



EIA SCHOOLS: BODY OF EVIDENCE



INTRODUCTION

English in Action (EIA) works to improve the English language competence amongst school students and the adult population of Bangladesh, so that millions more Bangladeshi can benefit from social and economic opportunities that require communication in English. The programme is implemented by the Government of Bangladesh and funded by the UK Government.

In order to improve the quality of student learning in English, teachers have to find ways to improve the teaching and learning practices in their classrooms. EIA is designed to help teachers do this, through continuous in-service teacher professional development.

There are relatively few teacher development programmes that generate hard evidence about improvements in teaching and learning, especially at large scale. This brief summarises the EIA approach and the substantial body of evidence EIA has contributed to the international evidence base since 2009. This demonstrates that improved teaching practice and student learning outcomes can be, and have been, achieved at large scale, with high value for money, in the context of Bangladesh.

QUALITY AND EQUITY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' CLASSROOM PRACTICES IN BANGLADESH

Classrooms as they were before EIA intervention

EIA baselines¹ show that: In 90% of lessons observed, only three teacher practices were observed - teachers talked from the front; asked closed questions and marked individual students from books.

Teachers talked almost exclusively in Bangla. Students rarely heard spoken English in English lessons. Most students had little or no opportunity to speak beyond choral responses to closed questions and most student talk was in Bangla. There was a focus on grammar-translation and memorisation for exams. (p.12)

Although the intention of the curriculum (for example, in the English for Today textbooks) is for communicative language teaching, classroom practices are poorly developed and rarely create a communicative learning environment. There is little opportunity for students to practise speaking, listening or communicating in English. These findings are in line with prior studies² which found that teaching is mainly a matter of teacher talk to the whole class, closed questions, chorused responses of 'the right answer' (or what the teacher says), repetitive tasks, and barely any opportunity for imaginative student responses.

Changes in practice which EIA promotes

EIA intends to help teachers bridge the gap between the communicative language teaching practices promoted by the national curriculum and textbooks, and current classroom practices.

EIA seeks to help teachers develop a fuller 'toolkit' of teaching techniques and classroom resources, so that they can plan and deliver more varied learning activities in lessons, and sequence activities effectively. In particular, EIA seeks to help teachers:

- » create opportunities for all students to actively participate in lessons;
- » develop all four skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening), not just reading and writing;
- » increase student talk, especially among students in pairs or groups;
- » help students learn grammar in a meaningful context.

Whilst the focus here is specifically on English language teaching, such changes are very much in line with emerging international evidence³ on effective teaching behaviours, including:

- » flexible use of whole-class, group and pair work;
- » regular relevant use of materials beyond the textbook;
- » expanding student responses beyond closed questions;
- » appropriate use of code switching (using mother tongue and target language as required);
- » varying activities and lesson sequences.

1. English in Action (EIA) (2009). An Observation Study of English Lessons in Primary and Secondary Schools in Bangladesh. Baseline Study 3, English In Action, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
2. Tasker, G. (2008) Quality teaching better learning: towards quality primary education in Bangladesh, London: DFID. FMRP (2006). Social Sector Performance Surveys: Primary education in Bangladesh: Assessing service delivery. OPM and FMRP: Dhaka.

3. Westbrook, J., Durrani, N., Brown, R., Orr, D., Pryor, J., Boddy, J., and Salvi, F. (2013). Pedagogy, curriculum, teaching practices and teacher education in developing countries: final report. Education rigorous literature review, EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE QUALITY AND EQUITY IN CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Two approaches to teacher development are most commonly used⁴:

- » Boutique' programmes of long, out-of-school workshops (typically of several weeks or months), led by national or international experts. Because of high cost and limited 'expert' capacity, such programmes can only reach small numbers of teachers.
- » Cascade training uses 'master trainers' and 'teacher trainers' to reach large scale at low-cost, but is often ineffective in bringing about meaningful changes in knowledge⁵ or practice⁶.

EIA takes a different approach to achieve high quality outcomes at large scale.



EVIDENCE FROM EIA BANGLADESH, 2010-2015

Teachers and students: more participation, interest and learning

As part of programme monitoring, a sample of teachers are asked about how important different aspects of the EIA approach are in helping them to improve their practice and how often they use that form of support. In 2014-15 over 2,000 teachers provided this information.

4. Tom Power, Robina Shaheen, Mike Solly, Clare Woodward & Sonia Burton (2012). English in action: school based teacher development in Bangladesh, *Curriculum Journal*, 23:4, 503-529. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2012.737539>

5. DFID (Department for International Development). 1998. Strengthening primary education in Kenya: An evaluation of the Strengthening Primary Education (SPRED) Project, Kenya, 1991-1996. London: Evaluation Department, DFID.

EIA is school-based. Teachers learn by carrying out new classroom activities, guided by teacher development videos that show and explain the activities. Teachers recognise that the videos show teachers, students and schools similar to their own; the activities are relevant to their needs and practical in their context. Teachers also have classroom audio for use with students. All EIA activities and materials relate to the national curriculum and textbooks and have been refined over several years. All teachers have the materials available on their mobile phones, so there is no dilution of the programme's core messages by some intermediary coming between them and the development materials.

The teachers are supported by a partner teacher in their own school. Head teachers also encourage their teachers to work through the activities together in school and monitor how teachers are getting on. Local Teacher Facilitators (TFs) lead local teacher development meetings helping teachers to work through the activities and share their experiences together.

- » The aspects most teachers considered very important were local teacher development meetings, teacher development videos, and classroom activities.
- » Over 70% teachers said they used the teacher development videos every week.
- » Over 80% teachers said they carried out the classroom activities every week.

6. Kraft, R., Ehsan, A., and Khanam, R. (2009). Comprehensive Primary Teacher Education & Continuing Professional Development: A Framework for Reform. Draft Final Report. Technical report, UNICEF, Dhaka, Bangladesh.



There have also been three research studies of teacher and student perceptions from before EIA started (2009) and then again in the pilot (2010) and again at scale (2013). These have each involved hundreds of teachers and students.

- » Before students thought English is important and were highly motivated to learn it, but many students thought English was difficult to learn. After EIA, even more students think it is important to learn English, but far fewer think it is difficult to learn.
- » Many students say they enjoy the EIA activities (including the songs at primary level) and they liked learning English and using it in the classroom, especially talking with each other in English.
- » In all the studies teachers agree that English is an important language and that it is necessary for students to learn it for both jobs and further study. Those who participated in EIA almost all support the communicative approach and saw improved learning and motivation in their students.
- » 90% teachers agreed that since taking part in EIA, their own English proficiency had improved, they felt more confident to use English in the classroom and EIA had an impact on the way they teach.

Field staff and field researchers' observations on classrooms and schools

As part of programme monitoring, in 2014-15, Government educational managers and EIA field staff observed some 200 classrooms. They found that almost all the primary teachers used EIA audio materials and the majority used posters. In secondary these were used in almost three-quarters of classrooms.

- » 90% teachers were observed organising student work in pairs and groups, and in two-thirds of lessons observed, more than half of all students' talk was in English.

To provide robust research evidence, EIA conducted a series of three studies (2011, 2012 and 2013) to find out whether teachers had improved their classroom practice, looking especially at opportunities for students to talk in English. Researchers from the Institute of Education and Research (University of Dhaka) carried out a systematic observation of around 400 lessons for each study. The observations show substantial increases in students' active

participation, with more opportunities to speak and practise the target language. This was maintained as EIA scaled up from the pilot to the current cohort of teachers.

- » The results indicate that students talk for about a quarter of the lesson and do so mainly in English. They also talk for 20% or more of that time in pairs and groups, which are particularly good to develop their English communication skills. By the same token, teachers only speak for around half of the lesson and teachers mostly talk in English.
- » In a lesson of 34 minutes, the teacher was typically speaking for only 16 minutes, i.e. less than half of the lesson time, and teachers were mostly talking in English. Students were speaking for 9 minutes. For 3 minutes of the lesson, the students were listening to audio materials, for 2 minutes they were reading and for 2 minutes they were writing. Of the 9 minutes when students were speaking, they were talking in English for 8 of those minutes. In total, students were active for 16 minutes i.e. 47% of the lesson.

These changes mean students now have the opportunity to practise speaking and listening, as well as to continue reading and writing, in English. Students also hear a wider range of spoken English, through the use of classroom audio resources.

Impact on student learning outcomes

The achievements of students have been independently assessed against international standards by Trinity College London, UK. The assessment is a one-to-one conversation, so it gives good evidence of how students communicate in English in a realistic situation.

Assessments in 2010, before the start of the project, provided a baseline against which future students could be assessed and showed that before EIA, proficiency was low: two thirds of primary students did not achieve a pass; in secondary students, one quarter of students did not pass, and one quarter of students only achieved the lowest level (grade 1).



At the end of each stage of the EIA project, a representative sample of students across the country has been assessed. In 2011 at the end of the pilot phase, students showed substantial improvements:

- » After a year with EIA, the primary pass rate had increased to over half, while the secondary pass rate was about nine-out-of-ten. In 2013, more than two-thirds of primary students passed the assessment, and again almost 90% of secondary (the same as in 2012) passed, even though the numbers of teachers and students taking part in EIA was very much larger.
- » In the most recent assessments, in 2014, the pass rates were equally high. In three successive studies, at increasingly large scale, every cohort of EIA students has improved proficiency in English Language compared to the baseline, with more students passing the assessment.

As well as making substantial differences in the quality of teaching practice and learning outcomes, EIA has demonstrated a high degree of equity in learning outcomes by gender and location: in each study, male and female students have performed equally well (and in some cases girls have performed better than boys) and the differences between students in rural, semi-rural and urban areas have not been great.

EMERGING INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE

The findings of EIA are in broad agreement with an emerging consensus in the international literature, on the aspects of teacher development or classroom practice, that contribute to improved educational quality and equity in schools. The key findings of recent DFID literature reviews (Westbrook et al, 2013; Power et al, 2014) identify peer support, head teacher support, follow-up support and monitoring, alignment with teacher needs and curriculum and use of offline AV materials and mobile technologies, as factors that contribute to improving the quality of

educational outcomes from teacher development or educational technology programmes; these findings are echoed in other recent reviews by BERA (British Education Research Association) and IoE (Institute of Education, University College London).

VALUE FOR MONEY

As the scale of EIA's reach to teachers and students has increased and the programme has become increasingly institutionalized, costs have become comparable to those of Government of Bangladesh teacher development programmes. Yet for similar levels of inputs, much greater results are achieved, in terms of improvements in teacher understanding, classroom practice and student learning outcomes.

SUMMARY

EIA approaches to improving classroom practice and learning outcomes through school-based teacher development, using low-cost mobile phones and local peer support, have been developed and refined over the last seven years through extensive work with teachers and education officials across the country. EIA's research has received international recognition from the UK Collaborative on Development Sciences.

As the scale has increased from hundreds to thousands to tens of thousands of teachers, costs have become comparable to Government of Bangladesh norms, yet changes in the quality and equity of teaching and learning have been maintained. An emerging body of evidence, including major reviews by DFID, BERA and IoE, identify common features of effective classroom and teacher development practices, that EIA exemplifies in the context of Bangladesh.



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