllabusB.A.Honsfrom2020-2021.pdf

Varendra University. (2023). *Curriculum: Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in English, Spring 2023*. Department of English. https://vu.edu.bd/public/storage/uploads/syllabus/1761628497_BA_in_English_OBE_Curriculum_(Spring_2023).pdf

Viswanathan, G. (1989). *Masks of conquest: Literary study and British rule in India*. Columbia University Press.

Woo, E. (2023). What is the problem represented to be in China's world-class university policy? A poststructural analysis. *Journal of Education Policy, 38*(4), 644–664. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2022.2045038

Ylijoki, O.-H., & Ursin, J. (2013). The construction of academic identity in the changes of Finnish higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 38*(8), 1135–1149. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.833

Appendix A. WPR analysis by document

Table A1
Evidence for the six WPR questions in each document

Document	Problem represented	Presuppositions and genealogy	Left unproblemati	Effects	Dissemination and contestation
NEP 2010	Low quality; skilled manpower alongside humanistic aims	Education as human development and human capital	Humanistic aims vs skills	English a compulsory 3-credit skill subject	Anti-commodification commitment as resource
PHE 2018–2030	Unemployme t and low productivity a a quality and skills deficit	Human capital theory; World Bank-supported planning; from 2006 plan	Labour demand; job creation; enrolment expansion	Intake rationalisation; job-market-linked budgets; communicative English	Humanities relocated culture, ethics and a flagship university
BNQF 2021	Education–work gap	Outcomes in four generic domains	Disciplinary knowledge	140-credit degree; generic outcomes	Binding via BAC accreditation
OBE template 2020	Job-market gap; end-user dissatisfaction	Measurable outcomes; Bloom's taxonomy as subject-neutral	Interpretive outcomes	PEO–PLO–CLO mapping in all programmes	Management exemplar; no humanities drafters
BAC manual 2024	Skill mismatch graduate competitivene s	Stakeholder and employer needs define curricula	Disciplinary purposes	Employers on curriculum committees; work-integrated learning; SMART PLOs	Accreditation scores enforce compliance
Draft plan 2026–2030	Job readiness; demand-driven education	Employability rationality persists after 2024	Humanities; labour deman	OBE everywhere by 2030; AI; industry ties	Press-reported draft; open to consultation
University of Dhaka	Skills; globalisation	Literature-led humanism with ELT stream	Enrolment pressures	EPP, ICT skills, careers service	"Liberal humanistic attitude"; literature-majority core
Islamic University	Graduates for the Fourth industrial revolution	Skilled professional graduates (OBE)	Poetry–employability fit	PLO named "Employability" all courses mapped to all PLOs	Ecocriticism; South Asian and Afro-Caribbean literature
Comilla University	Global job-market competition	Literature as route to language and jobs	Literature's own purposes	Employability -linked skills labs; EPP	Nurturing humanity; Bangalee writers in English
North South University	Employment and leadership challenges	US-benchmarked curriculum	Why students choose linguistics	Three streams; ~85% UG linguistics, ~95% MA TESOL	2026 humanities conference
East West University	Professional success via communicatio n	English as gateway to professional life	General vs specific objectives	IELTS/TOEFL and ELT training; MA TESOL	"Humanitarian causes in a world dominated by commercial motives"

BRAC University	Not stated in extract	Three specialisations	Not determinable	Literature one of three streams	Not determinable
North East Univ. Bangladesh	Career readiness	English as gateway to IT, management, journalism	Literature's distinct value	Business, economics and law in general education	Space to explore life language and literature
Varendra University	Careers; workplace adaptability	Literature focus with ELT and media options	Labour demand	Workplace-adaptability PLO	Literature over three-fifths of credits; human rights and literature
Sylhet Intl University	Employment; fourth industrial revolution	Professionalised General education	Literature's distinct value	Career and entrepreneurshi courses	Ecocriticism, postcolonial literature, translation

Appendix B. Classification rules for the credit analysis

Literature: courses whose primary object is literary texts, literary history, or literary theory and criticism, including literatures in translation, postcolonial and world literatures, ecocriticism and literary surveys.

Language, linguistics and ELT: language-skills courses (listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, academic writing), professional and business communication, English for Professional Purposes, linguistics and its sub-fields, phonetics, second language acquisition, ELT and TESOL methods, teaching practicums and technology-assisted language learning. Comilla University's Learning Language Through Literature was classified here because its stated aims are language and employability.

Other: general-education courses (Bangladesh studies, history, philosophy, economics, business, law, psychology, ICT, sustainability, career planning, entrepreneurship), Bangla language and literature, translation studies, creative writing, media and film studies, cultural studies and anthropology, and research methodology.