



Learning English: Teachers' and Students' Perceptions

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 establish the views of teaching and learning English among Cohort 2 teachers and students participating. Views were compared with those of the teachers and students participating in Cohort 1 (2010) and aspects of a baseline study (2009).

The research question was:

To what extent has the programme been successful in reproducing the perceptions seen in Cohort 1, when Cohort 2 is operating at a much larger scale?

The study focused upon:

1. Teachers' views on communicative EL teaching and learning approaches, their own classroom practices and student responses, and the utility of the EIA programme;
2. Students' views on English and EL learning, and their experience in English lessons.

The study used questionnaires, self-completed by teachers and secondary students, or completed by interviewer for primary students. Fieldwork was carried out by researchers from the Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka.

Teachers and students were selected from EIA schools in six divisions across Bangladesh, through random stratified sampling. The sample comprised 269 primary teachers, 123 primary head teachers (HTs) and 143 secondary teachers. Student data were collected from 376 primary and 457 secondary students.

KEY FINDINGS

Primary teachers

Almost all primary teachers (99%) agreed taking part in EIA helped them to improve their own English (53% strongly agreed). A very large majority (89%) also felt that EIA had an impact on their confidence to use more English.

Almost all primary teachers (92%) agreed EIA had an impact on the way they teach, with two-thirds (63%) strongly agreeing. Although teachers expressed a degree of support for some more traditional approaches (grammar rules, repetition, error correction) to a greater degree than in Cohort 1, most primary teachers (87%) agreed the focus in their English classes was communication. Most (89%) reported often using activities where the students interacted with each other in English, and 81% agreed that students liked these activities. Almost all (98%) reported using more pair and groupwork as a result of EIA and 91% agreed that students played games or sang songs more often.

Asked whether changes in their teaching had a positive impact on student motivation, 99% agreed (57% strongly). When asked whether changes in their teaching had a positive impact on student learning, 82% of primary teachers agreed.¹

Primary students

Over half of primary students (64%) reported that their English teachers used English most of the time in their lessons.

Most primary students reported regularly participating in classroom activities that are promoted in the EIA materials (79% regularly interacting in English, 95% playing games, 93% singing songs), and finding them enjoyable (interacting in English (79%), playing games (95%); singing songs (93%)). Most also reported enjoying more traditional activities, such as learning grammar rules (95%) and being corrected by the teacher (98%).

Almost all (99%) liked learning English, and 96% said they liked learning English because it is important for them; less than a third felt it was difficult to learn (32%).

Secondary teachers

Almost all secondary teachers (96%) agreed taking part in EIA helped them to improve their own English. A very large majority (88%) also felt that EIA had an impact on their

¹ Note, primary teacher and primary head teacher data were analysed and reported together.

confidence to use more English. 80% agreed they used mostly English in the classroom and 88% agreed that teachers speaking in English in the classroom is essential for student learning.

Almost all secondary teachers (93%) agreed EIA had an impact on the way they teach, with two-thirds (66%) strongly agreeing. Although teachers expressed a degree of support for some more traditional approaches such as error correction (88%) and repetition (85%), most secondary teachers (89%) agreed that the focus in their English classes was on communication. Most (88%) reported often using activities where the students interacted with each other in English, and 74% agreed that students liked these activities. Almost all secondary teachers (92%) reported using more pair and groupwork as a result of EIA, and nearly three-quarters (71%) agreed that students played games or sang songs more often.

Asked whether changes in their teaching had a positive impact on student motivation, 97% agreed (60% strongly). When asked whether changes in their teaching had a positive impact on student learning, 79% agreed.

Secondary students

While only a third of secondary students reported that their teacher used English most of the time in lessons (36%), most (80%) reported speaking in English in lessons with their classmates, and 82% reported enjoying this. Perhaps predictably, secondary students reported less playing and singing: only a third (33%) reported playing games and singing, and a similar proportion (35%) reported liking these activities.

Most secondary students were strongly motivated to learn English: 94% thought English is important in their life, and 92% thought it will help them find a good job. Almost half (44%) thought English was not difficult to learn, but a third (33%) felt it was.

In the baseline study (EIA 2009), 51% of primary and secondary students thought English was very important, and 60% thought English was difficult to learn.

SUMMARY

Most primary and secondary teachers reported impact from EIA on their own confidence in, and use of, English language. Although teachers expressed a degree of support for some more traditional approaches, almost all teachers reported changes in their classroom practice, with an emphasis on communication and frequent use of interactive strategies. Most teachers believed this has led to improved student motivation and learning outcomes.

Most students confirmed changes in teaching practice, with increased opportunities to use the target language and actively participate in lessons. They also reported a strong motivation to learn English.

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 under 'publications'.

REFERENCES

EIA (2009). *Baseline Study 2: Socio-linguistic Factors –The Motivations and Experiences of School Students, Teachers and Adults in the Community*. Dhaka: EIA.

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