

An Audit of Current Materials for Teaching English in Bangladesh



One of the series of studies carried out for English in Action in 2008-2009

Introduction: Background and Setting

- English in Action (EiA) aims to develop language learning and teaching over a 9-year period. It is funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DfID).
- The goal of EiA is to "contribute to the economic growth of Bangladesh by providing English language as a tool for better access to the world economy". The purpose of the project is to "increase significantly the number of people able to communicate in English, to levels that enable them to participate fully in economic and social activities and opportunities".
- The EIA project aims to achieve its goal and purpose by introducing innovative pedagogical practices and new materials to support English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh.
- This baseline study was undertaken in August 2008 to examine the materials already in use in English language teaching in Bangladesh.
- The results could be used as a basis for developing new learning materials for English language learners in Bangladesh.

How this study was carried out?

Data for this study was using a variety of methods. First, a workshop was held in Dhaka attended by representatives from 16 government organizations (GOs) and NGOs. A pre-structured questionnaire was used which the respondents completed during the workshop.

Second, visits were made to different NGOs, government organizations and private schools in Bangladesh and interviews were held with relevant people.

Third, various reports, project documents, teacher training materials and journal articles were collected and analysed. Some textbooks were analysed in terms of lesson content and approach, particularly the GoB English for Today textbooks for Grades 1-5 and materials available in BRAC Primary schools. Other materials were examined for comparison.

Key Findings

“There was a scarcity of print materials even in elite schools”

The print materials available for the teaching of English in Primary and Secondary school are limited even in more élite English Medium schools.

“Whatever was available was of poor quality and grammar-focused”

The market place and publishing of English books shows little awareness of a possibly increasing market and the quality remains poor and many books are old series from England that have not been used in UK schools for many years. The emphasis in workbooks and textbooks is on grammatical structures and outmoded exercises and often-outmoded vocabulary.

“Books produced by NGOs appeared to be of better quality”

In the Primary sector NGOs have produced better quality and more child and context focused textbooks. NGO books look nicer than the government textbooks but they cost considerably more. Government textbooks are written by a committee of writers, often drawn from the Secondary, tertiary or university sector. The educational quality, content and predicative methodology is very variable with some sections showing insight into the learning of language by young learners; other sections are incomprehensible, not relevant to the Bangladesh context and contain little to help students or teachers to become better learners and speakers of English.

Key Conclusions

The materials available and already in use in English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh do not provide effective means for imparting communicative language competence among students and teachers. The materials used in NGO schools were relatively more effective than those used in government schools.