



# Improving English Language Competence

## BACKGROUND

With approximately 4,400 teachers, Cohort 2 of the English in Action (EIA) school-based teacher development (SBTD) programme was six times larger than Cohort 1. This cohort was enabled by a greater emphasis on teacher development videos and local peer support, with less direct contact with English language teaching (ELT) specialists.

## RESEARCH

EIA carried out a study to assess student learning outcomes for Cohort 2, against recognised international frameworks of English language (EL) competence<sup>1</sup>; and to explore teachers' EL competence.

The research questions were:

1. To what extent do the students and teachers of Cohort 2 show improved EL competence?
2. To what extent has the programme been successful in repeating the improvements seen in Cohort 1, at a much larger scale?

A post-intervention assessment on Cohort 2 was carried out independently by Trinity College London, through face-to-face interviews in 2013.

Results from these were compared to Cohort 1 pre-intervention (baseline) and post-intervention scores in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

A total of 532 teachers (246 primary and 286 secondary) and 884 students (463 primary and 421 secondary) were assessed from Cohort 2. The sample size enabled statistically valid comparisons to be made with the previous studies.

The EL competence of both teachers and students was measured using the 12-point Trinity scale: Grade 1 indicates initial spoken English; Grade 12 indicates complete fluency.

## KEY FINDINGS

### *Primary Students*

Over two-thirds (70%) of Cohort 2 primary students passed, with most students achieving Grade 1 (44%) or 2 (18%). This shows very substantial improvement over both the 2010 baseline (34% more Grade 1 or above; 20% more Grade 2 or above) and over Cohort 1 post-intervention (20% more grade 1 or above than in 2011).

The performance of girls (74% pass) was statistically significantly higher than boys (65% pass) and, surprisingly, those who were in rural schools performed statistically better (81% pass) than those who lived in semi-urban (60% pass) and urban areas (59% pass).

### *Secondary Students*

Over four-fifths of secondary students (86%) passed, with 60% achieving Grade 2 or higher. Cohort 2 secondary students performed considerably better than the baseline in 2010, with 14% more at Grade 2 and above, and 11% more at Grade 1 and above, although Cohort 1 pass rates remained statistically higher than Cohort 2.

There were no statistically significant gender differences in secondary student scores. Pass rates were similar by location, but more semi-urban (33%) than rural students (19%) achieved Grade 3 (the difference was statistically significant).

### *Primary Teachers*

All primary teachers achieved a pass grade, and most (93%) achieved Grade 2 or above. There were no statistically significant gender differences. Rural teachers performed less well (43%) at higher grades (3–4) than urban (53%) or semi-urban (63%) teachers.

Primary teachers performed better than the 2010 baseline (7% more at Grade 2+; 3% more at Grade 3+); post-intervention scores were within 1% of Cohort 1 at Grade 2+, but 5% lower at Grade 3+.

<sup>1</sup> Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE) (Trinity College London, 2013), which map onto the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages (Trinity College London, 2007).

## Secondary Teachers

Almost all (99.7%) secondary teachers achieved a pass grade, with over half (52%) achieving Grades 3–4. There were no statistically significant differences by gender or by location. (There were no urban secondary schools in the sample.)

There were no statistically significant differences between Cohort 2 secondary teachers and either the baseline or the Cohort 1 post-intervention scores.

## SUMMARY

These results show that the EIA SBTD programme has achieved considerable improvements in student EL learning outcomes, over the baseline. For primary students, these increases are great, and much greater than those achieved for Cohort 1. For secondary students, the achievements are similar to those of the pilot, but with slightly fewer achieving the highest grades.

This suggests the large-scale, more localised and decentralised SBTD programme was almost as effective in improving secondary student learning outcomes, and substantially and statistically significantly better in improving primary student learning outcomes, compared with the smaller scale Cohort 1 programme.

## ABOUT ENGLISH IN ACTION

English in Action (EIA) is a nine-year education programme which aims to enhance the economic and social prospects of people in Bangladesh by improving their communicative English. It does this through communicative language learning in primary and secondary classrooms, and television and other media, such as websites and mobile, aimed at adults.

EIA encourages teachers to introduce new English language learning activities into their classroom practice, with their students. Teachers are supported by audio-visual and print materials for professional development and classroom practice activities, and by other teachers in their school and local area. Teachers 'learn by doing' in the classroom, reflecting on their

practice and by supporting each other. They are guided by a video 'trainer in the pocket', showing authentic videos of classroom practice and supported by audio materials for use with students in class. Audio-visual materials are provided at low cost, offline, through memory cards accessed on affordable mobile phones.

Following the pilot intervention with 751 teachers (Cohort 1), the EIA schools intervention up-scaled with a cohort of 4,368 teachers and an estimated 887,000 students in 2012 (Cohort 2).

EIA research reports are available at [www.eiabd.com](http://www.eiabd.com) under 'publications'.

## REFERENCES

*EIA (2012). English Proficiency Assessments of Primary and Secondary Teachers and Students Participating in English in Action (Study 3a2). Dhaka: EIA.*

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*Trinity College London (2007). Relating the Trinity College London GESE and ISE examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference – project summary. London: Trinity College London.*

*Trinity College London (2013). Exam Information: Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE). London: Trinity College London.*



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