English in Action School-Based Teachers Development - Body of Evidence

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INTRODUCTION

English in Action (EIA) works to improve the English language competence amongst school students and the adult population of Bangladesh, so that millions more Bangladeshi can benefit from social and economic opportunities that require communication in English. The programme is implemented by Government of Bangladesh and funded by UK aid from the UK Government.

In order to improve the quality of student learning in English, teachers have to find ways to improve the teaching and learning practices in their classrooms. EIA is designed to help teachers do this, through continuous in-service teacher professional development.

There are relatively few teacher development programmes that generate hard evidence about improvements in teaching and learning, especially at large scale. This brief summarises the EIA approach and the substantial body of evidence EIA has contributed to the international evidence base since 2009. This demonstrates that improved teaching practice and student learning outcomes can be, and have been, achieved at large scale, with high value for money, in the context of Bangladesh.

QUALITY AND EQUITY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS’ CLASSROOM PRACTICES IN BANGLADESH

Classrooms as they were before EIA intervention

EIA baselines1 show that in 90% of lessons observed, only three teacher practices were observed - teachers talked from the front; asked closed questions and marked individual students from books.

Teachers talked almost exclusively in Bangla. Students rarely heard spoken English in English lessons. Most students had little or no opportunity to speak beyond choral responses to closed questions and most student talk was in Bangla. There was a focus on grammar-translation and memorisation for exams.1,2

Although the intention of the curriculum (for example, in the English for Today textbooks) is for communicative language teaching, classroom practices are poorly developed and rarely create a communicative learning environment. There is little opportunity for students to practise speaking, listening or communicating in English. These findings are in line with prior studies2 which found that teaching is mainly a matter of teacher talk to the whole class, closed questions, chorused responses of ‘the right answer’ (or what the teacher says), repetitive tasks, and barely any opportunity for imaginative student responses.

Changes in practice which EIA promotes

EIA intends to help teachers bridge the gap between the communicative language teaching practices promoted by the national curriculum and textbooks, and current classroom practices.

EIA seeks to help teachers develop a fuller ‘toolkit’ of teaching techniques and classroom resources, so that they can plan and deliver more varied learning activities in lessons, and sequence activities effectively. In particular, EIA seeks to help teachers:

» create opportunities for all students to actively participate in lessons;
» develop all four skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening), not just reading and writing;
» increase student talk, especially among students in pairs or groups;
» help students learn grammar in a meaningful context.

Whilst the focus here is specifically on English language teaching, such changes are very much in line with emerging international evidence3 on effective teaching behaviours, including:

» flexible use of whole-class, group and pair work;
» regular relevant use of materials beyond the textbook;
» expanding student responses beyond closed questions;
» appropriate use of code switching (using mother tongue and target language as required);
» varying activities and lesson sequences.

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TEACHER DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE QUALITY AND EQUITY IN CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Two approaches to teacher development are most commonly used:

- **Boutique programmes of long, out-of-school workshops** (typically of several weeks or months), led by national or international experts. Because of high cost and limited ‘expert’ capacity, such programmes can only reach small numbers of teachers.

- **Cascade training** uses ‘master trainers’ and ‘teacher trainers’ to reach large scale at low-cost, but is often ineffective in bringing about meaningful changes in knowledge or practice.

EIA takes a different approach to achieve high quality outcomes at large scale.

EIA is school-based. Teachers learn by carrying out new classroom activities, guided by teacher development videos that show and explain the activities. Teachers recognise that the videos show teachers, students and schools similar to their own; the activities are relevant to their needs and practical in their context. Teachers also have classroom audio for use with students. All EIA activities and materials relate to the national curriculum and textbooks and have been refined over several years. All teachers have the materials available on their mobile phones, so there is no dilution of the programme’s core messages by some intermediary coming between them and the development materials. The teachers are supported by a partner teacher in their own school. Head teachers also encourage their teachers to work through the activities together in school and monitor how teachers are getting on. Local Teacher Facilitators (TFs) lead local teacher development meetings helping teachers to work through the activities and share their experiences together.

Yet, elements of the above have appeared in the Bangladeshi system for many years, and so what makes the difference? Some factors are highlighted below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modelling: seeing and experiencing new practices</th>
<th>What it’s not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seeing effective pedagogies being put into practice, in authentic classroom settings (e.g. on videos)</td>
<td>Watching other teachers doing the same things you are already doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating, as a learner, in new pedagogic activities and learning through experience</td>
<td>Observing new pedagogical practices which are not put in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing new classroom practices and generating learning through peer support in school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing new skills, building confidence and boosting motivation through practice</td>
<td>Doing ‘something’ with your class from a lesson you’ve seen, without thinking about why you are doing it, what difference it makes, or how it could be improved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective observation by peers to think differently about what is happening in your classroom</td>
<td>Not considering others’ experiences of practicing new pedagogies to enrich your own learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating teacher / school networks that support new classroom practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing practical understandings of which approaches work, for whom, in which contexts</td>
<td>Transmission of skills without critical understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering moral and emotional support to peers for trying something new in the classroom or school</td>
<td>One-off opportunity to interact and learn from peers and then onto a new topic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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EVIDENCE FROM EIA BANGLADESH, 2010-2017

What do teachers rate as important and what do they use?

As part of programme monitoring, in each cohort, a sample of teachers are asked about how important different aspects of the EIA approach are in helping them to improve their practice and how often they use that form of support. In 2015-16, over 3,500 teachers provided this information.

- The aspects most teachers considered very important were using EIA activities during teaching and discussing EIA activities with their project partner in school.
- The aspects most frequently used were EIA activities during teaching and support from their Head Teacher.
- Over 55% of teachers said they used the teacher development videos at least every two weeks.
- Government educational managers observed these teachers’ classrooms.
- In more than three-fifths of all classrooms observed, EIA audio resources were used.
- In over 81% of classes observed, there was pair and group work.
- In 93% of classes observed, most of the students participated in the lesson activities.

What are teachers’ and students views?

There have been three research studies of teacher and student perceptions from before EIA started (2009) and then again in the pilot (2010) and again at scale (2013). These have each involved hundreds of teachers and students.

- Before students thought English is important and were highly motivated to learn it, but many students thought English was difficult to learn. After EIA, even more students think it is important to learn English, but far fewer think it is difficult to learn.
- Many students say they enjoy the EIA activities (including the songs at primary level) and they liked learning English and using it in the classroom, especially talking with each other in English.
- In all the studies teachers agree that English is an important language and that it is necessary for students to learn it for both jobs and further study. Of those who participated in EIA, almost all support the communicative approach and saw improved learning and motivation in their students.
- 90% of teachers agreed that since taking part in EIA, their own English proficiency had improved, they felt more confident to use English in the classroom and EIA had an impact on the way they teach.

Is there impact on classroom practices and student learning outcomes?

The results of the primary schools intervention:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>2010 Cohort</th>
<th>2012 Cohort</th>
<th>2013 Cohort</th>
<th>2015 Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of participating teachers</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>2,702</td>
<td>5,253</td>
<td>14,511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of student talk in lessons</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of that student talk that is in English</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% achieving Trinity GESE® Grade 1</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>41% after 12 months</td>
<td>70% after 12 months</td>
<td>70% after 12 months</td>
<td>55% after 6 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the secondary schools intervention:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>2010 Cohort</th>
<th>2012 Cohort</th>
<th>2013 Cohort</th>
<th>2015 Cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of participating teachers</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>1,660</td>
<td>3,546</td>
<td>2,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of student talk in lessons</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of that student talk that is in English</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% achieving Trinity GESE® Grade 2</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>69% after 12 months</td>
<td>60% after 12 months</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>59% after 6 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Classroom practices

Researchers from the Institute of Education and Research (University of Dhaka) carried out a systematic observation of around 400 lessons for each study. The classroom observations show substantial increases in students’ active participation, with more opportunities to speak and practise the target language. This is maintained as EIA scaled up from the pilot to ever increasing numbers of teachers.

The 2015 cohort study is a large-scale, quantitative, quasi-experimental study, in which both EIA (treatment) schools and non-EIA (control) schools were measured. Even though the post-test measurement was taken while teachers were only half through the EIA programme, significant differences were beginning to emerge; such as decreased ‘teacher talk’ through ‘presenting’ to students in both primary and secondary; a dramatic four-fold increase (from 4% to 16%) in ‘student-student talk’ in primary treatment schools; substantial increase in ‘teacher talk’ in English of 22% (from 64% to 86%) in secondary treatment schools; a statistically significant increase in ‘student talk’ in English in secondary treatment schools.

In associated qualitative study, in one school, “the teacher had deliberately increased the use of spoken English over the year ‘We think… they won’t understand, but they understand’. Twice a month, teachers met together at lunchtime, to watch professional development videos and plan teaching. The Head Teacher observed and reviewed lessons with teachers. The Education Officer was actively supportive.”

7 EIA research reports at www.eiabd.com
8 Trinity College London Graded Examinations in Spoken English
**Student learning outcomes:**

In parallel, to assess any impact on student learning, the achievements of students have been independently assessed by Trinity College London, UK. The assessment is a one-to-one conversation, so it gives good evidence of how students communicate in English in a realistic situation. Assessments in 2010, before the start of the project, provided a baseline against which future students could be assessed and showed that before EIA, proficiency was low: two thirds of primary students did not achieve a pass; in secondary, one quarter of students did not pass.

At the end of each cohort of the EIA project, a representative sample of students across the country has been assessed and students have shown substantial improvements, as shown above. To illustrate, in order to achieve GESE Grade I, students are able to use simple commands, basic parts of the face and body, common animals, colours, basic pronunciation, everyday items of clothing, demonstratives, present simple tense, singular and plural, simple adjectives, personal information. Even at the scale of the 2015 cohort and despite the fact that there was very little time for improved practices to translate into improved student learning outcomes, significant learning gains can be seen.

As well as making substantial differences in the quality of teaching practice and learning outcomes, EIA has demonstrated a high degree of equity in learning outcomes by gender and location. In each study, male and female students have performed equally well (and in some cases girls have performed better than boys) and the differences between students in rural, semi-rural and urban areas have not been large.

**EMERGING INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE**

The findings of EIA are in broad agreement with an emerging consensus in the international literature, on the aspects of teacher development or classroom practice, that contribute to improved educational quality and equity in schools. The key findings of recent DFID literature reviews (Westbrook et al, 2013; Power et al, 2014) identify peer support, head teacher support, follow-up support and monitoring, alignment with teacher needs and curriculum and use of offline AV materials and mobile technologies, as factors that contribute to improving the quality of educational outcomes from teacher development or educational technology programmes; these findings are echoed in other recent reviews by BERA (British Education Research Association) and IoE (Institute of Education, University College London). Statistical analysis in 2016 of impact evaluations from 26 programmes in low and/or middle income countries reported the largest influences on student learning outcomes to be where the main focus of training was on practical classroom management, with other important influences being follow-up visits to school, programmes that had a primary focus on pedagogy or new technology and the proportion of training spent practising with other teachers.

**VALUE FOR MONEY**

As the scale of EIA’s reach to teachers and students has increased and the programme has become increasingly institutionalised, costs have become comparable to those of Government of Bangladesh teacher development programmes. Yet for similar levels of inputs, much greater results are achieved, in terms of improvements in teacher understanding, classroom practice and student learning outcomes.