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Teaching and learning English in Bangladesh: English in Action teachers' and students' perceptions

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Background

English in Action (EIA) is a 9-year (2008-2017) English language programme, aiming to provide learning opportunities to 25 million people in Bangladesh. Funded by UKaid, the programme is implemented by the Government of Bangladesh and run by BMB Mott McDonald with technical support from The Open University (UK) and BBC Media Action, and local partners: Underprivileged Children's Educational Programmes and Friends in Village Development Bangladesh.

The EIA schools component includes a practice-based teacher professional development programme, comprising audio-visuials – on micro-SD cards within mobile phones – and print materials to encourage teachers to use communicative language teaching (CLT) activities. Teachers are also given audios and posters to engage students. All materials link to the content of the national textbook. The professional development model involves peer support: learning with a partner teacher and regular meetings with other participating teachers to share experiences.

A pilot involving 750 teachers was carried out in 2010-11, after which the programme scaled up to 4,000 teachers (2012). The programme currently works with 8,000 primary and secondary teachers and 1.7 million students across the country in rural and urban areas. By 2017, 76,500 teachers and 8.6 million students will have been reached.

Perception study

EIA conducted an evaluation study to ascertain views of teachers and students to EL practices and EIA within schools participating in EIA. Views of teachers and secondary students were collected via self-completion questionnaire, and primary students via survey interview. Questionnaires comprised statements to which respondents showed their preferences according to a five-point scale. The sample consisted of 535 teachers, 457 secondary students

and 374 primary students. Fieldwork was carried out in 13 *upazila* across six divisions by researchers from the Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka.

Findings

Findings showed EIA had an impact on teachers' ability to use English more in the classroom, and students reported their teachers spoke more English. However, more teachers felt Bangla helped students understand. Teachers also reported their students were more motivated. Although there was an increase in the use of English in the classrooms, more interaction through audio and visual resources, teachers and students showed strong attachment to more traditional approaches such as drilling and grammar. Although teachers felt positive about using CLT they felt teaching large classes, time management and the exam were the main obstacles to using it. In comparison, primary teachers seemed to feel the grammar-based exam was more of an obstacle for them than for secondary teachers. Tables 1, 2 and 3 (EIA 2014c) summarise the key findings.

Table 1: Teachers' perceptions

	Primary	Secondary
EIA helps improve my English.	99%	96%
I use English in class most of the time.	70%	80%
The focus in on fluency – grammar is explained as required.	87%	89%
I use interactive activities.	89%	88%
Changes in classroom practices have improved students motivation.	99%	97%
Grammar should be taught explicitly.	47%	58%
Students improve more quickly when grammar is taught and practised.	70%	70%
Drilling is important to learn.	95%	85%

Table 2: Students' perceptions

	Primary¹	Secondary
The teacher uses English in class most of the time.	64%	36%
I like it when the teacher uses Bangla.	69%	37%
We like interactive activities.	79%	80%
We enjoy learning with songs.	93%	33%
English is important.	96%	92%
English is difficult.	32%	33%
I like speaking English in class.	-	69%
Drilling is enjoyable.	-	89%
I like learning grammar rules.	-	86%
Learning English means learning grammar rules.	-	69%
The teacher should correct all the errors.	-	93%

Table 3: Teachers perceptions: Main obstacles to implementing EIA practices

	Primary	Secondary
Large classes	68%	62%
Students low proficiency in English	87%	79%
Time management	58%	46%
Grammar-based exam	64%	28%

Conclusion

Evidence showed EIA is making an impact on perceptions of teaching and learning English in schools. Teachers and students have a positive attitude towards EIA and English language learning, but the reality of Bangladesh classrooms –large classes, the national exam and limited time – makes it difficult for teachers to implement CLT fully.

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¹ Because of the primary students' young age not all questions asked to secondary students were asked to primary. This explains the lack of data for some questions.

References

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