

Teachers' experiences of school-based teacher development in support of communicative English language teaching in Government schools in Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

In transitioning from pilot (phase II, 2008-2011, ~750 teachers) to large-scale implementation (phase III, 2011 – 2014, ~12,500 teachers), the EIA approach to school-based teacher development (SBTD) underwent a number of critical changes necessary to maintain quality and impact, through increasing scale and value-for-money whilst decreasing per-capita training costs and reliance on national and international experts. The large-scale implementation phase (III) may also be viewed as a transitional stage in the journey from delivery through a 'project mode' in phase II, to delivery through an 'institutionalised mode', with and through Government mechanisms and personnel, in phase IV.

The changes in approach, known internally by the programme team as the 'New Elements' of the teacher development model, included:

- ➲ **New audio-visual (AV) materials**, most significantly, greatly increased use of video to show communicative language practices taking place in authentic classrooms in Bangladesh. These were used to model new practices (Westbrook et al., 2013:60), enabling 'learning by looking' (Cordingley, 2013:6) for teachers.
- ➲ **Emphasis on 'school-based' teacher development**, through inclusion of primary head teachers as classroom practitioners, an explicit pro-active role for head teachers in supporting teacher development activities in school and promotion of peer observation of lessons. These were intended to encourage active support from the head teacher and school leadership (Westbrook et al, 2013:62) and to promote a school culture that encouraged collaborative learning (Avaolos, 2011:12-16), as well as providing further opportunities for 'learning by looking'. Teachers were also intended to use the new AV materials to help each other plan, carry out and reflect upon new activities in their classrooms, situating professional learning in the context of schools and classroom practice (Avaolos, 2011:12-13) and providing teachers with opportunity for enquiry based learning, to identify what works for them, in what contexts (Cordingley, 2013:5).

➲ **Emphasis on peer support, through local Teacher Facilitators (TFs)**. Whereas in the pilot, international and national experts ran most of the teacher development meetings, in phase III, most meetings were run by local teachers, who were given extra training and support to act as facilitators, guiding teachers through the professional development activities in the materials, whilst also promoting peer learning (Avaolos, 2011:17-18; Cordingley 2013:5; Westbrook, 2013:61-62) and the development of support networks.

Social Inclusion, which had previously been implicit, was made an explicit focus of each teacher development module and meeting. Government Education Officers were given a pro-active role in quality assurance, through school visits and classroom observation, to include them in programme activity and strengthen monitoring.

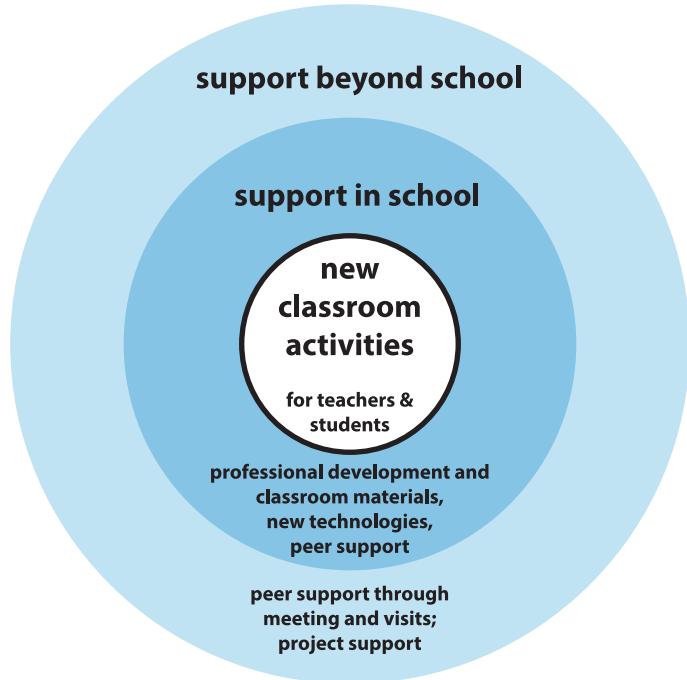
The mobile technology used also became significantly more affordable, with low-cost feature phones (the kinds of phones teachers were purchasing for themselves) and SD memory cards replacing iPod media players and low-cost portable speakers becoming available from China.

The purpose of this study was to provide the programme team with insights as to how these changes were being experienced by teachers in the field, to inform iterative programme design and delivery.



RESEARCH QUESTION

The changes in teacher development approach ran across all three levels of the EIA teacher development model (Power, 2015).



The Research Question was:

'How have changes to EIA programme design and implementation affected teachers' experiences, with reference to:

- Carrying out new classroom activities
- The school as a centre for teacher development
- Peer facilitation of professional development beyond school.

This question was explored through three cross-cutting themes: teachers' experiences of new materials, new technologies and social inclusion, in the context of each level of the model.

All three levels of the study were carried out using small-scale, qualitative case studies, through semi-structured interviews (Longhurst, 2010) to gain an in-depth insight into participants' experiences. Direct observation of practice was also used to inform, or provide concrete illustration of, issues discussed in the interviews. Observations of lessons took place prior to teacher interviews, and of teacher development meetings, prior to teacher facilitator interviews. All semi-structured interviews had a two-part structure, with an open-ended phase giving space for participants to freely explore their expectations, perceptions, aspirations or frustrations; followed by a more structured phase, focussed upon the cross-cutting themes.

EXPERIENCES OF CARRYING OUT NEW CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Researchers were persuaded by direct observation and by views expressed by teachers, students and head teachers, that the school-based teacher development approach was embedding deep rooted and significant pedagogical changes in classroom practice. All teachers felt the programme had brought positive changes in their classroom practice, that students were very aware of these changes and were much more engaged in lessons than they had been previously. Some expressed this very vociferously (e.g. saying emphatically and repeatedly that it was a "radical transformation"). Most teachers reported their lessons are now more based around student activity. (One teacher stressed that he 'never' taught in the way he does now; another teacher stressed how his students were far more active now. A further teacher said he used to 'lecture' the students and they were 'afraid of me', now they 'love the classes and speak actively'). Evidence for the teachers' claims of active classrooms was certainly present in all observed classes, to varying degrees. Observations suggested students were familiar with routines associated with pair and group activity and many students enthusiastically confirmed this, expressing new-found enjoyment of their English lessons, several stressing how much they liked the use of audio in class.

Several teachers seemed much more fluent and comfortable with English language in the lesson, than in interview. The implication of this is that they had become able to operate comfortably in English in the



classroom context, using classroom language. The teachers whose classrooms showed the greatest extent of student engagement and communicative activity, were also those who were the most self-reflective and self-critical. Appropriate communicative practices included successful uses of integrated skills practice, meaningful pair and group work and effective, even model, use of audio resources.

New Materials. The ability to use classroom audio was mentioned by many of the teachers and demonstrated in a number of the classes. 'When they listen to the audio they are very much attentive ...but when they listen from my mouth (they are not so attentive). Some of the teachers felt that the productive use of the speaker (audio) and mobile phone was the key difference between EIA and programmes that had preceded it.

New Technologies. It may have been expected that the biggest challenge would have been with the technical operation of the mobile phones and audio in the classroom. However, there were no problems reported or observed, with the use of the mobile phone or speaker in the classroom.

Social Inclusion. Inclusion was evident to some extent in all observed classes in that teachers were, to varying degrees, aware of encouraging and providing opportunities for all students to participate. One teacher stressed that 'I want every student to talk'. When asked if he attempted to include all students before EIA, he shook his head and added 'Before EIA not very interesting ...only text book, duster, talk'. Other teachers talked of wider inclusion issues and strategies.

EXPERIENCES OF THE SCHOOL AS A CENTRE FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Most teachers report planning lessons and discussing experiences with other teachers at school. Most teachers mention doing this during free periods or at lunch, whilst one teacher reports teachers meeting regularly in the evenings to discuss plans at home in their village. In one school teachers talk about formal meetings (not the administrative staff meeting) where all the teachers meet to discuss teaching and learning; another teacher talks about showing and discussing the audio and video resources from the training, with other teachers, when they meet regularly.

Head teachers were generally seen to be enthusiastic supporters (both by themselves and by teachers), but there was no evidence of any pro-active head teacher activity to promote or monitor school based teacher development activities.

New Materials. Generally, teachers were very positive about the new materials (both those for classroom use and for teacher development) and to varying degrees, all demonstrated a working knowledge of the techniques contained in the materials. All teachers spoke of the usefulness of the teacher development videos. Some teachers could identify specific activities in the lesson observed, that they had adapted directly from the video clips and in one case, could identify the source material.

New Technologies. Several teachers referred to the mobile learning (for teacher development and for classroom practice) as being one of the most distinctive features to which they attribute programme effectiveness. One teacher reports '[Other programmes]... just trained us, after that, there was no communication... [technology and ongoing support] they are the big things...', going on to say the other teachers in the school '...were astonished' when they presented the phone, speaker and materials and talked about how they were going to use them. Another teacher notes 'We use audio and video from our training [in our school]. If we had a video set in the classroom, we would use [that too] ... our government... they will be providing... multi-media classroom'. No teachers identified any problems, relating to the use of new technologies in school.

Social Inclusion. Most teachers were able to say little about engaging with social inclusion issues or strategies as part of their professional development within school. One teacher said he included all the students because 'if I become busy with the good student only, then what will happen with the others?'. He attributed the inclusion strategies he uses to the EIA teacher guide '...that gave



me a chance to think about all the students... I make it very clear.....you are coming from different families, different environments, but here you are given one uniform. Same class, same uniform....all are equal....if you are from other religions, other environments, other families, rich or poor, forget it, forget this, forget it totally. You are here only as student...'.

EXPERIENCES OF PEER FACILITATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BEYOND SCHOOL

The cluster meetings observed were well attended (19-21 teachers). Teachers were seated in groups, in rooms that were fit for purpose. Teachers seemed engaged and professional learning appeared to be taking place. TF's (Teacher Facilitator) worked together as a team and were generally attentive to the needs of teachers. TF's had prepared thoroughly for the cluster meetings. TF's were a little dominant, not really allowing sufficient time to allow participants to make thoughtful contributions.

New materials. All TFs stressed that perhaps the most important thing for them was to be very familiar with the videos and modules. They also stressed the importance and usefulness of the modules, audio and video. In general, there was a feeling that more audio and longer video clips (of complete classes) would be helpful. The primary TFs suggested producing a series of videos aimed at the TF role, in the way that current videos were aimed at the teachers' role. This has been included for phase IV (2014 onwards).

New technologies. All TFs were very positive about the role of new technologies in EIA. There was a strong opinion that this was one of the unique and positive aspects of the project. They also stressed that the technology (and particularly the video) enabled them to experience rather than just learn about the techniques in EIA. A desire was also expressed for the provision of

projectors as this would make the group viewing of the videos easier to manage. No TFs expressed any difficulty with using the technology.

Social Inclusion. All TFs recognized the importance of encouraging the participation of all teachers (just as they attempt to do this with students in their classes). The secondary TFs were rather more vociferous, expressing that EIA had raised their consciousness of issues of inclusion and that they saw it as an essential part of the programme.

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