

# SOUTHEAST ASIA

## A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

### ARTICLES

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*AKM Ahsan Ullah*

Signs in the linguistic landscape as markers of  
an ethnic group's identity and ownership  
*Paolo Coluzzi*

A comparative study on motivation in foreign  
language learning in Brunei and Malaysian  
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Rohingya Refugee Response Encircling South  
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The Grateful migrants: Indians and  
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Administrative Reforms in South and  
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Public Service Delivery  
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**Aims and scope**

South East Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal (SEAMJ) marked its 20th year of publication in 2020, having been published annually by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) since 2000. While the regional focus of the journal is South East Asia and, therefore, most of the articles reflect and relate to this geographical region, articles may still be considered if the topics are of relevance and have significant implications to the region. SEAMJ aspires to become a leading platform for the publication of original and path-breaking research catering to Southeast Asian regional and global readership.

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## Editorial

### COVID-19 and Southeast Asia

*AKM Ahsan Ullah\**

Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal (SEAMJ) has stepped into its 20<sup>th</sup> year in 2020. SEAMJ is published biannually by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). Its disciplinary focus encompasses the whole range of humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. SEAMJ is dedicated to advancing knowledge on a range of areas (such as English Language and Linguistics and Literature; Environmental Studies; Geography and Development; Historical and International Studies; Professional Communication and Sociology-Anthropology) that relate to the South East Asian region.

We are releasing the 20<sup>th</sup> Volume (Issue 1) of the SEAMJ amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic— a nightmarish milestone in the pandemic history (Ullah et al., 2021). The coronavirus, for far, has killed more than 2.6 million people across the world. In today's modern healthcare system, the toll that COVID-19 exacts is unimaginable. About 120,042,087 people have been infected (Worldometers, 2021). About 90 per cent of the international flights have been grounded, about 200 countries underwent either full or partial lockdown, millions of jobs were lost, which resulted in a shocking number of people falling into extreme poverty and facing serious threats to food security (Caballero-Anthony, 2021; Ullah et al., 2021).

Though the virus has not spread as rapidly in Southeast Asia as in other parts of the world, Southeast Asia (SEA) was not entirely spared. SEA was not out of the havoc the COVID-19 has inflicted on the world. As compared to the European, South and North American nations, SEA is handling the pandemic fairly well (World Bank, 2020). Along with the health, economic and political impact of COVID-19 in SEA could no way be flouted. However, the economy has been seriously impacted, with economic contraction averaging between 4% and 7% across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries (Caballero-Anthony, 2021).

Though southeast Asian countries have moved fast to apply technological measures (Ullah and Ho, 2020) to address and combat COVID-19 (United Nations, 2020) responses to the pandemic undertaken by individual ASEAN

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member countries were enormously diverse (Djalante et al, 2020). The deployment of these mitigation measures was instrumental in thwarting the spread of COVID-19. The measures ranged from strict lockdown conditions in the highly regulated city-state of Singapore to 'business as usual'. 'The Covid-19 management responses differs clearly between countries, ranging from ministerial level centralized responses (for example, Brunei, Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia) through to decentralized task forces (such as Indonesia and Lao DPR) that comprise public-private, private-societal and co-governance partnerships between medical service providers, government agencies, private and corporate financiers and civil society organizations (Djalante et al, 2020:7)'.

Southeast Asian healthcare sectors exhibit varying degrees of preparedness, and more than half of the subregion's countries are vulnerable because of weak health systems, including Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines and Timor Leste (United Nations, 2020). However, some Southeast Asian countries have efficiently escaped the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Brunei Darussalam is one the best examples. The Brunei government effectively crafted a four-stage de-escalation plan with a budget allocation of BND15 million to meet viral outbreaks and emergencies (Hamdan and Case, 2021).

Hamdan and Case (2021) made an argument that Brunei benefitted during this pandemic by enclave economy and dispersed energy founts, which left the country less porous and densely urbanized than its other SEA countries. The relatively insulated and diffuse population has aided significantly in thwarting the transmission rate (Hamdan and Case, 2021; Ullah and Kumpoh, 2018).

As cases spiked around the world, Brunei responded most rapidly (Hayat, 2021) by ministerial communication with live events conducted daily on television and through social media, substantiated by round-the-clock hotline services for inquiries about COVID-19 (Hamdan and Case, 2021). The Ministry of Health swiftly embraced the regulations formulated by the World Health Organization, such as social distancing and self-isolation, as well as contact tracing through the BruHealth application to which some 90 per cent of citizens subscribed (Bodetti, 2020). Brunei has been able to reopen its economy much earlier than many countries afflicted with COVID-19.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Volume (Issue 1) of SEAMJ publishes five articles. The first one: Signs in the linguistic landscape as markers of an ethnic group's identity and ownership by *Paolo Coluzzi*, argue that the link between the land and the language/s spoken (or that used to be spoken) can only become visible through the linguistic landscape, which not only asserts identity and ownership but can also help to reinforce prestige and vitality of the languages employed.

The second article: A comparative study on motivation in foreign language learning in Brunei and Malaysian Universities by *Farhana Amirah Pg Redzuan*,

is a critical analysis of past studies by Ainol and Isarji's (2009) on foreign language learners at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), and Farhana's (2019) study on Universiti Brunei Darussalam's (UBD) foreign language learners' motivation. The third article: Rohingya Refugee Response Encircling South Asian Geo-politics: Debriefing India's Stance from Bangladesh Perspective by *Santa Islam*, presents an analysis on one of the most pressing issues in the world is the geopolitical aspects of diplomatic divergences between India and Bangladesh regarding the Rohingya population. The fourth article: The Grateful migrants: Indians and Bangladeshis in Singapore in times of COVID-19 by *Diotima Chatteraj*, investigates how varied ways COVID-19 has impacted the lives of the migrant workers in Singapore and highlights the migrant workers' belief if Singapore's effort has been enough for them during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fifth article: Administrative Reforms in South and Southeast Asia: Enhancing the Capacity for Public Service Delivery by *Muhammad Azizuddin*, aims at looking into the administrative reform—a special public policy instrument of governments—is to improve the capacity of public service delivery systems in South and Southeast Asia.

SEAMJ has released a 'call for paper' for a special issue on COVID-19 and Southeast Asia. The Coronavirus Disease Outbreak-2019 (COVID-19) has had a far-ranging global impact. Southeast Asia is no exception. The impact of COVID-19 on this region has had a direct effect on its economy. The diversity of the region has posed serious issues of human security on a massive scale, resulting in a stagnation of economy, mobility, trade and human relation. This special issue welcomes all perspectives on this topic through articles grounded in original first-hand empirical research—be it on the basis of (online) texts or actual fieldwork—that fall under social science or humanities research, and that consider the social, economic, cultural and/or political impact of this unprecedented crisis on Southeast Asian societies. Papers (5,000 to 7,000 words) along with abstracts (150 words) are to be sent to Chief Editor: seamj@ubd.edu.bn by 15th of August 2021. We are expecting to have this special issue published at the end of 2021.

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## Signs in the linguistic landscape as markers of an ethnic group's identity and ownership

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### Abstract

Whereas the geography of a certain area is certainly linked in many ways to the ethnic group occupying it (or who used to occupy it), the link between the land and the language/s spoken (or that used to be spoken) can only become visible through the linguistic landscape, which not only asserts identity and ownership but can also help to reinforce prestige and vitality of the languages employed. The problem is that if the local heritage language is a minority or regional one, only in few cases can it be used to affirm the identity and ownership of its speakers. There are two *sine qua non* conditions for the local language to appear in the linguistic landscape: 1) The language must have gone beyond the 'threshold of literacy', i.e. it must have developed as a written language, with its own orthography and literature; 2) The language must be allowed to be used in the linguistic landscape and /or enjoy a degree of official recognition. This article presents five case studies on the presence of local minority/regional languages in the linguistic landscape based on the author's research: two in Italy (Udine and Milan) and two in Southeast Asia (Kuala Lumpur and Bandar Seri Begawan, the capitals of Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam respectively). The very interesting situation in Macao will also be touched on, where the colonial language, Portuguese, has been given prominence in the linguistic landscape in spite of the fact that only a tiny percentage of the population can speak it. In this case, Portuguese is portrayed as a kind of heritage language (as well as an international language) that does not need to be mastered as its main function is symbolic, i.e., to help Macao retain its special status as a Special Administration Region of China.

*Keywords:* Brunei Darussalam, Italy, linguistic landscape, Macao, Malaysia, regional/minority languages, 'threshold of literacy'.

### Introduction

Whereas the geography (including architecture) of a certain area is certainly linked in many ways to the ethnic group occupying it (or who used to occupy it), the link between the land and the language/s spoken (or that used to be spoken) can only become visible through the linguistic landscape, which not only asserts identity and ownership but can also help to reinforce prestige and vitality of the

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languages employed. This link between language and territory which can be reinforced through the use of the local language in the linguistic landscape, can be seen as an example of the ideology of language-and-territory as defined by Myhill (1999). The problem is that if the local heritage language is a minority or regional one, only in few cases can it be used to affirm the identity and ownership of its speakers. There are two *sine qua non*-conditions for the local language to appear in the linguistic landscape: 1) The language must have gone beyond the 'threshold of literacy', i.e. it must have developed as a written language, with its own orthography and literature (see Coluzzi, 2012a); 2) The language must be allowed to be used in the linguistic landscape and/or enjoy a degree of official recognition.

To prove the point, this paper presents five case studies based on the research on the presence of local minority/regional languages in the linguistic landscape in two Italian cities (Udine and Milan) and two Southeast Asian countries (Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam, with a focus on their capitals, Kuala Lumpur and Bandar Seri Begawan respectively). The very interesting situation in Macao will also be touched on, where the colonial language, Portuguese, has been given prominence in the linguistic landscape in spite of the fact that only a tiny percentage of the population can speak it.

Apart from the one carried out by the author and focused upon in this article, relatively little research has been published to date on the presence of minority/regional languages in the linguistic landscape of the four countries looked at in this article. As far as Italy is concerned, articles have been published on the presence of German varieties in South Tyrol and Piedmont (Plank, 2006; Dal Negro, 2009), of Slovene in Friuli Venezia Giulia (Tufi, 2013; Blackwood & Tufi, 2015; Mezgec, 2016), and of various regional languages in different Italian coastal cities (Blackwood & Tufi, 2012 and 2015) and on-road signs in Northern Italy (Puzey, 2012). As for Malaysia, most of the published research so far has concentrated on Kuala Lumpur, the capital, and its surrounding area, looking at Malay and English, but also at minority languages, particularly Chinese and Tamil (Syed Abdul Manan et al., 2014; David & Syed Abdul Manan, 2015; Supramani et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2016 and 2017; Wang & Xu, 2018). With regard to Brunei, only one article on the linguistic landscape has been published to date (Susilawati Japri, 2016). Finally, as for Macao, three articles are available on the visibility of Chinese, English and Portuguese (Neves, 2016a and 2016b; Radwańska-Williams, 2018), the latter being one of the few minority languages dealt with in this article that enjoys an official status (the others being German, Slovene, Friulian and Sardinian in Italy, all recognized minority languages). Interestingly, the results provided by most of this research, whether published before or after the author's research, seem to corroborate those arrived at in his own articles.

## Italy

### Udine

Friulian, the Romance minority language spoken by about half a million people in the autonomous region of Friuli Venezia Giulia in north-east Italy, enjoys official status as a minority language in Italy and possesses a standard variety with an official orthography (see Coluzzi, 2007). In spite of this, its presence in the linguistic landscape is scarce. The research was carried out in 2008 (Coluzzi, 2009) in one major street in the city of Udine (Via Aquileia), the second largest town in the region and the ‘capital’ of the Friulian speaking area, showed a very limited number of signs displaying this language.

Two hundred units of analysis were recorded in Via Aquileia (Coluzzi, 2009). 172 (86%) of them were in Italian only, 25 (12.5%) contained one or more other languages in addition to Italian, and 3 (1.5%) were monolingual in English.

As for the languages employed in the multilingual signs, in 22 cases out of the 25 where one or more languages were present in addition to Italian, this language was English (88%), in 3 cases it was French (12%), in 2 it was German (8%), whereas Slovenian, Croatian and an unidentified Indian language appeared only in one unit each (4%). In 4 cases, only it was Friulian (16%).



Table 1. Signs in Udine.

	Via Aquileia (Udin/Udine)
Units in Italian only	172 86%
Units containing another language with or without Italian	28 14%
Units displaying at least one sign in Friulian	4 16%

Figure 1. Sign in Friulian: ‘Jo o feveli furlan’ (I speak Friulian).

### Milan

Milan is the second-largest city in Italy and the administrative centre of the Lombardy region. The heritage language of Lombardy and some bordering areas, which include Canton Ticino in Switzerland, is Lombard, a Romance regional language that has not been recognized yet by the Italian state and only enjoys very limited protection granted by a recent regional law (Coluzzi, Brasca, Trizzino & Scuri, 2018). It’s been calculated that about 3.5 million people speak one of the Lombard varieties. Even though a unified orthography is available

now (Scriver Lombard), various orthographies are being used to write the different Lombard varieties, and sometimes even the same variety. Some of these orthographies have been in use for a long time, to write mainly poetry, but also other genres (Coluzzi, Brasca & Miola, 2019).

One hundred eighty-eight units of analysis were counted in Via S. Gottardo (Coluzzi, 2009). 143 (76%) of them were in Italian only, 41 (21.8%) contained one or more other languages in addition to Italian, and only 4 (2.1%) were monolingual in another language that was not Italian, in this specific case in English.

As for the languages employed in the multilingual signs, in 40 cases out of the 41 where one or more languages were present in addition to Italian, this language was English (97.5%), in 4 cases it was French (9.7%), in 2 it was German (4.8%), whereas Milanese, the local Lombard variety – in the same way as Turkish, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek and even Latin – appeared only in one unit of analysis (2.4%).

Table 2. Signs in Milan.

	Via S. Gottardo (Milan)
Units in Italian only	143 76%
Units containing another language with or without Italian	45 24%
Units displaying at least one sign in Lombard	1 2.4%



Figure 2. A sign in Lombard, Milanese variety: 'Se parla anca el Milanese (Milanese is also spoken).

#### Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur)

In spite of being a very linguistically diverse country featuring around 140 languages, most of which are still quite vital (Ethnologue, 2018; Coluzzi, 2017), in most cases, only three languages are quite visible in the Malaysian linguistic landscape: first of all Malay, the national language, and English, and secondarily Chinese on enterprises belonging to Chinese owners. Tamil, too, can be found in the linguistic landscape, but less frequently. By law Malay has to appear prominently even on the signs of private enterprises (even though this is not always implemented, see Syed Abdul Manan et al., 2014), whereas English also enjoys high visibility as a prestigious international language and Malaysia's second language. Chinese is the only minority language in Malaysia that is quite ubiquitous, at least in Kuala Lumpur, along the Western coast of peninsular Malaysia and in Malaysian Borneo. Tamil, normally written using its traditional script, is most visible in the various Indian neighbourhoods ('Little India') that can be found in most cities along the Western coast. Malay

normally appears written in Roman characters, but the old Arabic-derived script known as Jawi is still occasionally used. Its use is actually compulsory for shop signs in the north-eastern state of Kelantan Terengganu (Coluzzi, forthcoming). What is rather peculiar about Malay is that it seems to enjoy rather low prestige among the large non-Malay minority, to the point that this tends to make minimal use of it in the linguistic landscape of 'private' places that are not regulated by law, such as the places of worship.

In fact, within places of worship attended exclusively or almost exclusively by one ethnic group (such as Chinese Taoist, Hindu or Sikh temples) the use of the ethnic language (often in combination with English) dominates and clearly marks the space ethnically (Coluzzi & Kitade, 2015). As far as Chinese is concerned, it is normally written in Chinese characters, but names are often Romanised, partly to highlight the ethnic origin of the shop owner, which is in most cases Cantonese or Hokkien. It is the size of the Chinese and Tamil communities, the fact that both Chinese (Mandarin) and Tamil are important literary languages that enjoy official status respectively in China, Taiwan and Singapore, and in Tamil Nadu (India), Sri Lanka and Singapore, and the high literacy rates in these languages of most Malaysian Chinese and Tamils (due to the presence of national-type Chinese and Tamil schools) that have contributed to these languages enjoying such visibility. Apart from a few exceptions, all the other minority languages, including some that are quite widely spoken, such as

Iban in Sarawak or Kadazandusun in Sabah, are virtually invisible. This is sometimes due to lack of standardization (lack of a recognized orthography), limited literary use, absence (or in a few cases very limited presence) in education, and/or the low prestige they enjoy.



Figure 3. Trilingual sign in Petaling Jaya (Malay, Chinese and English).



Figure 4. Chinese writings in Sam Kow Tong Chinese temple in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur.

### Brunei (Bandar Seri Begawan)

In spite of its small size, Brunei is a very diverse country, even though the government's homogenizing policies have made standard Malay overwhelmingly present in the linguistic landscape, even though it is virtually nobody's first language (Coluzzi, 2011). Here, too, English, in spite of not

enjoying any official status, is as visible as the national language. In fact, 63 out of the 102 units of analysis examined along Jalan Sultan in the capital Bandar Seri Begawan in 2009, showcased standard Malay, written in Roman characters and/or Jawi, whose use in the linguistic landscape is compulsory in Brunei; English, on the other hand, was found in as many as 64 units of analysis. The only minority language found in the capital's linguistic landscape was Chinese, which appeared in 19 units of analysis; however, as new signs in Chinese have been outlawed, the presence of Chinese is expected to shrink over time (Coluzzi, 2012a, 2012b and 2016).

Table 3. Signs in Bandar Seri Begawan.

Language	Units
Standard Malay	63 61.7%
English	64 62.7%
Chinese	19 18.6%
Other languages	4 3.9%



Figure 5. Bilingual sign in Bandar Seri Begawan (Malay in Jawi and English).



Figure 6. A multilingual sign in Bandar Seri Begawan (Malay in Jawi, Malay in Rumi, Chinese and English).

### Macao

Macao is a former Portuguese colony on China's southern coast, now a special administrative region in the People's Republic that enjoys a high degree of autonomy. Macao's case is very interesting. Whereas Malaysia and Brunei feature many language minorities, some of them very large such as the Chinese, but their languages are either totally invisible or only appear on some bottom-up units of analysis, in Macao a language that is spoken by a tiny percentage of the population, Portuguese (4022 individuals in 2011, i.e. 0.74% of the total population, Neves, 2016, p. 45), enjoys an overwhelming official presence in the country. According to my own research carried out in Largo do Senado, the main central square, in 2016, most of the 56 units of analysis recorded showcased Chinese, Portuguese and English. Forty-seven units of analysis had signs in Chinese, 37 in Portuguese, 31 in English and only 1 in another language.

Table 4. Signs in Macao.

Language	Units
Chinese	47 83.9%
Portuguese	37 66%
English	31 55.3%
Other (Italian)	1 1.7%

Macao's government is spending a considerable amount of its budget to guarantee this Portuguese image to the region, without neglecting English, though, which, being both a prestigious international language and one of Hong Kong's official languages, is not relegated to bottom-up signs. And this is done mainly for symbolical purposes, to help Macao retain a distinct identity from the mainland and, therefore its autonomy (Neves, 2016a and 2016b).



Figure 7. Bilingual writing in Macao (Chinese and Portuguese).

Figure 8. Trilingual sign in Macao (Chinese, Portuguese and English).



## Discussion

As the case studies discussed in this article show, the visibility of local minority languages in all the places surveyed is minimal or null. Minimal, when the language has been developed, at least to an extent, with an accepted orthography and some literature, and/or when the language is recognized and protected by law. Null, when the language does not even have an accepted orthography and is not recognized as a minority language. Chinese (and partially Tamil in Malaysia) is an exception. It is a vital widespread language, an official in China, Taiwan and Singapore. Even though it does not enjoy official recognition in Brunei and Malaysia, most Chinese in these countries attend Chinese schools and can enjoy a wide array of media in Mandarin (and even in Cantonese and sometimes in Hokkien) (see Coluzzi, 2011 and 2017b). It is a sort of 'majority-minority language, whose presence in the linguistic landscape marks the presence of ethnic Chinese and their own territory, even though this might be limited to one neighbourhood in a city or even one shop or temple. This, unfortunately, does not happen with other minority languages, even those that have been recognized as co-official such as Friulian or Slovene in Italy. One can travel through Udine or Milan without even realizing that the local heritage language is not Italian. The local linguistic landscape sends a very clear message

– these cities and their inhabitants are Italian, not even Italian and Friulian, or Italian and Lombard, just Italian. To external eyes, the local minorities do not have a territory. Therefore they do not exist.

As for Malaysia or Brunei, the autochthonous language minorities do not have a space that other people could recognize as belonging to them – the non-Chinese or non-Indian are just lumped together as Malaysians, and, if they are Muslim, even as Malay. A tourist travelling through Malaysia, in fact, would mainly see signs in Malay, Chinese or occasionally Tamil in addition to English, which would lead to the idea that Malaysian territory only belongs to the Malay, Chinese and Indian with English as a sort of lingua franca; on the other hand, the same tourist travelling in Brunei would see the country not only as Malay but also as Muslim thanks to the ubiquity of Jawi. By and large, nation-states want to portray only one identity (and language), the national one (see Coluzzi, 2012b). It is in a way paradoxical that these countries try subtly to repress linguistic diversity, even to the point of causing their own local languages to disappear, whereas Macao is strongly supporting a ('majority') minority language chiefly to mark Macao's identity as Cantonese-Portuguese. What most governments do not understand is that creating a strong local identity through the use of the local language in the linguistic landscape is not only a sign of respect for the local community and a chance for them to assert their own identity and ownership, but it could even contribute to tourism and trade of local products, as the local language would make the place and its products special and unique. It would be good if all linguistic minorities would be able to mark their presence and/or territory with signs in their own language, but in order to do so, official recognition and a degree of corpus planning are necessary so that a relatively uniform orthography could be used that speakers would understand and externals could relate to the minority living in the area.

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## **A comparative study on motivation in foreign language learning in Brunei and Malaysian Universities**

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### **Abstract**

Universiti Brunei Darussalam has been fostering the study of foreign languages in Brunei to expand their undergraduates' accessibility in the job market and overall give them equal opportunities to have a quality foreign language learning experience. This paper is a critical analysis of past studies by Ainol and Isarji's (2009) on foreign language learners at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), and Farhana's (2019) study on Universiti Brunei Darussalam's (UBD) foreign language learners' motivation. A focused investigation at how different motivation types, namely intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative, affect foreign language learners at the university level in Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia. A pattern observed in Brunei and Malaysian universities is that intrinsic motivation is the foundation of foreign language learning. Bruneian undergraduates are learning out of interest, and their Malaysian counterparts are learning because they enjoy the experience. While the university's language policy determines the number of students learning a foreign language each semester, the outcome is still highly dependent on the student's motivation to learn the foreign language.

*Keywords: Motivation: intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative and instrumental, foreign language learning, Brunei, Malaysia*

### **Introduction**

In most Asian countries, children learn their second language when they enter primary education (Singmaster, 2013). For most of them, this would be English, depending on the country and the school. They understand that in the future, a foreign language is an economic commodity that will lead to an opportunity to participate in the global economy (Ainol & Isarji, 2009). This paper discusses the types of motivation undergraduates have when learning a foreign language at a university level. Taking Ainol and Isarji's (2009) case study on Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) to compare to Farhana's (2019) study on motivation in the local university, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. Both studies look into the kinds of motivation that affect foreign languages' learning and the reasons they made their language

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choice. A similar category of both studies is the exploration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In addition to those findings, Farhana (2019) also explores instrumental and integrative motivation. By comparing the universities, the study hopes to provide insight on the types of motivation that are prevalent among university students in the region. It also hopes to gain a better understanding as to why university students in Brunei and Malaysia learn foreign languages and compare the direction each country has for their undergraduates when they offer foreign languages at the university level.

### **Overview of Foreign Language Learning (FLL)**

When communities or nations undertake to be multilingual, it raises concerns on identity, culture, and even self-determination (Meyerhoff, 2006). The country's decision in selecting language(s) to be officially or nationally recognized brings about many social effects within the community. For a majority of South-East Asian countries that hold a colonial history and are at the very least have a bilingual society, shifting to being a multilingual society through language policies contributes to a progressive national identity for the speakers. Qiang Liu and Turner (2018) define the term 'national identity as the historical and cultural traditions, values, ideals, beliefs, national sovereignty, and so on of a citizen of their own country. So a progressive national identity is a positive social development of the citizens, and this growth embraces the progress of the linguistic changes the country experiences. In a way, when a person is learning a language, the learner experiences the learning process through the target community's language and culture (Liddicoat and Kohler, 2012). This indirectly influences the identity of the learner because of the integration of the language in their daily life.

Nababan (1981) suggests that we need language in order to socialize and communicate with others. Socialization takes place at three different levels, and at each level, language plays a different function. The first level of the socialization process is the home upbringing; the second is the school education; and lastly, the apprenticeship of life and work. With that, learners are constantly learning the language systems and how they play a role in their socializing process. By categorizing language learning in these three different sections, Nababan (1981) explains that the home upbringing establishes anyone's first language (L1), and the next stage is the school stage where communication is used to let the learner accumulate information in order for them to communicate in a language. The last stage is the post-school stage, where the individual's immediate interaction is in the workplace and the society at large. Thus, when language changes its function, so will the motivation to learn a language. Thus, the type of socialization that is emphasized is the second level, the school education. This is to prepare the individual to adapt to the next level of socializing, which is life and work. Language learning has to adapt according to the speaker of the language to fit into the society they intend to belong to.

Dörnyei (1998) describes language as (a) a subject taught in school because it is a *communication coding system*, (b) an integral part of *an individual's identity* because it involves their mental capacities, and (c) most importantly, the *channel of social organization* where it is rooted by culture in a functional society. Therefore, Dörnyei suggests that language involves nurturing a language within a set of social cues that initially occurs in school and transition over time. As this happens, language acquisition becomes more complex as the learner develops lexical competence. When learners are at the university level, we can assume that they make decisions autonomously and are aware of their language choice. Learning foreign languages at the university level is becoming common around the world, and it has become necessary for the world of academia to investigate what drives students to pursue foreign languages at higher levels. Exploring why older students are driven to learn a foreign language is important because, ideally, the act of learning is a means to an end. A student that is willing to commit their time and put in effort in acquiring a language should, at the end of a certain period, expect results. At the same time, an institution's role would be to provide this skill at different levels, such as beginners to advanced levels. This, in return, would contribute to enhancing society's communication skills. Knowing how to enrich the interest of the learner's skill would benefit both the learner and the community as it could lead to better opportunities. Meyerhoff (2006) also suggests that institutional support promotes the vitality of a language and aids in its maintenance and use, through the extensive use of mass media, as a medium of instruction, and even in official government business. Hence, how the learner uses the foreign language is also significant. For this paper, the researcher will exclude the English language as Malaysia and Brunei perceive English as a second language.

### **FLL: Malaysia**

Based on a study committee on the future direction of language education in Malaysia (2010), language and linguistics have fitted well in Malaysian universities but must also be understood from a national perspective and not just as a subject in academia. In Malaysia, language affects them in various aspects such as:

1. Contributing to the national economy
2. The development of science and technology in Malaysia
3. Malaysian identities and nationhood

Dr Maszlee Malik, Malaysia's current Education Minister, has made efforts in the education system by getting students to learn foreign languages to make them capable of a third or a fourth language, including Arabic (Malay Mail, 2018). Also, the Malaysian Education Ministry has been collaborating at local and international levels to boost their efforts into getting the country to be

multilingual. Their projects involve participants from Indonesia, Brunei, Cambodia, Vietnam, and China.

There are many factors that contribute to successful foreign language learning, of which motivation is one. Learners of a foreign language do not necessarily know what exactly drives them to learn a language when it is for long periods of time. Most universities provide foreign languages with the purpose of giving students the opportunity to learn and expand their knowledge, but in some cases, this is achieved by giving the students a direction. Due to having no specific goals for the student after learning the target language, the universities produce graduates who are capable of communicating in multiple languages but with a skill that is underutilized and often overlooked by future prospects.

Vijaindren (2017) suggests that identity politics is also one of the issues raised when learning foreign languages in a country that favours their national language. In Malaysia, under the National Language Policy in Article 152 of the Malayan Constitution, Malay or *Bahasa Malaysia* is the national language of the country, but English is still used side by side in the government administration after the independence, especially in the Higher Court (Asmah Haji Omar, 1985). Today, English plays the 'second most important language' and to most Malaysians who referred to themselves as ESL (English as a Second Language) speakers (Asmah Haji Omar, 2007). However, Malaysians have anxiety even when it comes to the English language as speakers get shamed, or name-calling occurs for using English with others who do not share the same appreciation for the language (Vijaindren, 2017). Much support is needed from the Ministry of Education in enforcing English into the education system at different levels, which will help develop individuals in their future workplace. Considering that some Malaysians have a noticeable resistance to learn English as a Second Language, it would be expected that it would be harder for the government to insist on learning other foreign languages for their future. They need to realize that they need to increase their communication skills through English and foreign languages to compete globally.

### **FLL: Brunei Darussalam**

Brunei, having experienced British intervention in the past, has a similar education system to Malaysia, and with that, English plays an instrumental role in connecting Brunei to the rest of the world (Asmah Haji Omar, 2007). Jones (2008) observes that in general, Bruneians want to learn Standard Malay and English for instrumental purposes and Brunei Malay as a means of communication. However, in the context of Brunei, the community has become more open towards foreign languages in recent years as the number of undergraduates in the university learning FL has been increasing. Dr Joyce Teo Siew Yean, the current Assistant Vice Chancellor for Global Affairs at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) mentions that employers perceive having an extra language as an asset as it

increases the marketability of applicants looking for jobs and that employers believe it enhances international communication skills (Chin, 2015). According to Dr Noor Azam, the Japanese language is one of the top languages students enrol and minor in at Universiti Brunei Darussalam's Language Centre (Chin, 2015).

### **Overview of motivation**

Throughout the years, there has been several researchers defining motivation from different approaches. Dörnyei (1998, p.118) defines motivation as a "process whereby a certain amount of instigation force arises, initiates action, and persists as long as no other force comes into play to weaken it and thereby terminate action or until the planned outcome has been reached". He suggests that when motivation is initiated, it continues as long as there are no external forces that can interrupt the process. Another concept of motivation introduced by Pintrich and Schunk (1996) is that it is no longer just a mirror of forces such as instincts, volition, will and physical energy; neither is it caused by behaviour which is triggered by stimuli and reinforcement. From a cognitive approach, motivation is bounded by an individual's thoughts and beliefs (including emotions) that results in actions (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996).

Furthermore, motivation is also defined by patterns of thinking and belief which directs students' participation in the learning process (Ushioda, 2001). An example given that explains this is when students may have different learning goals; some may understand that learning in itself is an ability gained, while others see it as an opportunity to demonstrate their ability. Another example is how students evaluate their achievements; students may feel satisfied when achieving better than their peers, while others experience a sense of accomplishment by gaining knowledge or understanding. It would also be idealistic to say that motivation alone contributed to the success of the learning, but it is definitely an important aspect. Motivation does not equal achievement, which implies that motivation should not be deduced from a student's achievement test scores (Ames, 2001). Likewise, Bernaus, Wilson and Gardner (2009) define motivation as an individual's characteristics reflected on how motivated they are to learn the language. They suggested that motivation varies from an individual's goals, effort, emotional reactions towards their actions, perseverance and attentiveness.

### **Motivation: Intrinsic and Extrinsic**

This paper looks into four orientations of motivation. The first is *intrinsic* motivation which is defined by an individual's inherent pleasure and interest in the task (Noels, 2001). For example, when a student is learning a foreign language because it is fun, it gives them spontaneous satisfaction. The response felt by the student is what provides the student with the drive to learn a foreign language. Noels (2001) also defines *extrinsic* motivation as instrumental reasoning apart from personal interest, such as situations where students understand a foreign

language to exhibit their ability to do tasks and activities in a foreign language. The goal set by the learner is to impress others, so the involvement of an external factor is an extrinsic variable. These types of motivation are explored in both studies.

### **Motivation: Integrative and Instrumental**

*Integrative* motivation is defined as having an interest in learning a language to get closer to the target language community; being open to others' cultural groups and way of life (Gardner, 2001). Gardner also suggests that integrative motivation involves a student's emotional connection towards the cultural group, and at extreme levels, learners may completely identify with the target community and possibly withdraw from their original community. Dörnyei (1994) explains that *instrumental* motivation is actually 'well-internalized extrinsic motives' that revolve around the individual's goals in terms of employability. This is investigated in Farhana's (2019) study in order to examine further the manifestation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of foreign language learners.

### **Objectives**

The initial objective of Ainol and Isarji's (2009) study is to investigate the Malaysian students' motivation in learning foreign languages at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Their research questions are:

1. *What is the motivation of Malaysian students at UKM and UiTM to learn a foreign language?*
2. *Is there a difference between the motivation of Malaysian students at UKM and UiTM to learn a foreign language?*

In the case of the study on UBD's foreign language learning, the research questions from Farhana's (2019) are:

1. *What types of motivation do students learning a foreign language at Universiti Brunei Darussalam have?*
2. *What are the types of motivation that affect attractiveness, difficulties, and employability (motivational factors)?*

However, for the purpose of this analysis, it will explore the question stated below.

1. What are the types of motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative) that affect foreign language learning in UBD, UKM and UiTM?

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

Ainol and Isarji (2009) sampled more than 500 Malaysian undergraduates who are enrolled in foreign language classes and 18 staff members who are teaching at UKM and UiTM. In UKM, foreign language modules are offered as an option for students and are most likely taken by students who want to improve their grades.



In contrast, UiTM has a different language policy because it is a graduation requirement for all undergraduates. The students have to select one FL for three levels, and each FL is offered two hours a week for 14 weeks which means, the entire 3-level of FLL is completed within 84 hours.

For the case of UBD, the sample students are from the Language Centre and are made up of students that are from various faculties within the university but also from a partnered university called *Universiti Teknologi Brunei* (UTB). This arrangement allows UTB students to take only language classes from UBD as part of their program electives. Language modules are offered as optional modules outside the students' faculty, and some languages are offered as a minor after 6 modules/levels have been completed. The majority of the students registering for these classes are students who have to take modules outside of their faculty.

### **Sampling strategy**

There were over 500 students from UKM and UiTM; 52% from UKM, and 48% studied at UiTM. 77% of the participants were female, and 23% were male students. 71.7% of the students who participated were in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

The total number of participants in Farhana's (2019) study is 157 students from the Language Centre. Out of the 157 students, 12 participated in a follow-up interview. Given that there were 596 students in the UBD pool, the study only selected 157 participants to represent an equal number of students per group within each level. Since some of the foreign languages, such as French and Filipino, only had Level 1 and Level 2, while other subjects were until Level 3, Level 4, Level 5, or Level 6, which created inconsistencies in the number of participants. Since Levels 1 and 2 had higher populations, the participants were randomly selected. For Level 3 to Level 6, all that participated were taken into account because of the limited number of students registered in those classes. Therefore, there is a big difference in a number of participants between the UBD study and the one on Malaysian universities, but this may also be due to each university's total population, with UBD having a much smaller number. However, even with the smaller number of participants, it would not have made much difference on the findings because the study looks at different stages of their learning. By doing so, the study can look at the trends among students who are taking foreign languages for short periods and those who are completing the levels available.

### **Instruments and Procedures**

The instruments used for UKM were replicated with the participants from UiTM. Similar to the methods used to collect data from learners at UBD, Ainol and Isarji (2009) used a survey based on a six-point Likert scale, document analysis, and focus group discussions. Ainol and Isarji (2009) analysis method for their 16-item

questionnaire is through the Rasch instrument model using WINSTEPS version 3.48. Further analysis was done through *SPSS* software to provide descriptive statistical results of the different motives of learning foreign languages. The written documents that were reviewed by them relating to the course outline, programme policies, and course structure were acquired and analyzed appropriately.

The methods used by Farhana (2019) to examine the types of motivation among the undergraduates are through questionnaires and follow-up interviews. The participants were given a maximum of 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire to minimize intrusion because it was carried out in the participants' language classrooms, while the follow-up interviews were carried out separately. The participants were interviewed in spaces that were convenient for them, and the researcher targeted at least a 15-minute interview for each participant who volunteered. They were briefed each time before the data was collected, and during the interview, they were given the opportunity to look through the interview questions to help them prepare their answers better.

The questionnaire was designed specifically for the Language Centre as the items are directed towards the norms among Bruneian undergraduates. Items such as the students' language choices, the number of semesters they are in (duration), and the methods used to learn foreign languages. The questionnaire was structured into three sections: Section A was demographics, Section B consisted of multiple-choice questions, and Section C consisted of Likert-scales to test motivation factors and types of motivation. Section B's focus areas are in identifying the present FL and past learned FL, time factors, language use, types of motivation, motivation and functionality, and motivation and difficulties. Then, Section C is divided into two sub-sections; the first consists of I-statements to test the four types of motivation: intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative. The second sub-section contained socio-cultural statements and therefore excluded intrinsic motivation as it targets the external factors of oneself. The interview questions were structured as open-ended questions to allow the participants to express their opinions on FL learning in the Language Centre. It was made up of 9 questions; each question represents a focus area triangulating the questionnaire. These nine focus areas identified language choice, motivation and time consumption, the extent of motivation through learning methods, types of motivation, motivation and employability, motivation and difficulties, and suggestions for the improvement of FLL in UBD.

The data collected was tabulated on *Microsoft Excel* and analyzed through the program. All the interviews were recorded on a personal device and were analyzed by the researcher, and transcripts were provided where appropriate. The data from the interview were selected based on the themes of the study, which are the types of motivation and the motivational factors: attractiveness, difficulties, and employability.

## Results

### Demographics

There were over 500 students from UKM and UiTM; 52% from UKM, and 48% studied at UiTM. 77% of the participants were female, and 23% were male students. 71.7% of the students who participated were in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year. In comparison, there were only 157 participants to represent the students in Language Centre, UBD. That makes up 26.3% of the total population of foreign language learners at the university. 58.6% of the participants are female, 41.4% are male participants. Only 6% of the survey participants participated in the follow-up interviews.

The foreign languages that are selected to be taught in the universities may be influenced by the functionality of the language. Thus, Table 1 demonstrates the languages taught in each university. UKM provides eight languages, UiTM has 9, and UBD offers 7 languages. There are four foreign languages that are particularly not common among the universities. They are Thai, Spanish, Italian, and Filipino, with Italian being offered only in UiTM; Filipino only in UBD; while both Thai and Spanish are offered in both UiTM and UKM. This may indicate the demand for those languages in the Malaysian region. Malaysians learning Thai could be due to the geographic location as Thailand is at the North of the Malaysian peninsula.

Table 1 Foreign Languages in UKM, UiTM, and UBD

LANGUAGES	UKM	UITM	UBD
ARABIC	✓	✓	✓
JAPANESE	✓	✓	✓
FRENCH	✓	✓	✓
MANDARIN	✓	✓	✓
GERMAN	✓	✓	✓
KOREAN	✓	✓	✓
THAI	✓	✓	-
SPANISH	✓	✓	-
ITALIAN	-	✓	-
FILIPINO	-	-	✓

### Key Findings

What are the types of motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative) that affect foreign language learning in UBD, UKM and UiTM?

### UiTM: Intrinsic motivation

According to Ainol and Isarji's (2009) findings, the undergraduates from UiTM showed that they are significantly more intrinsically motivated to learn a foreign language compared to UKM students. Their reasons are as follows:

- I would really like to learn many foreign languages.
- Learning a foreign language is an enjoyable experience.
- I want to read the literature of another culture in the original language.
- It is important for everyone to learn a foreign language.
- If I were visiting a foreign country, I would like to speak the language of the people.

### UKM: Extrinsic motivation

In contrast to UiTM, the UKM students scored higher in extrinsic motivation such as follows:

- Other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language.
- My friend(s) encouraged me to learn a foreign language.
- My lecturer(s) encouraged me to learn a foreign language.
- I need to complete a foreign language requirement to graduate.

UKM students are motivated in order to fulfil their graduation requirements. The university has programs such as science politics and international business, which require them to learn FL. Although for the majority of the programs, the university policy does not require them to do so. The students are usually encouraged by their friends and lecturers to take up language classes because it is considered an easy course to score, especially at beginner levels, therefore getting higher CGPA.

Table 2 Intrinsic and Extrinsic items only from UKM and UiTM questionnaire

Item no	I learn a foreign language because (Extrinsic reasons)	UKM %	UiTM %
1	I think it will make me a more knowledgeable person	100	96.8
2	I think it will someday be useful in getting a job	99.6	96.8
3	My lecturer(s) encouraged me to learn a foreign language	98.9	87.0
4	My friends encouraged me to learn a foreign language	97.8	82.7
	I learn a foreign language because (Intrinsic reasons)		

5	I enjoy meeting and listening to people who speak other languages	97.5	93.7
6	Learning a foreign language is an enjoyable experience	95.3	95.6
7	It is important for everyone to learn a foreign language	70.3	95.2

\*Percentage of agreement

Table 2 is a list of statements that are only in the UKM and UiTM questionnaire that explore extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. UKM shows a high percentage of its participants agreeing with the statement, at above 95%, and only 70.3% believes 'it is important for everyone to learn a foreign language'. UiTM participants show they are more consistent with their intrinsic reasons, scoring above 90%. Their extrinsic reason is influenced once 'lecturers' (87%) and 'friends' (82.7%) are introduced as an influence to them learning a foreign language.

Table 3 Similar intrinsic items for motivation to learn a foreign language

Item no	I learn a foreign language because (Intrinsic reasons)	UKM %	UiTM %	UBD %
1	It will allow me to meet and converse with a variety of people	100	97.6	84.7
2	I will be able to participate in the activities of other cultural groups	100	96.0	50.3
3	If I were visiting a foreign country, I would like to be able to speak the language of the people	87.2	95.7	86
4	I want to read the literature of another culture in the original language	69.7	86.9	74.5
5	I would really like to learn many foreign languages	53.6	97.2	94.3

\*Percentage of agreement

Based on the items used in the instruments to explore the types of motivation in UBD, UKM, and UiTM, the first comparison of results is indicated with similar items tested. By looking at Table 3, it is clear that UKM has a high level of participants agreeing to the intrinsic motivation items. Statements such as 'It will allow me to meet and converse with a variety of people (100%)', and 'I will be able to participate in the activities of other cultural groups (100%)' shows how they intend to be communicative or have active roles once they are able to speak the language with others. While UiTM has a higher interest in conversing with a variety of people (97.6%) and because they 'would really like to learn many foreign languages (97.2%)'. For UBD, on the other hand, participants 'would really like to learn many foreign languages (94.3%)', and 'if I were visiting a foreign country, I would like to be able to speak the language of the people (86%)',

indicating the functionality of the language and their intentions of learning a foreign language.

Table 4 Similar extrinsic items for motivations to learn a foreign language

Item no	I learn a foreign language because (Extrinsic reasons)	UKM %	UiTM %	UBD %
1	I will need it for my future career	100	96.4	22.3
2	Other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language	99.6	92.9	30.6
3	I need to complete a foreign language requirement to graduate	98.9	94.0	61.1
4	People will think highly of me	78.8	85.3	30.6

\*Percentage of agreement

Extrinsic motivation is the other type of motivation that is examined in UKM and UiTM. Only four statements were comparable from both surveys. In Table 4, the statement 'I will need it for my future career' is agreed 100% by UKM, 96.4% by UiTM, and only 22.3% by UBD. This could indicate how foreign languages in valued in different universities and countries. Other statements such as 'I need to complete a foreign language requirement to graduate' are 98.9% in UKM, 94% in UiTM, and 61.1% in UBD. Again, this may be influenced by the universities' language policies and graduation requirements. The statements 'other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language' have similar results for UKM and UiTM, which could indicate how knowledge of a foreign language is a stereotype of how other people perceive people who are multilingual. Then 'people will think highly of me' reflected how participants feel that it adds to their value when they are capable of learning a foreign language. Both Malaysian universities indicated that more than half of the participants agreed, while the Bruneians only 30.6% agreeing. Perhaps this difference is due to their perception of FL in their respective countries, as learning of foreign language could signal a certain level of superiority and be privileged in the society.

Table 5 Intrinsic and Extrinsic items only from the UBD questionnaire

Item no	I learn a foreign language because (Extrinsic reasons)	UBD %
1	I want to impress my teacher and peers	22.3
	I learn a foreign language because (Intrinsic reasons)	
2	It gives me a sense of success/achievement	68.9
3	The language sounds beautiful to me	64.3

\*Percentage of agreement

In contrast to Table 4, Table 5 are intrinsic and extrinsic items that are from the UBD questionnaire. The extrinsic statement 'I want to impress my teachers and peers (22.3%) indicates how low foreign language learning is influenced externally at UBD. The two intrinsic statements 'gives me a sense of

success/achievement' (68.9%) and 'the language sounds beautiful to me' (64.3%) are two of the low-scoring statements categorized under the questionnaire's intrinsic statements.

### UBD: Instrumental and Integrative motivation

Table 6 Instrumental and Integrative motivation items only from the UBD questionnaire

Item no	I learn a foreign language because (Instrumental reasons)	UBD %
1	So I can get good grades because the language is easy to learn	35
2	I would like to work in the country of the language I'm speaking one day.	49.7
	I learn a foreign language because (Integrative reasons)	
3	I want to understand the culture of the language(s).	66.9
4	I want to share the same language with a person I idolize	28
5	I feel more comfortable with foreigners if I can speak a different language.	49.7

\*Percentage of agreement

Table 6 points out two types of motivation that are not explored by Ainol and Isarji (2009), which are integrative and instrumental motivation. The instrumental reasons that are asked are 'so I can get good grades because the language is easy to learn' (35%) and 'I would like to work in the country of the language I'm speaking one day' (49%). Taking language courses in UBD is not a requirement for students, and this is reflected in the findings, as students would usually take just the first level. 49% for working abroad is an indication of work expectations and opportunities students have when they acquire a foreign language.

The additional types of motivation, integrative and instrumental motivation, create a better and clearer categorization of identifying motivation. By doing this, extrinsic motivation can be seen to a deeper degree – extrinsic is an umbrella term that is associated with anything external to the individual, but by defining it as instrumental motivation, motivation is then understood as a tool used by the learner.

Below are two extracts of interviews carried out in Farhana's (2019) study to show how they are motivated to use foreign languages.

#### **Sample 1:**

36 T1: What motivates to *belajar bahasa Arab*? (What motivates me to learn Arabic?)

R: Yeah.

37 T1: I think for me its like..I..it's actually from social media.

R: ah..?

- 38 T1: *Cam..* like on twitter, I follow some people *yang* tweets in Arabic then *ada* on Instagram they *ada* post videos *yang* speaking in Arabic then from there *Macam ada* interest to actually understand *lah*. It's just more of the same *macam T2 jua*. *Cam sendiri atu mau lah*. Like the interest. (Like on twitter, I follow some people who tweet in Arabic and on Instagram, they post videos where they speak in Arabic. From there I started to have an interest to understand. It's just more of the same with T2. I personally want to. Like the interest.)

In Sample 1, the participant shows intrinsic motivation towards learning Arabic due to the exposure and use of social media platforms that is not in their first language. Identifying that foreign language is the key to accessing information pushes the participant to improve their skills.

#### **Sample 7:**

- 25 T4: umm...maybe like most realistically at most maybe going for like multi-national companies that are German or something.  
 R: Not exactly use the language as a whole right?  
 26 T4: Cause like...Yeah not use the whole language per se. But then like from a work culture point of view. Maybe working with people from German speaking countries.  
 27 R: So at least you get to communicate right?  
 28 T4: Like for example *Total* one of the oil and gas...yeah they're French. And all of them can kinda speak French and yeah.

Farhana (2019) suggests that participants are likely to use their foreign language in work environments where people of the target language are present. Giving themselves the opportunity to expose and communicate with foreigners ensures that the language they learned is beneficial for them.

#### **Discussions**

Intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in learning foreign languages at the university level. It is usually the driving force of participants to perform consistently throughout their undergraduate years. By depending on just having an interest in learning a foreign language, participants can actually maintain their ability to acquire language even when faced with difficulties such as failure. UBD students are very dependent on this statement alone, as agreed by 94.3% of participants, and it outweighs even incentives of earning better or having better job opportunities. Participants match this intrinsic drive with integrative motivation by adopting cultural norms of the language. With that, they can practise the way the target language is used among the community and indirectly feeds their curiosity about the language. By being able to learn the language, they create access to the society they want to be a part of.



UiTM also displays high intrinsic motivation towards foreign language learning. Participants are driven by their interest in culture and being able to speak to people with the same language. Furthermore, learning foreign languages is a graduation requirement for all undergraduates under the university policy. Therefore when they pick a language they want to learn throughout their programme, they ensure that it is fun for them so that they maintain their interest in learning. For UKM participants, however, their extrinsic motivation is higher than their intrinsic motivation. Learning a foreign language is not a requirement for them to graduate. Most participants are influenced by the lecturers and their friends to learn a foreign language. Also, foreign language is known to be easy to score and raise their overall grades, making it appealing for them. Perhaps pushing undergraduates towards integrative motivation and instrumental motivation would encourage deep-rooted and long-lasting foreign language learning.

### **The universities' language policy – indirectly the society's role**

One out of the three universities imposes foreign language learning as part of its undergraduate programme, and it does imply the role of foreign language within the system. Not only does it reflect the university's vision, but it also reflects the acceptance and importance of the roles of foreign languages among the locals. Even when Malaysia imposes most of their public universities to provide foreign languages for their students, it is not necessarily a requirement for them. Most students would initially enrol for a class out of obligation. In Brunei, although the foreign language is offered to students in the university, students are not expected to graduate with a completed minor in a language for cases where all levels of the foreign language are available for enrolling. For students who are able to reach the maximum level of 2 and 3 for their language, they would have been considered as completing the FL they selected. It is also not pushed by the government to obtain a foreign language as Brunei prioritizes the national language; *Bahasa Melayu* through the country's Malay Islamic Monarchy philosophy also known as *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB), and Malay is the language of the government alongside the English language (MABBIM, 2017).

### **Intrinsic motivation as the foundation of FLL**

Based on the findings in this study and comparing both countries, the common finding further emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation in learning a foreign language and how there is an opportunity for academia to mould their students into ensuring that they learn a foreign language. Intrinsic motivation is the ideal type of motivation, even when extrinsic motivation can drive an individual to proceed further because extrinsic motivation is dependent on external variables. Thus, when intrinsic motivation is paired with or is progressing towards integrative motivation, the possibility of the learner being competent in a foreign language, in the long run, is higher. This is because learners are not only investing their time to learn a language but also incorporating the target language's

culture and way of life into theirs. Therefore, doing so, it puts the learner in a more firm position to maintain the target language. Even with institutional support given to the learners, the demographics of the speakers still affect the vitality of the language (Meyerhoff, 2006). She mentions that even when a language has a very little social and economic role in a community, but the speakers of that language outnumber or grow in a concentrated area where another language is present; in the long-term, the language is maintained and improved. This is a possibility for foreign languages to be maintained among the learners, especially when learners are able to find communities of the target language. Referring to the interviews extracted from Farhana (2019), it shows to what lengths students are able to immerse themselves in their target language. Not only through classes but sources such as the internet, social media platforms, networking sites, and even minimal social interactions with foreigners would maintain their interest.

### **Challenges and strengths**

One major limitation is the number of universities that represent FL in Malaysia versus UBD as the only university in Brunei that offers a range of foreign languages to students. Although Brunei has another university that offers foreign language as part of their curriculum and university policy, they only practice Arabic due to the university being an Islamic university. The presence of UTB students in the Language Centre also meant that UTB could have participated as part of the research study that was carried out by Farhana (2019). Even if the students are learning under UBD, the data would have given a better understanding of why undergraduates learn foreign languages as it would be inclusive of another institution. In terms of the analysis of Ainol and Isarji's (2009) case study, the study is limited because they only target intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Not investigating both instrumental and integrative motivation restricts the data by not categorizing the items more rigorously because some statements would sound vague. In addition, the sample population from Ainol and Isarji (2009) is unclear because their levels were not specified; therefore, the parameters of the sample may not be easily compared because students were only categorized by the year they were in.

The comparison on Brunei and Malaysia provides an outlook on how foreign language learning is affected by the language policy established by the university while the government implements a separate set of policies that may not necessarily coincide with each other. However, since students are governed by the rules of the university as it affects them directly during their studies, it is easier for students to be run by this set of rules, enforcing FL learning as a requirement or as an option in their program. The methodology used by Ainol and Isarji (2009) to collect data on the Malaysian students was triangulated therefore giving both quantitative and qualitative data. The data collected from the interviews allowed a better understanding from the lecturers' point of view when it comes to FL learning in their respective universities. In comparison to Brunei, interviews were

a follow-up of the participants where they could reason out their answers when asked questions about their opinions in learning FL in UBD. Clarification of answers was achieved, and participants were also able to give their suggestions on how to improve foreign language learning among the Brunei undergraduates.

### Perspectives for future work

It would be interesting to delve into (a) the motivation of the Malay communities to learning foreign languages; that would give an interesting view of how the community is affected by foreign language in an area where Malay is the language of communication. Countries similar to Brunei and Malaysia can study how FL affects university students and can therefore estimate how it would also affect their education system because South East Asia is known for being multi-cultural and absorbs a diversity of languages in the society; (b) The impact of motivation when learning foreign languages at an earlier stage of education; this would help determine if by increasing the number of years learning a foreign language in school will help learners be more competent and prepare them for learning foreign languages at an advanced level at university.

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## **Rohingya Refugee Response Encircling South Asian Geo-politics: Debriefing India's Stance from Bangladesh Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to present a brief discussion on the geopolitical aspects of diplomatic divergences between India and Bangladesh regarding the Rohingya issue. Presently, more than a million people are living in 30 refugee camps in Bangladesh. In August 2017, the plight of Rohingya refugees broke all the previous record and had largely affected the Cox's Bazar region of Bangladesh when Bangladesh decided to provide shelter to the Rohingyas, identifying them as "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN)". Due to geographical closeness and historical linkage with both Myanmar and Bangladesh, India, despite taking strict measures to avoid any cross-border opportunities for Rohingyas, could not escape the consequences. Myanmar, due to its strategic position and natural resources, has always been the epicentre of attention and investment of foreign powers. The crisis has all the elements in it to create political turbulence in South Asia and South East Asia. A peaceful environment based on mutual trust and cooperation is required for the continuing economic growth of the region. Considering the importance of in-depth research in this arena, the study pursued the qualitative method.

*Key Words: Rohingya, refugee, South Asia, India, Myanmar, Bangladesh*

### **Introduction**

Due to geographical proximity and shared historical past, India and Bangladesh have a lot in common, e.g., cultural and political differences; and the internal affairs of the one has a spillover effect on another. The relationship between these two neighbouring countries has stood along with the tests of time. Both countries have been able to resolve most of their political differences like demarcation of maritime boundary, exchange of enclaves peacefully etc. Bangladesh came out as a nation-state on the world map following a bloody liberation war with the assistance of India. This formed the basis of the neighbourly relationship. This relationship underwent some periodical disturbances on a number of factors.

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Bangladesh and India enjoyed a steady period of their relationship, but India's silence following the Rohingya influx in Cox's Bazar region of Bangladesh has created an uneasy atmosphere since late 2017. India's traditional approach towards refugees, as has been seen with Bangladeshi refugees in the 1970s or Sri Lankan refugees in the 1980s and aspiration to behold the leadership role in South Asian politics, it was expected that the country would come forward to resolve the crisis. On the contrary, India did not take any reasonable stance against Myanmar's atrocities rather strengthened economic partnership. On September 26, 2019, India abstained from voting on a resolution titled "Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar" at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) (*UNHRC Vote on Rohingya*, 2019). The resolution was passed with 37 votes out of 47, but India's silence has exposed its diplomatic difference with Bangladesh. In this paper, the impacts of Rohingya refugee issues in South Asian geopolitics have been discussed based on the changing features of the India-Bangladesh bilateral relationship. Production of Rohingya Refugees: Debriefing India's Stance.

In May 2014, amid the speculation by the neighbouring countries, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under the leadership of Narendra Modi came to power in India. India's policy towards Bangladesh under his regime should be discussed under the broad framework of its foreign policy. Since the very beginning, there were different kinds of controversies regarding his election manifesto and foreign policy development. One group of academics and experts expected that under PM Narendra Modi, India would see some major shifts in foreign policy where others denied the speculation and predicted that India's foreign policy would focus more on continuity rather than change (Kashem & Islam, 2016). It was obvious that the Narendra Modi regime will focus more on domestic priorities along with increased regional connectivity and cooperation between BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) countries (Chaudhury & Samaddar, 2018). India's 'Neighbourhood first policy' received serious attention from the inception of his tenure. Moreover, it provided a renewed opportunity to India for strengthening its relations with bordering countries. Remarkably, the invitation to all SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation) member countries leaders in the oath-taking ceremony of Narendra Modi, clearly sends the message of their importance to him. During this period, India's stance towards the Rohingya crisis has changed swiftly. Since the Indian subcontinent was partitioned in 1947 following the colonial regime, it has witnessed continuous transboundary and forced internal migration arising from ethnic violence, economic scrutiny and other factors. Due to geographical proximity, the governments of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar in the post-colonial period has failed to control illegal immigration.

Since the 1970s, being subject to decades-old persecution, Rohingyas have continued to flee from Myanmar's Arakan state to neighbouring Bangladesh to find shelter. Bangladesh and UNHCR have kept them with certain restrictions in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar. In response to the 2012s exodus against Rohingya in Rakhine or the former Arakan state of Myanmar, Bangladesh took a strong stance to stop the inflow. At that time, Delhi considered the situation of Buddhist-Rohingya conflicts in Myanmar as their 'internal affair' while being sympathetic towards the Government of Myanmar (Home, n.d.). India allowed Rohingya refugees to enter its border without making it an issue in its domestic politics or in its bilateral relations with Myanmar. In December 2012, the then UNHCR and the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in his visit to India, highly appreciated India for its history of tolerance, understanding and policy of protecting and assisting refugees, as well as its strong adherence to the principle of non-refoulment and voluntary repatriation.

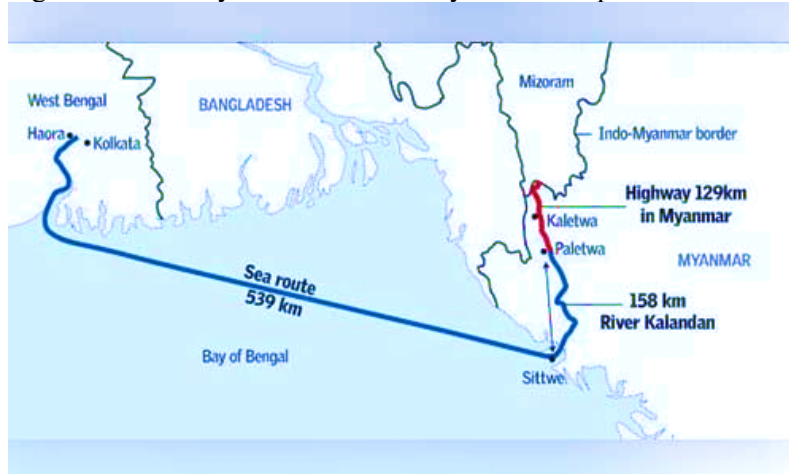
In 2015, the Rohingya crisis got a regional dimension when using their easy access to the high seas, they started their journey towards Malaysia, but before they could reach there, they were kidnapped and imprisoned in Thai border-detention camps. And many others got stranded in the high sea. Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia all turned away crowded boats carrying Rohingyas attempting to embark on their shores (Ullah & Chattoraj, 2018). This brought a serious humanitarian crisis, and the media called them 'Asia's boat people'. In 2015, India was hosting around 10,500 Rohingya refugees; by August 2017, it reached 40,000 despite their push back in borders. Geopolitics, security concerns, economic interests and humanitarian concerns worked as key factors to shape India's Rohingya response during this phase. India needs Myanmar to get access to Southeast Asian countries. Moreover, for the development of India's seven north-eastern states, connectivity and trade through Myanmar is important. India, hence, deliberately preferred to take the side of Myanmar to humanity as it was more concerned about its ties with its newly formed government rather than risking its inclination towards China.

India also has economic interests with its companies holding stakes in Shwe Gas field situated in the Rakhine State along with energy interests and plans to build cross-border pipelines. In order to connect the landlocked north-eastern region with other parts of India, to get access to the Bay of Bengal, link Kolkata under a joint project with Myanmar. According to the news reports of the India Times, India is investing in the construction of roads, development of Sittwe port, inland-waterway in the Kaladan River, Kaladan Multimodal Project in Sittwe, capital of Rakhine state (*India Myanmar: India All Set to Take over Ops in Myanmar's Sittwe Port after Chabahar - The Economic Times*, n.d.). India was more concerned that instability in the Rakhine State would have adverse effects on these interests. With growing security cooperation between the two countries, particularly in tackling cross-border ethnic



insurgency in their shared border regions, India carefully abstained from risking the development of bilateral relations between the two.

Figure 1: India-Myanmar Connectivity via Sittwe port



Source:  
*Countering  
 CHINA. India  
 all set to take  
 over ops in  
 Myanmar's  
 Sittwe Port  
 after  
 Chabahar,  
 Defence360  
 (January 10,  
 2019)*

Around 26 million Rohingya refugees reside in low-income and middle-income countries of the world with poor health systems (Cummings, 2020). Following decades of persecution and systemic violence in Myanmar, the Rohingya people, a stateless ethnic Muslim minority group, have sought sanctuary in the neighbouring coastal region of Bangladesh. In the wake of the 2012 riots in Rakhine, when the Rohingya Muslim community was targeted by extremist Buddhists, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) was formed with the aim of "defend, salvage and protect" the Rohingya against the systematic repression by the state "in line with the principle of self-defence". According to the media reports, the group had been under training since 2013, but their first attack was not until October 9, 2016, when they killed nine police officers. This attack led to a major military crackdown in the Rakhine state; the security forces got engaged in a mass shooting, torching houses, looting property, destroying food stocks, and raping women. This caused massive displacement of Rohingyas, and an estimated 87,000 Rohingya people fled to Bangladesh. During that period, India was wary of getting involved in the matter and overlooking the issue, following that India does not want to go back to the 1990s situation with Myanmar. The latest case of late 2017 indicates a similar pattern of events.

On August 25, as reported, ARSA launched a series of attacks on the police and military posts in northern Rakhine, which instigated subsequent security operations by the *Tatmadaw* (armed forces of Myanmar) and triggered violence across the

Rakhine region. Entire areas have been evacuated as terrified civilians have been fleeing from their inhabitants, villages being burned to the ashes, making it more difficult for people to return. Since then, more than 740,000 people from Myanmar have fled to Bangladesh; 55% of them are children ("Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh," 2020). This is considered the largest mass refugee movement in the region in decades. Moreover, an unidentified number of Rohingya people remain stranded, displaced from their residence or were forced to move in other parts of the three northern townships of Rakhine state.

Myanmar did not provide any sufficient data on the number of internally displaced Rohingya people, and following the security operation in the next few months and their unwillingness to reveal the exact situation of Rakhine, it was not possible for the international community to track down the real scenario. Most of the Muslims who fled their homes were involved in a long and dangerous journey on foot over difficult terrain. The refugees arrived in Bangladesh, their nearest destination; exhausted, hungry and traumatized by the atrocity they faced. People arrived carrying infants, young children and elderly family members. The voyage was more horrifying for the people with disabilities, injured and pregnant women. Some reached Bangladesh with injuries caused by gunshots, fire and landmines. Many people paid whatever they had to pursue the risky coastal journey to cross the border from the southern part of Maungdaw Township in small boats. Media reports showed repeated incidents of capsizing over-crowded boats in rough waters, and many others had drowned in the middle of their journey.

In the next few days' pictures of bodies being washed up on the shores in different places had been published. There have been widespread allegations against Myanmar military of mass, arbitrary and brutal attacks on civilians, of threats and violence being used to uproot people from their residence, rape of women and of serious human rights violations including the killing of civilians, large-scale destruction of villages in Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung townships of Rakhine state. On September 19, 2017, Human Rights Watch (HRW) an international human rights organization, published a report analyzing satellite images and identified 214 sites that were totally destroyed. Fires and looting continued to be reported in the affected area. Myanmar denied access to the UN fact-finding mission in the affected area, stating that it believes such a mission would not be helpful to mitigate the complex nature of challenges in Rakhine state. Following the atrocities, the US, EU and Canada also impose sanctions against the Myanmar military at different degrees (Wong, 2018). In September, 2017, the UN slammed Myanmar that what happened in the Rakhine state is "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" (*UN Human Rights Chief Points to Textbook Example of Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar*, 2017).

Traditionally, India has been a key international partner for Bangladesh, but following this catastrophe, Bangladesh has lacked India's support in countering the role of the Myanmar Government. Perhaps, India does not have the influence over Myanmar to push for a change in its Rohingya policy; still, for Bangladesh having India on its side has symbolic significance. Moreover, India has continued to extend its support towards Myanmar due to various strategic and economic factors. According to the literature, India is actually taking this crisis as an opportunity to develop close bonding with Myanmar and to counter China's expansion in the region (Iffat Idris, 2017). Moreover, India needs support from Myanmar to control insurgency in its north-eastern region, as the militants use Myanmar as its base. So, the Indian government was reluctant to address this crisis against Myanmar rather than expressed solidarity with its 'fight against terrorism on various occasions. Rather, India expresses its concern that the Rohingya refugees fleeing to Bangladesh could further travel to India and also said it would expel the estimated 40,000 Rohingya already living in the settlements of Delhi, Jammu and Hyderabad. According to the UN, only 15,000 of them are registered, whereas India wants to push back all of them. In September 2017, the government of India, in its response to a PIL (Public Interest Litigation) challenging the deportation of Rohingya filed by two Rohingyas in the Supreme Court, said that their presence is a threat to national security, and some of them have connections with Pakistan based terrorist groups ("Rohingyas Illegal Immigrants, a Threat to India, Says Government to Supreme Court," 2017). At the same time, under 'Operation Insaniyat' India extended its relief assistance for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh; claiming that India is ready to provide any assistance required by Bangladesh during the crisis period (*Operation Insaniyat - Humanitarian Assistance to Bangladesh on Account of Influx of Refugees*, n.d.). However, India's move following the crisis has been strongly condemned by the UN. Even human rights advocates have challenged that the Indian government's toughness against Rohingya people is contradictory to its constitutional values. In Spite of being a non-signatory to the international refugee laws, India has established hospitable situations for refugees through judicial intervention (Chaudhury & Samaddar, 2018).

In respect of Article 14 (Equality before the law or equal protection of the laws within the territory of India) and Articles 21 (defence of life or personal liberty) of the Indian Constitution, the Supreme Court has declared that these (apart from other constitutional rights) apply to everyone residing in India, and not only to citizens (Chaudhury & Samaddar, 2018). In February 2019, Bangladesh urged for India's assistance in the Rohingya repatriation process which was earlier bilaterally agreed between Bangladesh and Myanmar (*Rohingya Crisis: Bangladesh Requests India to Help with Early Repatriation of Refugees to Myanmar*, n.d.). On the contrary, during late 2019, the Indian parliament passed a controversial citizenship amendment act, under which, for the first time, it undertook the decision of providing citizenship on

the basis of religion. Many criticize the act that India while claiming to be a protectorate of minorities, completely overlooked the persecution of Muslim Rohingyas. Bangladesh has expressed their concern that India is walking in the footsteps of Myanmar. In addition, many foreign policy experts have argued that India's deliberate attempt to confine the Rohingya crisis only to security perspectives is not a visionary decision, and it may further radicalize the suppressed community. If we analyze India's stance following the mass Rohingya influx since mid-2017 from an unorthodox view, India's failure to create its leadership image during this crucial hour and its reluctance to criticize Myanmar's role has raised questions about its role to uphold democracy and credibility to solve regional crises.

### Conclusion

Arguably, India has completely overlooked the adverse effect of the crisis in South Asia, especially in Bangladesh to gain its strategic goals to be achieved from Myanmar. Bangladesh is crossing a rough patch following emerging security threats arising from the refugee camps and tremendous political pressure at the national level to resolve the Rohingya crisis (ICG, 2019). It is also stressed by the lack of progress in the repatriating process of Rohingyas who left Rakhine post-October 2016, which was agreed by a Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral arrangement in 2017. The politics encircling the Rohingya influx has created slight bitterness in the India-Bangladesh relationship. More than one million Rohingya people have crossed the border from Myanmar's Rakhine state into Bangladesh. Myanmar has declared a military crackdown to uproot Rohingyas following Rohingya militants attacking police posts, killing 12 members of the security forces in August 2017. Undoubtedly, the Modi government, since its inception, has expressed its prime concern towards regional cooperation. However, Bangladesh expected India to address the persecution of the Rohingya Muslim community and undertake a leadership role to accelerate the repatriation process of Rohingya people within a reasonable period. In 2017, China took the leadership role and proposed a three-stage path for Rohingya repatriation (*China Draws Three-Stage Path for Myanmar, Bangladesh to Resolve Rohingya Crisis*, n.d.). Myanmar is indeed India's gateway to Southeast Asia, which might explain India's silence on the Rohingya issue. India has been investing in connecting northeast Indian states to Sittwe port, Rakhine state of Myanmar. Besides, Myanmar's growing bond and trade partnership with China creates discomfort for India. India's stance towards handling the Rohingya crisis did not convey any good message to Bangladeshi policymakers. India's approach towards the Rohingya refugees has destroyed its previous image as protectors of refugees. However, as the Rohingya crisis is gaining new dimensions, following Myanmar's reluctance to take them back and emerging regional security concerns, India has a lot more to offer to guarantee regional safety by upholding human rights and international laws.

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## **The Grateful migrants: Indians and Bangladeshis in Singapore in times of COVID-19**

*Diotima Chattoraj\**

### **Abstract**

Singapore has had a dramatic spike in coronavirus infections in early 2020, with thousands of new cases linked to clusters in migrant workers (MWs) dormitories. To control the spread, the Government attempted to isolate the dormitories, test workers and move symptomatic patients into quarantine facilities. But those measures have left thousands of them trapped in their dormitories, living in cramped conditions that make social distancing near impossible. This paper investigates how COVID-19 has impacted the lives of these workers in varied ways and highlights the migrant workers' belief if Singapore's effort has been enough for them during the COVID-19 pandemic? The focus is mainly on the low-skilled workers from India and Bangladesh, who are prone to be affected in various ways by COVID-19. My collected data show that migrant workers are grateful to the Singapore state for the support extended during COVID-19. I used the concept of subcultures to explain the condition of the workers in the state of Singapore. Because they expect so little social protection from the state, they are genuinely grateful for its support during the pandemic.

*Keywords: COVID-19, Singapore, Migrant Workers, India, Bangladesh.*

### **Introduction**

COVID-19 or Coronavirus turned out to be one of the terrifying diseases causing an impending crisis the world has not witnessed in the recent era. Originating in Wuhan, China, this highly contagious disease has spread in 215 countries, infecting more than 119 million (as of mid-March 2021) and killing more than 2.5 million (as of mid-March 2021) within a year. Almost all countries in the world (at least 210) is under some form of restrictions like full

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or partial lockdown to prevent the spread, leaving millions stranded (Ullah et al., 2021).

While trials of vaccines are ongoing, World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendations like staying in quarantine, isolation, maintaining social distance, and lockdown are only measures available to combat Covid-19 at the moment (Ullah et al. 2021). These measures are of course, the most effective in deterring the spread of the virus (Ullah et al., 2021). However, the real challenge lies in maintaining social distance and lockdown among the migrant workers living in overcrowded and smallest spaces in the dormitories. Migrant workers (MWs) in Singapore are no exception.

Among 351,800 MWs in Singapore<sup>2</sup> Indian and Bangladeshi workers are an essential part of the country's workforce. Many toil for long hours (8 am to 7 pm from Monday to Saturday and sometimes during Sundays) on their worksites, busy constructing and reconstructing buildings, roads, and carrying heavy loads to send money to family and relatives back home. Their dormitories are mostly situated outside the city-state in non-residential areas, making them isolated from the rest of the population in the island-country.

Singapore, despite handling this pandemic situation quite well, became one of the biggest hit countries by COVID-19 since January 2020. The Asian city-state has had a dramatic spike in coronavirus infections in February-March 2020, with thousands of new cases linked to clusters in MWs dormitories. In the effort to control the spread, the Government attempted to isolate the dormitories, test workers regularly and move symptomatic patients into quarantine facilities, which left them trapped in their dormitories, living cheek by jowl in cramped conditions that make social distancing near impossible.<sup>3</sup>

As of March 14 2021, the city-state reported 60,088 laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19 in a total of 5.7 million population (Ministry of Health, Singapore).<sup>4</sup> MWs constitute more than 90% of the cases, with a prevalence rate of 16.3% compared with 0.04% in the local population (Yi, 2020). Such a sharp disparity in COVID-19 infection is explained by 'high-density and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mom.gov.sg/documents-and-publications/foreign-workforce-numbers>

<sup>3</sup> Jessie Yeung, Joshua Berlinger, Sandi Sidhu, Manisha Tank and Isaac Yee, 'Singapore's migrant workers are suffering the brunt of the country's coronavirus outbreak', CNN, April 25 2020.

<sup>4</sup> [MOH | Updates on COVID-19 \(Coronavirus Disease 2019\) Local Situation](#)



‘unhygienic living conditions of migrant workers and a lack of inclusive protection system of equal access to healthcare and a social safety net (Yi, 2020). This makes the nation as a whole more vulnerable to the virus, exposing more broadly how unequal treatment of one group can affect the rest of the country.

This paper investigates how in varied ways COVID-19 has impacted the lives of these workers. Does this also highlight if the migrant workers believe that Singapore has done quite a bit for them during the COVID-19 pandemic? The focus would mostly be on the low-skilled MWs, from India and Bangladesh, who are prone to be affected in various ways by COVID-19.

### **Objectives and methodology**

This paper aims at investigating the impacts that COVID-19 has on the foreign MWs from India and Bangladesh in Singapore. Also, the relationship between the MWs and Singapore amidst the Covid-19 would be highlighted.

Since this is an ongoing issue, published articles are rarely available, and I had to depend mostly on ‘Internet research’ (Chattoraj, 2017), which provided a wide range of online reports, documents and newspaper articles. Internet research allowed me to gather secondary data on migrants in Singapore and about the grave situation they have been in due to this pandemic. I did reviews of the literature on human mobility/migration and studies on the spatial spread of diseases.

I conducted around 72 informal interviews (via Zoom and WhatsApp) with Bangladeshi and Indian MWs in Singapore in two phases: one from April to September 2020 and the other one in March 2021. I got associated with one of the NGOs<sup>5</sup> in Singapore that helped me establish networks with the migrant workers. I spoke to each of them for about an hour.

For conversational convenience, I chose Indian and Bangladeshi MWs. With the Bangladeshi MWs, I spoke in Bengali, which is their native language as well. The Indian MWs, whom I chose, are mostly from Punjab and Bihar, so I

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<sup>5</sup> This NGO works for the welfare of migrant workers and is in close contact with the Ministry of Manpower and Ministry of Health in Singapore.

spoke Hindi with them. To respect their privacy and security, I have not used their original names.

Questions I asked were about their experiences concerning Covid-19 before and after the lockdown. How their lives got affected? I asked them who has provided help and in what ways? What are the challenges that they faced like food quality, boredom, lack of communication, job security/salary payments)? How are their families in India and Bangladesh? When do they feel they can again see their families back home? The MWs ranged from being Work Permit Holders to Special Pass holders. During the time of the interviews, most of them were staying in the dorms, and few were in the rented rooms provided by their companies.

### **Theoretical framework: Subcultures**

I draw upon the concept of subcultures to theorize the condition of the MWs in Singapore. Yinger (1960) defined subcultures as groups that are smaller than society and which differ in language, values, religion, diet, and style of life from the larger society from which they are apart. Subcultures do not necessarily oppose or become a threat to the dominant culture (Yinger, 1960).

Indian and Bangladeshi MWs in Singapore form their own subcultures because—unlike Singaporeans, Permanent Residents or foreign talents—are governed under an illiberal immigration-citizenship regime of temporary migration, which disempowers them vis-à-vis the state (Yeoh et al. 2020). Tight regulatory measures that enact such transience include 2-year employment contracts, an employer-sponsored work permit system, restrictions on labour movements and denial of any residency rights or pathways to formal citizenship (Yeoh et al. 2020). MWs are promised as much as S\$1,200-S\$1500 per month but typically receive way less, which is between S\$450-750. They are often reluctant to complain about fear of being repatriated.

Singapore's migration regime also shapes the political values held by the MWs during their sojourn (Qin-Liang & Hassan, 2020). Like ordinary people, MWs carry conceptions of how the state should operate, whom it should serve (or not), who pays for it and who benefits. They form these political values primarily through their interactions with the state of their home countries.

Coming to Singapore, most of them recognize their low-status as 'second-class citizens and the precarity in their labour conditions and—as I demonstrate in the following sections—expect little social protection from the Singapore state during their employment. Neither do they believe that the Singapore state will extend more social protections to them because their precarity benefits the Singaporean economy? These values may persist even if they yearn for policies and programmes that can better ensure their wellbeing.

In contrast, using their home countries as their point of reference (I have shown them in the later part), most of the MWs hold Singapore in high esteem for its political stability, sound economic management and good governance. Significantly, their admiration contributes to their trust in the efficacy of the Singapore state in running the lion-city.

As Dutta (et al. 2018) writes, '[culture] passes on values within a community, and at the same time co-creates opportunities for transforming these values over time. In this paper, I discuss how their subcultures had structured their expectations and impressions of the state amidst the COVID-19, such that the MWs are grateful for the Singapore state's support despite their vulnerabilities during the pandemic.

### **Covid-19 and the Indian and Bangladeshi MWs**

#### *Social distance framework*

The WHO recommends social or physical distancing, implying that people must stay at least one metre away from each other to protect against Coronavirus. Together with this, regular handwashing/disinfecting is the key to halting the spread of COVID-19.<sup>6</sup> The WHO's specific guidelines are: Social distancing [at least 1 metre apart] is an effective protective measure against the Coronavirus, and measures to ensure people observe this are in force (Ullah et al. 2020).

It is estimated that about one-third of the world's vulnerable population is under quarantine in their own homes, and, in many countries, the police are

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<sup>6</sup> Douglas Broom, 'In pictures: this is what social distancing looks like around the world,' World Economic Forum, April 2, 2020.

enforcing social distancing (Ullah et al. 2021; 2020). Quarantine means restricting activities or separating people who are not ill themselves but may have been exposed to COVID-19 (Ullah et al., 2021). The goal is to prevent the spread of the disease at a time when people just develop symptoms. Isolation denotes separating people who are ill with symptoms of COVID-19 and may be infectious to prevent the spread of the disease, and the social customs have been revamped by implementing a no-visitor policy and greeting without physical contact (no handshakes, no kisses, no hugs etc.) (Ullah et al. 2021).

### *The Reality of the MWs' dormitories*

Of 351,800 migrant workers,<sup>7</sup> 200,000 workers reside in purpose-built dormitories (PBDs; specially built with features for their needs); the rest are housed in dormitories converted from disused industrial sites and other unlicensed residences.<sup>8</sup> Thousands of workers live in close quarters, and between 12 and 20 men sharing a single room which is 45-90 sqm. Making it difficult for them to maintain a safe distance amongst themselves. MWs use bunk beds, where they sleep just a few feet away from each other.<sup>9</sup> They share toilets, shower stalls, laundry clotheslines, storage spaces and line up together to receive food. For them, in the cramped and unsanitary living conditions, 'social distancing is a luxury' (Ullah et al. 2020). And due to this condition, an outbreak was inevitable.

From the first confirmed case among the workers reported on February 9, 2020, another four workers who lived at 'different' dormitories were infected. Since then, Covid-19 clusters have mushroomed in workers' dormitories despite immediate contact tracing and disinfecting affected sites (Yi, 2020). The largest, at the S11 Dormitory at Punggol, which housed 13,000 workers, went from four cases to 62 in under a week. New clusters formed in the other dorms and worksites. Over 100 migrant workers were tested positive for

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.mom.gov.sg/documents-and-publications/foreign-workforce-numbers>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mom.gov.sg/passages-and-permits/work-permit-for-foreign-worker/housing/foreign-worker-dormitories#/>

<sup>9</sup> Jessie Yeung, Joshua Berlinger, Sandi Sidhu, Manisha Tank and Isaac Yee, 'Singapore's migrant workers are suffering the brunt of the country's coronavirus outbreak', CNN, April 25, 2020.

Covid-19 within the mid of February. In total, 25 out of 43 PBDs were declared as isolation areas within 1 month from the first case.

All other buildings accommodating the city-state's 351,800 workers were placed under effective lockdown. The restrictions, an attempt to reduce further transmission, have left the dormitories even more crowded than usual as only essential workers are permitted to leave. While interviewing one of the health care officials in Singapore through the NGO, he told me that the MWs are excluded from the state planning of healthcare and covered by medical insurance that employers purchase for workers under their charge, without eligibility for subsidized healthcare. Healthcare quality is limited to meeting compliance standards of immigration procedures and occupational safety. They are covered only for acute conditions but not for specialized outpatient treatments, allied health (e.g., physiotherapy), rehabilitative, preventive or mental health services.

Respondents informed me that even until mid-April 2020, they did not have access to soap and adequate cleaning supplies. While migrants were being served food, either by the Government or by their companies, so that they did not use shared kitchens, the quality of meals was poor and lacking in nutrition. In some cases, more than 100 men shared five toilets and five showers.

Monsir Ali, a middle-aged construction worker from Bangladesh (whom I interviewed in late April), told me that in their dormitories, every-day, they have to stand in long queues to use shared bathrooms, which often did not have enough water for the showers or toilets to function. "Until, now none of us in my dormitory has been tested positive, but there are many with symptoms, some feel they have no energy, someone has body aches," he said. "We are frightened."

"My family thinks that I have a good job in Singapore because I spent so much (4 lakh Bangladeshi Taka<sup>10</sup>) to come here. They don't know the work we do. If I tell them that I work so hard in Singapore, they will be sad. My family will cry." said Rafiqul.<sup>11</sup> When asked about his experiences with Covid-19, he

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Bangladeshi taka is 0.016\$.

<sup>11</sup> I interviewed him through a WhatsApp video call at the end of September 2020. Rafiqul is a construction worker who was under quarantine at the time of the interview.

replied, "it is the worst. I was quarantined for three months; they tested me, I got negative, still have to stay in the quarantine. I don't know why. My boss came and let me go out for one day in August and then again got me quarantined. Until September 3, I was there. I was released on the 6<sup>th</sup>, started working, but again got quarantined from September 20. I am still there. Please help me to get out of here. I cannot stay like this anymore. I do not see a single person since I am inside here. The hotel-man comes and gives food and goes away. How am I supposed to survive like this?"

Through my interviews, I found that the MWs, I interviewed, though they have been treated very badly by their companies, yet held a deep sense of respect for Singapore. Shami, a worker who had been quarantined in a renowned hotel following the outbreak, had shared his initial motivations for coming to Singapore.

"Coming here felt like a dream because Singapore is a modern, rich and developed country [...]. I wanted to come to this country to earn a huge amount of money and send them back home so that my family can have a good life."

The deep reverence towards the country has also come from the economic hardships most workers had experienced back home in India and Bangladesh. Migration is about people, their aspirations and fears, triumphs and tragedies (Ullah and Haque 2020; Chattoraj 2020). While motivations for migrating to Singapore varied, they largely revolve around two factors: 'status claims' and 'economic deprivation' back home (Rahman, 2017). In this context, status claims are made through statements, behaviours or symbols which would indicate someone's position on the social hierarchy. Migration is regarded as a way through which one can increase their social standing through both economic and social terms (Rahman, 2017).

Jobs acquired in Singapore were seen to fetch higher salaries compared to home countries, which, combined with exchange rates, had made way for these workers to earn more money. Beyond material gains, the trajectory of migration itself seemed to hold a distinct form of cultural value for workers, thus allowing them to progress up the ladder of social hierarchy (Qin-Liang & Hassan, 2020). While these factors are certainly powerful in motivating them to migrate, there are also economic conditions that facilitate this decision.

In understanding Singapore to be a desirable destination to be worked towards, migration is deemed a way through which one would attain a level of reassuring success. Rana, a MW who migrated to Singapore in 2013, espoused his feelings:

“Singapore is an extremely successful country. People here have good jobs and earn a lot of money, and my cousin who came here some years back is also earning enough to lead a good life could at least earn a livelihood. Seeing him, I also wanted to try my luck if I could do something for myself and my family here.”

“In calculating benefits of migration, there is no way we can ignore the invisible cost migrants’ pay in pursuing migration”- this is a very important argument made by William Lacy Swing, Director-General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (Ullah and Haque 2020:vii). This argument complements the situation of the MWs as well in Singapore. Though they are well aware of the costs they need to pay; yet, they understand it to be an inevitability of their employment conditions. These conditions create ‘hyper-precarity’—a term used to connote the multi-layered vulnerabilities faced by workers as a result of insufficient protection as well as exploitation (Qin-Liang & Hassan, 2020). Such insecurities pervade every part of their life: From the threat of unilateral deportation to irregular salaries, migrants are subjected to precarity as they undertake such risks in order to continue working. Abul, a construction MW, remains cognizant of this as he had worked here for the past four years.

“It is a beautiful and brilliantly efficient city. But I know I am only a second-class citizen here. My rights and obligations are not assured. I am not on the same level as a Singaporean.”

To explain and understand the relationships between MWs and the state, this paper attempts to analyze the causes behind and nature of gratitude felt by MWs in the midst of this pandemic.

#### *Gratitude towards the “State”*

Especially compared to their countries back home, many workers see Singapore to be the better alternative. "Our Bangladeshi Embassy was given a

huge amount of money to distribute among us, but what did they give us? One packet of snacks but that also not to everyone!" This reflects the disappointment that the workers have towards their own Government. "We do not get any kind of help from our Embassy. Let me tell you, we only have holidays on Sundays, but our Embassy remains closed. So, if we need help, where should we go?" Shakil, a 26-year-old Bangladeshi worker, was taken by real surprise about the efforts of the Singapore Government in giving them the due attention:

"Of course, we are to suffer the most from the crisis [...]. We are the ones with the least entitlements; we are not citizens after all. I did not imagine the Government would care for us. But in the midst of COVID-19, they took so much care of all of us."

As narrated by Shakil, being the 'second-class citizens' in the country, he was pretty sure that he and his fellow workers would have to bear the worst effects of the pandemic. Yet, the ways in which they were taken care of were more than enough for an MW like Shakil. The wide-scale mass testing efforts and quarantine orders along with distribution of free food, masks and hand sanitizers topped the list. "Until today, none of my friends nor me have to buy any mask or hand sanitizer. Government is providing them throughout. Still today, I remember, when I returned home from work (it was in mid-January, I think) I saw a pair of masks, and a hand sanitizer was lying on my bed". As a result, the gratitude felt was mostly contextualized against larger felt systemic gaps that had left these workers vulnerable in the first place. This shows that the attention placed on them as a result of the pandemic had been a stark contrast from the usual times.

The Government has also succeeded in gaining trust from the MWs in this time of crisis by providing all kinds of support: "[...] my company want to send me back to Bangladesh, but I want to work in Singapore. [...] If I go back, my family will die because of financial reasons. We have no one to help us. I don't want to go to Bangladesh. [...] I am now in Quarantined, so cannot go out; otherwise, I am sure, if I would have gone to MOM, they would have surely helped me as they helped so many of my friends." This quote is from Rubel, who is quarantined and had been threatened by his company that he would be sent back to Bangladesh. But he trusts MOM and believes if his problem can reach them, they will surely provide some kind of support.



Additionally, they felt immensely appreciative of frontline medical personnel who had tended to them in the midst of the outbreak in the dorms. Many MWs had recounted the reassuring and pleasant experiences with the medical professionals working with them. Alamin, another migrant worker, had recounted his pleasant experiences with the medical team there.

“The doctor was very nice and comforted me a lot. I was grateful and amazed at the strength of the medical teams working tirelessly for us. I do not think any other country would have done this for their workers.”

In addition, several respondents also showed gratitude towards the country by comparing it with other countries like Saudi, Brunei and Malaysia: "Some of my friends and relatives are migrant workers in Saudi, Brunei and Malaysia. When I hear their stories, I feel how lucky I am that I have come to Singapore and not to those countries. I agree that the dorm conditions are far better than ours, yet the money we receive here is much better than theirs. Also, the workloads are much better for us."

#### *Role of NGOs*

Finally, as the pandemic progressed, there was also a gradual conflation of NGOs and the state for the MWs. While the state was seen to be responsible for the initial outbreak in the dorms, the involvement of several NGOs in responding to this crisis was, again, seen to be an extension of the state. The mass number of infections had seen NGOs rendering services to vast numbers of MWs alongside other government agencies.

"When Covid-19 came into being, no doubt Singapore Government helped us a lot and is still helping us. But I should also mention some of the NGOs, who supported and helped us in the troubled times. They provided basic necessities, like dry foods during Ramadan, clothes and many more." Not only NGOs, but there are many Bangladeshi Singaporeans who have also initiated in helping the workers at the dorms.

“MOM [...] all have been doing so much for us workers. The Government is trying their best and helping us through all these steps. At least I can be treated here, and I am being taken care of properly.” In a country like Singapore, where its citizens get the most priority, “we, migrant workers will be given the Covid-19 vaccine soon. In fact, more than a dozen of my friends from another company have already been vaccinated. They are doing fine. I am waiting for my turn now.”

### **Protecting the precarious: Singapore’s role during Covid-19**

Singapore was one of the worst affected areas in the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak. Since then, the nation-state has steadily built up its outbreak preparedness, including developing a national pandemic preparedness plan based on risk assessment and calibration of response measures that are proportionate to the risk (Lee et al., 2020). This includes holding regular exercises and building the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID), a 330-bed purpose-built infectious diseases management facility with integrated clinical, laboratory and epidemiological functions.

Since the end of January 2020, the Asian state undertook a whole-of-government approach by establishing a Multi-Ministry Task Force (Lee et al., 2020). It implemented effective measures to limit the importation of COVID-19 and augmented active case finding, extensive contact tracing and quarantine, testing, clinical management and community and social measures (ibid.). Initially, MOM issued advisories to dormitories on maintaining clean residential premises and promoting personal hygiene among workers.<sup>12</sup> However, the monitoring system was lacking. As COVID-19 continued to spread in the local community, much of the Government's focus was on curbing spread among local residents. The potential risk of MWs contracting COVID-19 was not given much priority. MOM’s guideline for precautionary measures in dormitories was not successfully implemented due to crowdedness in the dormitory, sharing facilities (e.g., toilet and shower rooms), lack of supplies of masks and hand sanitizers and inadequate manpower resources.

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<sup>12</sup><https://www.mom.gov.sg/covid-19/advisory-for-dormitory-operators-on-safe-living-measures-foreign-worker-dormitories>

Singapore implemented a 'circuit breaker.'<sup>13</sup> Phase (a local term for lockdown) for two months from April 7. While MWs were confined, extensive swab operations and serological testing were undertaken in all dormitories. Medical and recovery services were established to transfer infected workers with mild symptoms to 'community care facilities' and recovered workers to 'community recovery facilities' before their transition to work.

Two weeks before the end of the 'circuit breaker', the Government laid out a three-phase approach to exit lockdown: (i) safe reopening, (ii) safe transition and (iii) safe nation. Accordingly, the Government was set to resume construction projects with transition strategies, including regular testing to identify those with an asymptomatic infection and safe distancing guidelines for workplaces and construction sites. Although these strategies are essential to allow MWs to resume their economic roles in due time, special attention needs to be paid to non-work-related activities of workers.

The lockdown succeeded in slowing the transmission of COVID-19, yet the sustained human-to-human spread is still occurring in the community even today. MWs remain at high risk of contracting the disease if there are no guidelines to provide guidance when they engage in non-work activities. Knowledge of the social-ecological contexts of the activities in the population is crucial to implement a well-informed lockdown exit strategy to protect workers and prevent the further spread of COVID-19.

The highlighted problems affecting the MWs took a sharper turn prior to the spread of COVID-19; the pandemic brings them into sharper relief. For example, the difficulties of living in tight, crowded spaces in dormitories have been exacerbated. Existing problems of hygiene indicated by bedbugs and rat infestations have become important public health concerns. The discourse of containment, used to justify the seclusion of migrants in dormitories (often at the edges of the island), now enables greater restrictions on their movement, with thousands locked into their rooms for weeks. Relaxation during their off-days has now an old phenomenon. They can only go out from their dormitories on their off-days provided they have already got the 'exit pass' which allows

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<sup>13</sup> Circuit breaker refers to the set of measures implemented by the Singapore government from April 7, 2020, to June 1 to restrict the movement of the population towards suppressing, or mitigating, the COVID-19 pandemic.

them to go to the recreation centres for 3 hours—and going home to see their families? A big question still remained unresolved.

MOM's advice to dormitory operators was that workers should "stay in their rooms and minimize physical interactions." No advice was given on how to achieve this—probably because it can't be done: "We ask for the cooperation of workers to take necessary precautions and exercise individual responsibility. MOM also urges [...] dormitory operators to educate their workers and residents on the advisory to remain at home or in dormitories on their rest days." Even so, gaps existed in the measures which had been implemented. According to Dev, from a dormitory in Woodlands told, "temperature-taking was not consistently done because queues were getting too long."

The dorms themselves were still notoriously filthy, with garbage piling up, insect infestations, and broken amenities left unfixed for weeks. Misinformation and poor awareness are legitimate concerns but separate issue from dormitory overcrowding, which is beyond either residents' or dormitory operators' ability to solve. This was a strikingly obvious problem that needed time, attention, and resources to solve. The Government could, and should, have acted much sooner. Measures were also announced at other dormitories, including moving 'essential services' workers into other spaces, reducing intermingling between floors, and housing sick residents (even if not positive) in isolated sick bays. All of this is commendable but comes regrettably late.

To prevent further spread in the dorms, "decisive steps need to be taken right now", stated one of my respondents. One, ramp up cleaning frequency. Workers should also be reassured, in line with the Government's announcements, that they will not be penalized in any way for seeing a doctor and/or missing work. Operators who do not comply should be held accountable in the strictest possible terms.

Social scientists have shown convincingly that structural change often happens in times of great socio-political and economic upheaval. Goodwill efforts are welcome and necessary at times of crisis like this, where banding together demonstrates solidarity and gives much-needed immediate help. However, it should be ensured that policy change takes place to ensure better living and employment conditions for MWs, even after this crisis.

In addition to improving standards in worker dormitories, more direct channels of communication need to be established by the state to reach the marginalized MWs migrant communities. Migrant rights—whether in relation to wage payments or days off—need to be addressed within the larger realm of labour rights, as these individuals are as crucial as other workers in the country's economy.<sup>14</sup> Many states are prioritizing the health and wellbeing of their citizens. Others, such as Portugal, have extended full citizenship rights to migrants and asylum seekers (Ullah et al., 2021). The Prime Minister of Singapore has pointed out the significance of non-citizen migrants within the national border. Migrant welfare and rights must be prioritized now for the betterment of the interconnected global community. Guaranteeing rights and welfare of the MWs should not then be left to the discretion of individual employers but should be ensured collectively by the state working together with migrant advocacy agencies and a concerned public.<sup>15</sup>

From my collected data, I show that my respondents gained respect for the efficacy of the Singapore state in managing the pandemic. Most of them, though unhappy with their country's control of the pandemic, observed that the Singapore state was able to discipline its population effectively through its circuit breaker measures and, by doing so, mitigating the scale of the COVID-19 outbreak outside of the dormitories. As described by Shamim: “Singapore government very good in managing the pandemic. People back home no listen to the Government. But in Singapore, Government tells people to stay home; they stay home. It's like they take control.”

Significantly, my interviewees felt safe staying in Singapore because they believed in the capabilities of the Singapore government to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Another interviewee quipped: 'my family, no worry about me. Because it is safer to stay in Singapore than back home now.' Some of my interviewees observed that the state has paid for the hospital bills incurred by COVID-19 patients in public hospitals, whether Singaporeans or MWs from the dormitory clusters. They assumed that it would extend the social aid to any infected by COVID-19.

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<sup>14</sup> Laavanya Kathiravelu, 'Protecting the precarious: COVID-19 and migrant workers', Academic/Sg, April 8, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Same as footnote 9.

In accordance with the prevailing subculture, my interviewees directed their frustrations towards their employers or the COVID-19 while overlooking the role of the Singapore state in reproducing their precarity, which allowed these issues to fester in the first place. Having little expectations of the state to protect their wellbeing, they are grateful for its efficacy in managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Persistence of subcultures post-COVID-19**

I expect the subcultures of MWs to remain mostly unchanged in the foreseeable future because the values and norms that underpin these subcultures evolve slowly by nature. MWs would likely continue to hold the Singapore state in high regard for its strong governance as long as it continues to function effectively and efficiently. In addition, so long as an economic disparity persists between their home countries and Singapore, they are likely to want to migrate and work in the lion-city despite the precarious labour conditions.

Moreover, I do not foresee the occurrence of any major events that could trigger a drastic shift in the political values of these MWs or the Singapore state. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrust the plight of MWs into the limelight of Singapore society like never before, yet even it has failed to galvanize any political agitation among the MWs or engender structural changes to Singapore's temporary migration regime. The subcultures of MWs in Singapore are, hence, likely to remain largely unchanged in the foreseeable future.

Unfortunately, the endurance of the existing political cultures of MWs is a cause for concern because it allows the Singapore state to perpetuate its illiberal migration regime. As discussed above, MWs in Singapore understand their precarity but expect little social protections from the state. Though, some are wary of constant surveillance and the risk of repatriation if they speak or mobilize against the state. As a result, most choose not to participate in advocacy on issues concerning their wellbeing. The erasure of their voices from civil society relieves some political pressure on the Singapore state to enact any institutional changes to the temporary migration regime. As Bal (2015) explains, NGO activism has been the most concerted challenge to Singapore's migrant labour regime, but the political impetus behind it comes

from overtly confrontational outcomes of workplace struggles by low-waged MWs. These struggles are translated into a critical mass of casework through the nexus of NGO direct services. This casework forms the primary basis of advocacy within various political sites, without which advocacy cannot be conducted effectively.

## Conclusion

This paper concludes that the MWs are grateful to Singapore for its support during COVID-19, despite its role in creating and perpetuating their vulnerabilities to the pandemic in the first place. I used the subcultures of MWs in Singapore to explain this phenomenon. As MWs expect so little social protection from the state during their stay and respect its efficacy in governing Singapore, they are grateful towards the Singapore state despite its complicity in shaping their vulnerabilities to this pandemic.

This study highlights the impact of COVID-19 on the MWs, who are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 largely due to high-density and the unhygienic built environment. To address the structural barrier and contain the spread of COVID-19 among the MWs, Singapore's multi-ministry task force has made significant efforts by increasing geographic accessibility to testing and treatment facilities which is a key to controlling the epidemic. Such a multi-sectoral response system involving the MOM and the Ministry of Health should continue to provide migrant workers with coordinated care in the time of post-pandemic (Yi, 2020).

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has unmasked health inequity and shed light on the complex pathways from socio-economic exclusion to infection of the disease in the diverse populations of low-wage migrant workers, racial and ethnic minorities, refugees and other marginalized people with residential instability (Mann et al. 2020). Individuals from lower socio-economic strata often are 'essential workers' with pre-existing health conditions and have to continue working during lockdowns; they were thus at higher risk of exposure, and hence disease, including deaths, than the general population (Greenaway et al. 2020). While the risk factors of adverse health outcomes are context-specific and epic historical dependent, the literature evidences structural causes of health disparities—lack of legal, social and health protection in inadequate living conditions—and calls for accountability in global health justice (Yi,

2020). Although the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the world into disarray, it presents us an opportunity to work together towards health equity, ensuring equal and easy access to resources for tests, treatments and future vaccines for migrants and ethnic minorities. The pandemic and its impact on the MWs continue to evolve. There might, hence, be perspectives that emerged only in the latter stages of the crisis, which I have not been included in this paper.

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## **Administrative Reforms in South and Southeast Asia: Enhancing the Capacity for Public Service Delivery**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of administrative reform— a special public policy instrument of governments— is to improve the capacity of public service delivery systems. This study examines the reform-led service delivery situation of public institutions at the local level in South Asia. The study offers an in-depth qualitative study with gleaned data, focusing on primary education in the country in relation to MDGs basic education. Local administration in the country has been a 'low modicum of self-governance to provide public services. Institutional capacity dealing with educational management has called into question. Primary education in the country is quantitatively discussed while qualitatively is in a state of disarray. As a thorough academic qualitative study with a country-specific case has by far not been explored yet, it fills the information gap. Little is known about the public service delivery capacity with primary education at the local level. This study implicates governments and development partners such as the UN SDGs for effective partnership in development in an era of post-COVID-19 crisis.

*Keywords: Administrative Reform, Capacity Building, Service Delivery, SDGs, COVID-19, Primary Education, and Bangladesh.*

### **Introduction: State of the Art**

The service delivery capacity of public institutions has always been an issue of academic debates. The overarching goal of this study is to partake in academic debate in understanding the state of the service delivery capacity of public institutions in developing countries with reference to South Asia and southeast Asia. Empirically, it attempts to examine the reform-led capacity of public service institutions at the local level, offering an in-depth qualitative study with primary education service provision. The objective is to identify challenges and prospects of public service capacity of local administration of *Upazila* (*Mukim* in Malay; *Tabi* in Thai) in Bangladesh for primary education service delivery. Thus I seek to answer the question 'do administrative reform initiatives make the local public institutions better equipped to deliver services? The paper has proceeded by

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determining the aim, objective, and research question, followed by a methodology to narrate the data sources and analytical techniques and the theoretical framework.

The administrative system in south Asia, especially in Bangladesh, carries the legacy of the past from ancient Bengal, imperial Mughal, and colonial British India via the post-colonial Pakistani era (Zafarullah, 1998). This legacy has challenged the contemporary government for proper functioning as an independent nation. To catch up with the time and space, service delivery, capacity building, and administrative reform have come to the forefront to the academics, policymakers and practitioners (UN, 1983; UNDP, 2008).

Bangladesh is a low-income economy and densely populated country that shares common characteristics with many other developing countries, such as high levels of poverty, economic dependence, colonial heritage, and traditional administrative inheritance (Azizuddin, 2018). The reform efforts so far have not been fully successful in bringing the desired outcome for effective public service delivery. This means the capacity of public institutions for service delivery has been deeply challenged (Ahmad and Ahmed, 1992; Azizuddin, 2018).

### **Methodology**

Theoretical and methodological soundness provide the foundation of any research (Ullah et al., 2020). Field research in the context of public management and public service delivery merits systematic conceptualization of relevant terms and ideas (Yin, 2014). This particular study, of course, is dependent on qualitative research. At the conceptual level, methodology and the precise objectives of the study were determined in order to be able to remain focused in the field (Cohen et al., 2008:284). As the data source, this research used both primary and secondary data. A great deal of time was spent in the field (Bangladesh) to interview the respondents, both currently serving and retired. Primary data were collected from forty research participants in Bangladesh with an unstructured interview schedule, firstly in June – July 2017 and recollected in December 2019 - January 2020.

They comprised of people representative, academic and expert observer, administrator, and school teacher and management; were selected based on logistical convenience (Richard, 1996; Azizuddin, 2016). Secondary data collected from relevant documents such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and administrative reform commission reports. They were analyzed by applying case studies and content analysis techniques (Yin, 2014). In order to narrow down the literature, a systematic exclusion

process was adopted (Olsen, 1991). Table 1 shows the sample distribution of interviewees for this study.

Table 1: Sample Distribution of the Research Interviews

Research Participant	<i>f</i>	Breakdown
People's Representative	10	2 MP, 8 LC;
Expert Observer	10	6 UT, 4 Res;
Administrator	10	4 SLA, 2MLA,
School Teacher and Management	10	4JLA; 5 PST; 5 MSMC
Total	40	

Note: MP= Member of Parliament; LC= Local Councillor; UT= University Teacher; Res=Researcher; SLA= Senior Administrator; MLA= Middle Level Administrator; JLA= Junior Level Administrator; PST= Primary School Teacher; MSMC=Member of School Management Committee.

The paper advances with research context highlighting local administration and administrative reform and the public service provisions and primary education. The next section highlights the findings and discussion, and finally, the conclusion.

### Theoretical Framework

It is well known that reform is a conscious effort to address changes in the environment and the resulting demands for corrections (Caiden 1969; Pollit & Bouckaert, 2011; Laitinen et al., 2018). Administrative reform streamlines the public administration system aimed at optimizing the capacity of public institutions for public management and development programme implementation (Ciprian, Gabriela & Dimbu, 2010; Levy & Kpundeh, 2004; Azizuddin, 2019). Ciprian and others have tagged administrative reform as a 'special public policy' (Ciprian et al., 2010:37) to facilitate the capacity for the reorganization of the institutions of governance aiming at rationalizing and building the capacity of the administrative machinery to adapt public management for changing environment (Flynn, 1998). Therefore, capacity building of public institutions through administrative reform for policy implementation is the offspring of the fields of public administration and governance (Heeks 2001).

Public service, service delivery, institutional capacity, and administrative reform are the key concepts in the theoretical constructions. The contemporary, traditional public service approaches with generic public management theories have been challenged with time and space relations. Osborne, Randor, and Nasi (2012) pointed out that 'when the reality of

public services deliver inter-organizational, and it draws upon management theory from the experience of the manufacturing sector, they 'ignore the reality of public services as 'services' (Osborne et al., 2012:135). Consequently, as Osborne and others signify, 'the public service delivery environment has become a challenging one for PSOs [Public Sector Organisations], with a range of survival strategies' (Osborne et al., 2014:167). Thus, the functioning of 'the increasingly fragmented and inter-organizational context of PSD (Haveri, 2006:31; Osborne et al. 2012) has necessitated new approaches to service delivery. Subsequently, a service-dominant approach has emerged. Depending on the strategic importance of service delivery, a transition to service-dominant logic (SDL) has been observed (Vargo & Akaka, 2009).

Public service is the entity of government with provisions of services to deliver to the citizen through its national and local administrations that determine the quality of life. It is a very general term used in government and "is perhaps the most acceptable in any international comparison of the personnel of governments or state administrations in which problems of semantics are closely intermingled with politico-administrative systems and their history" (Leemans & Dunsire, 1981:11). Leemans and Dunsire narrate, "[T]he separation of politics and administration advanced by Woodrow Wilson, Weber's impersonalized bureaucracy, the neutrality principle in the British Civil Service, and similar norms for the behaviour of public servants, imply that the public service plays a certain role within the political system" (Leemans & Dunsire, 1981:12). Typically, public service would include the essential areas of public management, for example, food, education, health, shelter, law and order, justice, agriculture, forestry, and the environment. More specifically, it is described as "an organized entity that is responsible for managing the resources of a nation on behalf of the people who are the owners of these resources; it is run by both elected and appointed officials" (Marshall & Murtala, 2015:61). In this respect, it is a subsystem of politics and the vital vehicle for public service delivery and governance, and its roles have been conceived in various ways within the political system.

Stenvall and others (2014) discuss the issue of public services and identify three generations of service sciences. The first generation focuses on single public services and service sectors, while the second generation emphasizes comprehensive operational integration minimizing service recipients' issues. The third generation is based on open system thinking, where services are continually developing through human resource management interactions and reformations of a system aiming at integrating the professionals' in the functioning of public service (Stenvall et al., 2014). They, in turn, require appropriate management for service delivery in an organization corresponding to services in changing environment.

Service delivery is the implementation of and rendering government services to the citizen through its institutions. It ensures that basic needs services reach the people and places for which they are intended (Azizuddin, 2018). In government and administration, it refers to rendering 'the provision of basic needs in the form of goods/services to the people' (Mbecke, 2014:270). Harber (2009) sees the use of the phrase as part of a 'technocratic' description of the relationship between citizens and the government. Thus, the government delivers, and citizens receive (Nleya, 2011). Waheed (1999) describes several criteria for effective service delivery:

'improvement in the ability to identify problems for public actions, assess options for responding to these problems, formulate policies that constructively address these problems, implement activities required by the policies, and sustain such activities over sufficient time to have an impact on conditions for economic and social development.' (914-916).

Harber (2009) Notes,

'It contains a host of assumptions, policies, attitudes and promises – which are starting to haunt a government which has built its promise entirely on the notion of improving service delivery. They did not promise better opportunities, better access or better support in getting services, as these did not make ringing election slogans. They promised delivery, simple and straightforward.' (Harber 2009 cited in Nleya, 2011, p.5).

It is evident in the wake of COVID-19 crisis management and development challenges for countries worldwide. COVID-19 emerged from China in late 2019 has turned into a pandemic making the countries vulnerable with unequal strewn (Ullah & Haque 2020), resulting in mass lockdown. It was discovered originally in 1964 by Almeida's virology laboratory research (Combs 2020). The "lockdown has been strictly enforced since late March 2020, before which they seemed to have resorted to "wait and see" approach" (Ullah, Nawaz & Chatteraj 2021, p4). It has detrimentally affected public life, including basic education service delivery resulted from mass lockdown (Hutcheson 2020; WHO 2020). Almost all the primary schools in the world underwent closure.

The institutional capacity for public management is regarded as a fundamental issue of public service delivery (Brillantes & Fernandez 2008). However, capacity discourse on public administration remains ambiguous (Pazirandeh, 2010). Cuthill and Fien (2005) considered the capacity building as "the continuous process resulting in administrative reform for

effective and efficient responses to changing needs” (Cuthill & Fien, 2005, p.63). Stimulating institutional capacity building and improving service delivery also make public administration more responsive to the needs of citizens. There is a functional relationship between administrative reform, capacity building and service delivery, and they can be considered as complementary tools for sustainable public management (Azizuddin, 2018; 2019).

### ***Local Administration and Administrative Reform***

Local administration in Bangladesh is a part of public management that generally refers to the sub-national apparatus with the national government's subordinate offices as ‘field administration’ (Zafarullah, 1998). All the local authorities, including Zila (District) Parishad, Upazila Parishad, Union Parishad and City Corporation and municipality, fall within the jurisdiction of local administration.

In Bangladesh, the reform initiatives were introduced in 1973. Through the legislative measures (The Upazila Parishad Ordinance of 1982 and the Local Government (Upazila Parishad) Act 1998 and its subsequent amendments in 2009 and 2011, the changes in the inherited traditional system were made (Ahmed, Ahmed & Faizullah, 2011). The Committee for Administrative Reform and Reorganisation (CARR) in 1982 began the process of administrative reorganization and institutional capacity building at the local level. Among its findings, conversion of the then *Thanas* into *Upazilas* and aimed to make the field administration capable of public service delivery.

Upazila (sub-district/Kampong) is the middle-level field administration with a unique combination of state administration. It is a unit of local administrations with a functional local administration authority called the *Upazila Parishad* (Council), composed of a directly-elected chairperson, two Vice-Chairpersons and other functionaries of local representatives and administrative support staff.

There are 508 *Upazila Parishads* geographically located in Bangladesh. An employee with the rank of Senior Assistant Secretary (SAS) from the national government enjoys the status of ‘*Upazila Nirbahi Officer*’ (UNO) serves on deputation from central bureaucracy as the principal officer of the council.

### ***Public Service Provisions and Primary Education***

The local administration of *Upazila* is responsible for a wide range of public services, including regulatory and development functions: ‘retained



subjects’ and ‘transferred subjects’. Regulatory functions and major developmental activities at the national and regional level fall under the category of retained subjects and are controlled by the national government. All other development activities, which are considered local, are recognized as transferred subjects, and the local administration of *Upazila* is responsible for carrying them out. A total of 17 functional service provisions related to nation-building have their subordinate offices with functionaries deputed from the national bureaucracy to assist and work under each *Upazila Parishad* through the general supervision of the UNO (GPRB 2013). Figure 1 shows the list of local administration of *Upazila* public service provisions in Bangladesh.

Figure 1. List of Local Administration of Upazila Public Service Provisions

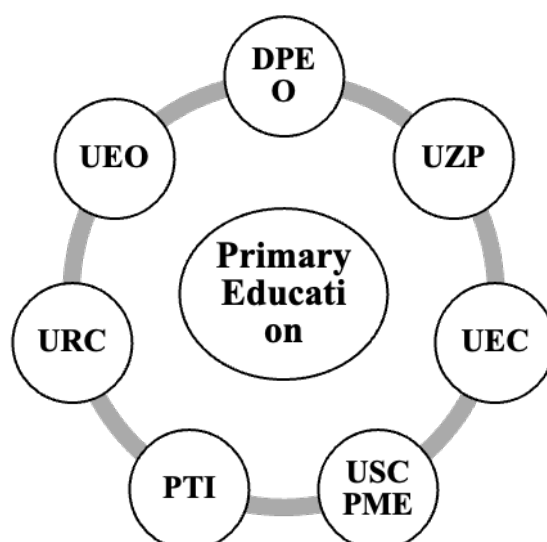
Executive &Magistracy	<b>Primary Education</b>	Social Welfare	Youth & Sports	Land Record & Revenue
Law & Order	Secondary Education	Food & Relief	Women & Children	Rural Dev & Cooperatives
Health & Family Planning	Environment & Forest	Agriculture	Livestock	Public Health & Infrastructure
	Local Infrastructure Development	Fisheries		

Source: GPRB. (2013). Upazila Parishad Manual. BG Press, Dhaka.

Primary education is one of the main public services of the local administration of Upazila in Bangladesh. Universal Primary Education has been enshrined in both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 2000-2015) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2015-2030) (UN 2001; UN SDSN 2015). The *Upazila* administration discharges the responsibility of providing primary education service. The actors such as the Upazila Parishad (USP), the Standing Committee, the Upazila Education Office (SEO), the Upazila Education Committee (UEC), primary schools, and the Upazila Resource Centre (URC) interact to perform the duties in discharging responsibility. Figure 2 represents the functioning of primary education public service at the local administration of Upazila in Bangladesh.



Figure 2. Actors and interaction of Local Primary Education Service Delivery



Source: Author construction (GPRB 2013; Azizuddin 2018)

Note: UZP= Upazila Parishad, DPEO= District Primary Education Office, UEO= Upazila Education Office, URC= Upazila Resource Centre, PTI= Primary Training Institute, UEC= Upazila Education Committee, USCPME= Upazila Standing Committee for Primary and Mass Education.

## Findings and Discussions

Primary education is an essential public service. This forms the basis for the future human resource development of a country. Children receive the basic education in primary school and step forward to secondary and tertiary levels of education. A good start at the primary schools paves the way for taking the challenges of other levels of education.

Local administration contexts in South Asia and South East Asia for public service delivery are diverse within a uniform framework (As-Saber & Rabbis, 2009). There are elected (and selected as well for some SEA countries) local councils geographically located throughout the country. Of course, the governance quality in local administrations varies from one area to another. While the local administration units function adequately, their performance is disputed. In Bangladesh, for example, in Gobindagonj, Upazila had Standing Committees on service delivery and were in operation, while Biswanath Upazila was yet to form the Standing Committees properly. Both Upazilas have been facing difficulties in providing quality public service in varying degrees (Azizuddin, 2018).

The research reveals that the scope and arrangement of service facilities in terms of structural, functional, and academic tasks are limited. The capacity of local administrations to deal with educational management for primary education service delivery is at stake in various ways (Sommers, 2011).

Administrative reform initiatives play a decisive role in bringing about systemic change at the local level. Local *Upazila* administrations have replaced a traditional 'field administration' at the then *Thana* level. The Upazila Ordinance, 1982, formally established the Upazila Parishad of local administration as a people's committee with local decision-making power and authority to deliver public services. The respective committees and subcommittees on services poorly handle the service delivery of education, health, culture, disaster management, food, and agriculture needs of local people.

While the local administration of *Upazila* is officially recognized as decentralized authority, its power in exercising it has been limited. The local council *Upazila Parishads* depends on national financial allocations and approval of the line administrative Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (MoLGRDC), and in case of primary education, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and their attached departments and directorates for decisions and implementation. Undesirable political interference from the national government and insufficient management supports has rendered capacity building difficult. Efforts for optimum output have gone futile.

Local administration in Bangladesh faces numerous challenges in public service delivery, especially in primary education provision. The administration has been following the traditional system without paying proper attention to the skill development of employees.

The system is centralized in the guise of decentralization at the local level. Table 2 represents a reflection of the research information on local administration public service delivery in Bangladesh.

Table 2: Reflections of Research Information on Local Administration

Factors	Attributes
Influence of national government over local administration	Undue
Adequateness of Service delivery	Poor
Learning facilities in schools	Unsatisfactory
Adequacy of teaching and learning staff	Insufficient
Task environment	Incongenial

Economic and social security of staff	Insecure
Teaching and learning standard	Somewhat poor
Effectiveness of School Management Committee	Somewhat active
The overall situation of primary education	Unclear

Source: Author construction 2020.

Like I mentioned that the local administration of Upazila is responsible for the delivery of primary education. But, undue national government influence and poorly equipped primary schools fail to deliver as it demands.

Administrative reform to improve service delivery by encouraging local involvement in governance and management has remained as rhetoric. The system maintains the traditional past administrative systems, including centralized, hierarchic bureaucratic practice, excessive control and supervision of the national government. As a result, the state of public service delivery, including primary education in the country, is unsatisfactory.

Decentralized local administrations always function better than centralized ones in any setting. A work environment conducive to effective programme implementation is a pre-requisite for capacity building in the public sector. There should not be undue interference from the national government in the affairs of local administration functionally. This practice undermines performance. Primary education, as the responsibility of local administration, should be focused and prioritize in the real sense. There should be less bureaucracy in the affairs of local administration management in the country. Local human resources should be well-trained to deliver public service decorously. The use and misuse of legal provisions have resulted in an increased dependence on the central government and managerial instability that stand the way of functional capacity building – particularly the provision of primary education service. National government interferences in local administration management affairs are more obvious in South Asian countries than in Southeast Asian countries as a whole.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The study tried to answer the question as to whether the local administration in South Asia, especially in Bangladesh, is capable of public service delivery. It has examined the reform-led service delivery capacity of public institutions such as primary education in the sub-districts. The study demonstrates that a number of issues have been related to public management and local administration. Although various administrative reforms have attempted to accelerate the institutional capacity of local

administration for service delivery, they have been used and otherwise misused. Administrative reforms have not contributed as expected because of the lack of functional decentralized authority of local administration and unsophisticated management practices. The institutionalization of service delivery capacities of local administration, particularly those related to primary education and learning, is weak. The capacity has been a 'low modicum of self-governance (Straussman, 2007:1104) for public services.

Although the study was only based on qualitative information with a small sample, the research contributes to the literature of public management, governance and local administration, discussing local administration service delivery situation with a micro-focus on South Asia. The research has broader implications for the governments in South and Southeast Asia. Future research with aims at delving deeper into the phenomenon may include these current surreal times (COVID-19). Depending on the logistical convenience, interviewing a representative sample would help infer to make better policy advice. Overall, the capacity of local administration for public service delivery requires improvement.

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