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## Assessing the impact of large-scale teacher professional development (TPD) in Bangladesh: English in Action (EIA)

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**Paper Title** Assessing the Impact of Large-Scale Teacher Professional Development (TPD) in Bangladesh: English in Action (EIA)

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## **Assessing the impact of large-scale teacher professional development (TPD) in Bangladesh: English in Action (EIA)**

### **1. Purpose / objective**

English in Action (EIA) is a ground breaking 9-year project (2008–2017), being implemented through a consortium of international partners working with the Government of Bangladesh. The project aims to contribute to the country's social and economic growth by assisting 25 million people in improving their communicative English language skills. This paper illustrates EIA's innovative school based professional development (SBPD) model. This timely model is designed to achieve results at scale and is currently being used with 12,500 English teachers through 2014 and will be used with a further 80,000 English teachers and 12 million students by 2017. We argue that EIA's SBPD model—which utilises the 'trainer in your pocket' (Walsh, 2011; Walsh et al, 2013)—a low-cost mobile phone, with hundreds of teacher professional development and classroom audio and video files stored on micro secure digital (SD) cards, is timely and a pioneering intervention for international development projects which hope to achieve large scale change.

The SBPD combines the 'trainer in your pocket' with cyclical face-to-face cluster meetings, print teacher guides (the contents of which are strategically aligned with the national English textbook *English for Today* used in every government classroom across the country) and English for academic purposes resources that are well suited to meet project's primary goal: to provide 12 million students with increased English language competency to assist them in accessing greater social and economic opportunities in the future.

Presently, the SBPD has impacted positively on both teachers' and students' lives by significantly increasing their English language competence. Teachers have learned and embodied new communicative language teaching (CLT) practices and adopted robust student centred teaching approaches that have transformed classrooms across Bangladesh. The SBPD model is being currently used with 4500 teachers after an initial pilot phase with 690 teachers (supported by 59 teacher facilitators) and 132,700 students (2008–2011). We illustrate through findings from internal and external research, monitoring and evaluation (RME) of the pilot phase intervention, the successful impact on teachers and students after participating in the project for just one year.

### **2. Perspective(s) or theoretical framework**

International research shows that for teachers to be effective they need strong understanding of subject knowledge coupled with pedagogic skills and motivation (Boissure, 2004). These areas are often the subjects of teacher professional development (TPD) programs. Two principles EIA maintains are essential with the context of international development in an emerging economy like Bangladesh, when providing professional development include:

- The classroom and school are the best place to improve practice; and
- Practicing teachers learn most effectively from each other, in the context of learning communities, but with support from outside (Dembélé, 2003).

As a result of EIA's SBPD, there is evidence of increased student English language competency as a result of their teachers engaging in EIA's TPD. As a result the following elements increase the viability of EIA's SBPD model:

- Face-to-face meeting(s);
- Classroom focused materials;
- In-school support from another teacher (peer support);
- In-school support from the head teacher;
- Meetings outside that are close to the school where a teacher can meet with others working on the same ideas (cluster meetings);
- Visits to the school by someone more skilled than the teacher; and
- Some kind of audio-visual support that can show what other teachers have done in the classroom perhaps with commentary (the 'trainer in the pocket').

EIA's robust SBPD model is not only grounded in these principles and elements, but also:

- places participation in *new classroom activities* at the heart of teachers' professional development, as the primary driver for transforming professional knowledge and practice; and
- draws upon open distance learning (ODL) materials to support such activities, including innovative audio-visual materials provided at low-cost on micro SD cards on mobile phones.

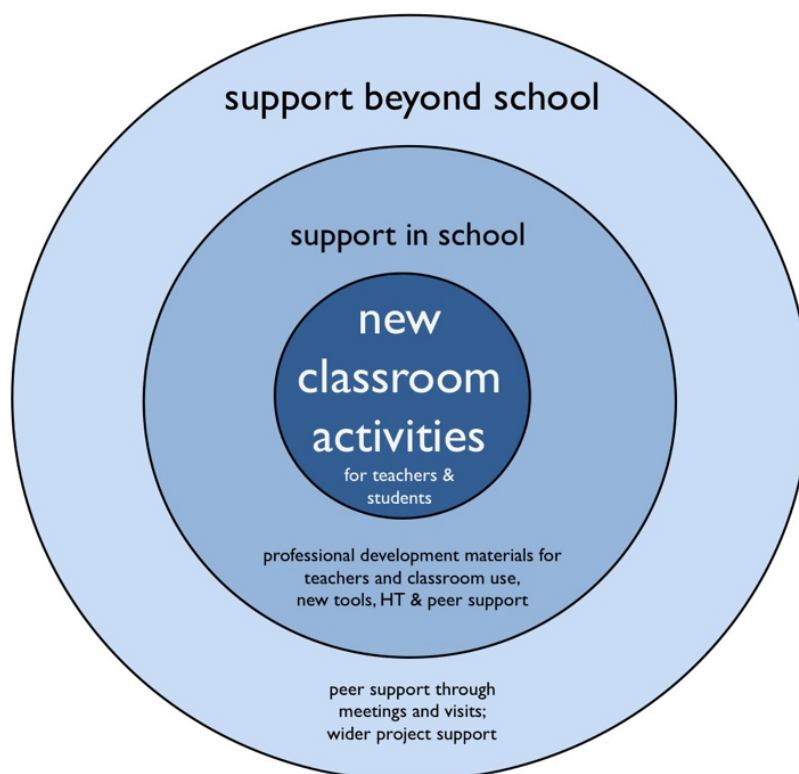


Figure. 1 EIA's SBPD model to support changes in classroom practice (Walsh and Power, 2011)

At the heart of EIA's SBPD model is the understanding, that as a result of participation in TPD, teachers and students will be engaging in new classroom activities where they are using English to communicate, not just to read and write. This is supported through two additional and complementary layers of support:

The first layer is *in school* support and is always 'on hand' to the teacher. Such support includes teaching resources to be used directly within the new classroom activities, and professional development resources for teachers to engage with in preparation for, or reflection upon, carrying out the new classroom activities. In addition to physical resources such as classroom posters, flash cards, and teacher guides, teachers are also provided with an extensive bank of audio-visual (AV) resources on micro-SD memory cards, accessed through mobile phones. AV resources include authentic videos of CLT practices, carried out by Bangladeshi English teachers in their own classrooms with their own students. Audio files have been developed, linked to the national textbook series, for classroom use via a small rechargeable speaker-amplifier (for further details see Mahbub, et al. 2012).

The second layer is *beyond school* support and this is provided through workshops and bi-monthly 'cluster meeting' (currently over a 16 months cycle) where groups of teachers from local upazilas (sub-districts) meet face-to-face, to reflect upon their experiences in school and highlight issues related to project implementation, and prepare to carry out planned classroom activities back at school.

### 3. **Methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry**

A total of 600 government English teachers (from 300 schools) and 90 English teachers from non-governmental schools participated in EIA during the pilot phase (2008–2011). In order to investigate the impact of the project, a number of studies were undertaken after 6 months (2010) and 12 months of the intervention (2011). Studies were carried out to understand the extent of change in teachers' classroom activities (EIA, 2011a and b), and also the extent of increased English language proficiency of both students and teachers (EIA, 2012). The classroom observation studies focused upon the amount of teacher and student talk time in lessons, and the use of English by teachers and students in the classroom (EIA, 2011a and b). The English language proficiency assessment studies were undertaken with the aim to test students' and teachers' communicative competence in aural-oral English, both before, and after one year of, participating in the program (EIA, 2012).

### **3.1 Classroom observation study**

The studies on classroom practice (EIA, 2011a and b) were large-scale quantitative surveys using a classroom observation schedule, focusing upon the use of English by teachers and students; the extent and nature of teacher and student talk time, and student activities. For this study, one lesson from 491 teachers (350 primary and 141 secondary) was observed in 2010, and one lesson from 324 teachers (195 primary and 129 secondary) in 2011. The data results are presented below.

### **3.2 English proficiency assessment studies**

The studies on English language proficiency (EIA 2012) were undertaken with 543 teachers (367 primary and 176 secondary) and 7,239 students (4,630 primary and 2,609 secondary) in 2010, and 1,102 students (785 primary and 317 secondary) and 317 teachers (230 primary and 87 secondary) in 2011. In both studies, teachers and students were assessed by independent evaluators from Trinity College (London) using the world-renowned Trinity College Graded Examinations in Spoken English (GESE). The participants were interviewed by the assessors and assigned a Trinity grade (1-12) indicating their English proficiency. The interviews lasted between 10-15 minutes. The data for the study is also presented below.

## **4. Data sources, evidence, objects, or materials**

To report on the impact of the SBPD model being used by the EIA project, this paper draws upon primary data collected through follow-up studies described above and were compared to EIA's six baseline studies<sup>1</sup>. This evidence from the pilot phase is being used to argue that the EIA approach to SBPD has undeniable potential for changing classroom practices and increasing students and teachers' English language proficiency at scale in a developing country that is both replicable and sustainable. Furthermore, the internal and external evaluation illustrate a remarkable sustained change in classroom practice and the extent of English used in lessons, linked to improved English proficiency for both teachers and students, in

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<sup>1</sup> To view the studies see <http://www.eiabd.com/eia/index.php/2012-10-11-09-41-47/research-publication/research-report>

both primary and secondary schools, after one year of participating in EIA (EIA, 2012).

#### **4.1 Changes in classroom practice**

Data from project research indicates that both teachers and students were speaking in English majority of the time during the lessons. Primary teachers were talking 72% of the time, compared to only 27% in the 2009 baseline study. Teachers were also involving students in interactive and communicative activities asking questions (27% of the time) and giving feedback, rather than just reading and presenting from the textbook. Teachers also provided students considerable opportunities to actively participate in discussions, engage in lessons through group and pair work, speak in chorus (53%) and on their own (38%), rather than just remain passive recipients of teacher talk (also observed in the 2009 baseline studies). The amount of student talk in general increased by 24%, and of this, 81% of student talk was in English in primary classrooms and 85% in secondary classrooms. The project views this as a significant achievement after just one year (for further details refer to Power et.al, 2012).

#### **4.2 Changes in English proficiency**

Independent evaluation by Trinity College London shows increased student and teacher proficiency in spoken English. In 2011, both students (1,102 students with 785 primary and 317 secondary) and teachers (230 primary and 87 secondary) performed better and obtained higher pass scores, compared to very low achievement levels in the 2009 baseline study in which most teachers and students failed to achieve any pass grade against the Trinity scale. The results are explored in more detail below.

### **5. Results and/or substantiated conclusions or warrants for arguments/point of view**

As result of EIA's intervention the English teachers participating in EIA all obtained a pass grade in the Trinity test, and almost all primary teachers achieved the English language (EL) competence to teach Class 3, while the secondary teachers achieved the EL competency to teach Class 6 in 2011. This was not the case when the teachers were initially assessed in 2010 where a smaller percentage of teachers obtained higher grades (Figures 2 and 3). It is significant to note there was a gender difference in performance in favour of male teachers who outperformed their female counterparts. Additionally, those in rural schools tended to perform worse than those in urban schools. As can be seen in Figure 2 and 3, the percentage of teachers achieving higher trinity grades increased from 2010 to 2011.

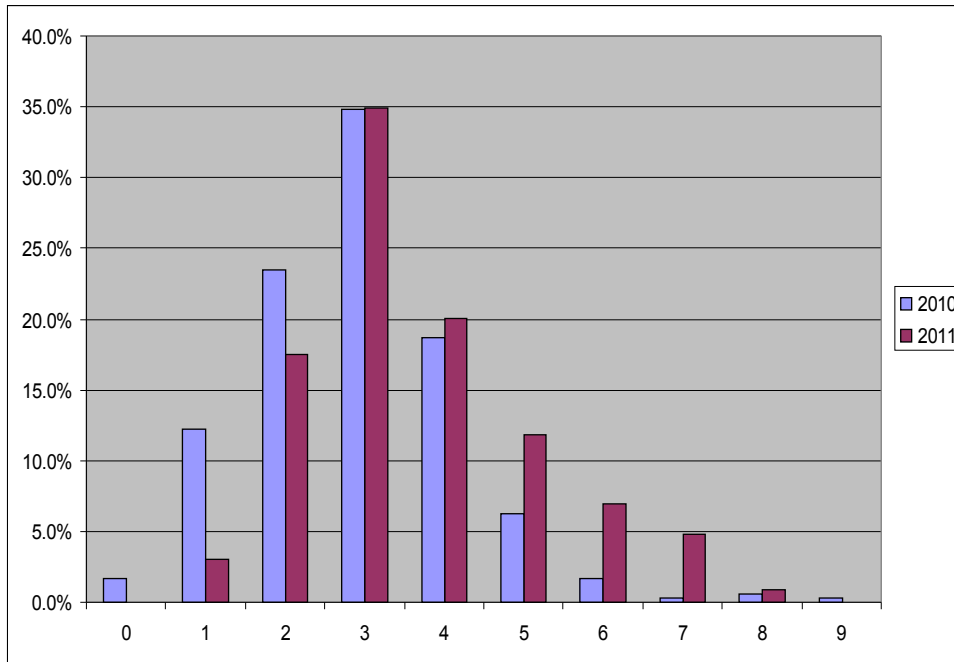


Figure 2: Primary teachers

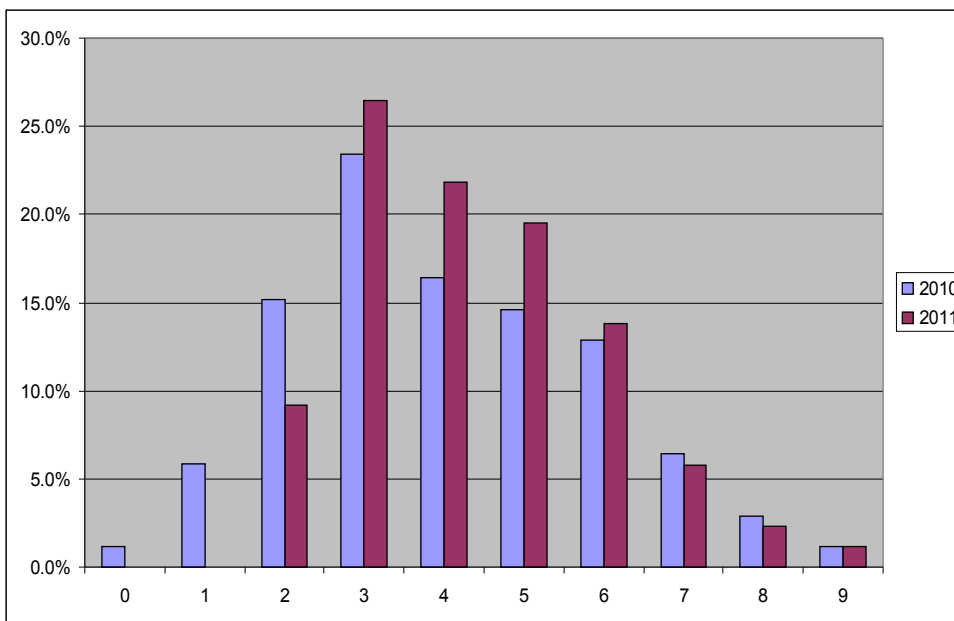


Figure: 3 Secondary teachers

The same is true for students, as shown in Figure 4 and 5, where the percentage of both primary and secondary school children at each of the higher grades has increased from 2010 to 2011. For primary students, prior to the teachers' participation in EIA, 64.3 % of students failed to pass the Trinity's graded examination. In 2011, that proportion fell to 49.9%. In 2010, 35.4% of the students scored initial levels (passing) levels of EL competency and this proportion rose to 50.1% in 2011. In secondary, while the proportion of students who failed (below grade 1) fell from 28.9% to 10.4 % in 2011, the proportion of students who passed at the initial levels (grades 1-3) rose from 61.9% to 66.6%. The percentage of students passing at the elementary level (grade 4-6) rose from 9.2% to 22.4 % - a



considerable increase (for further details see Shaheen et. al, 2013; Walsh et.al, 2012)

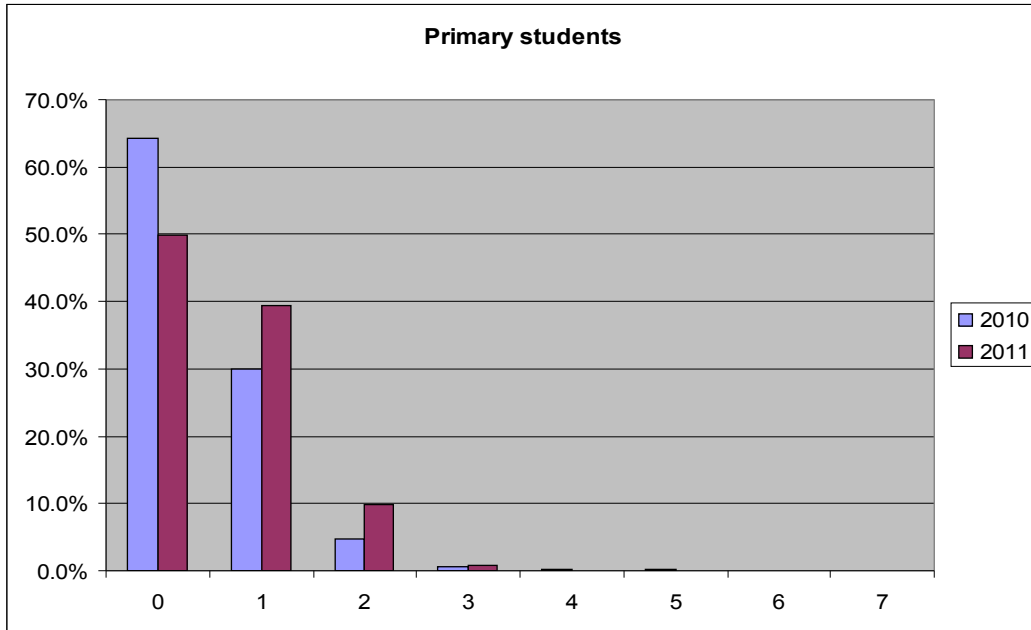


Figure 4: Primary students

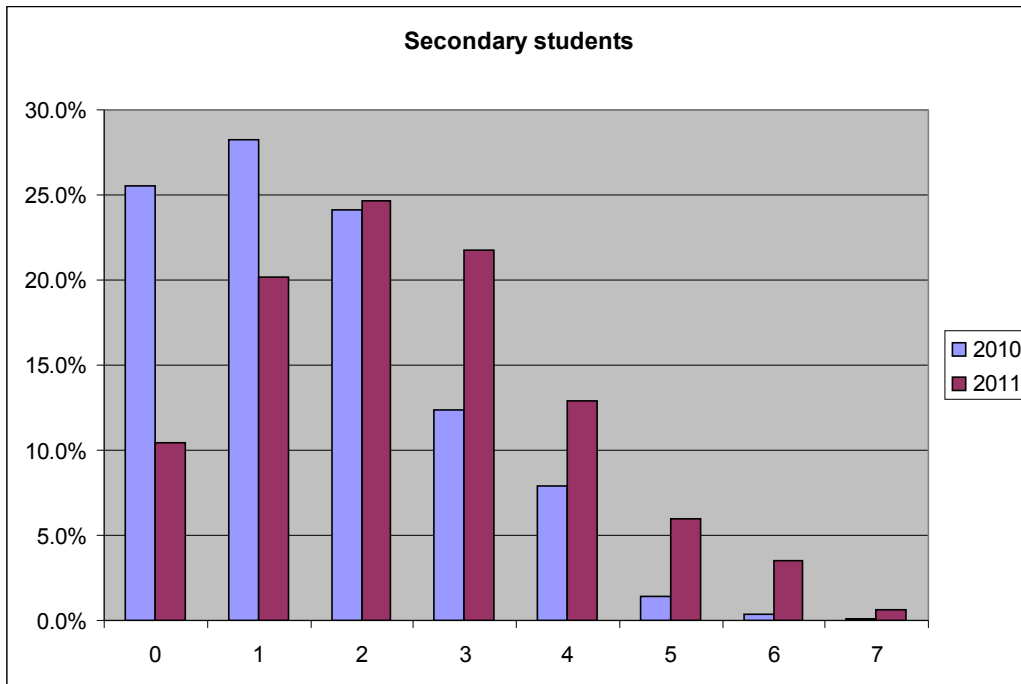


Figure 5: Secondary students

**6. Scientific or scholarly significance of the study or work**

The research presented in this paper is significant in that it focuses on, and provides evidence of, impacts on classroom practice and student outcomes from English in

Action's SBPD. We attribute these to our innovative model, designed for large-scale deployment through peer learning and mobile phones. EIA is one of the largest donor funded international development projects (£50 million), which aims to improve communicative English for 25 million people, as a tool for contributing to economic and social development (Shaheen et. al, 2013). This is paramount for Bangladesh - a country, which has acute poverty, lacks socio-economic infrastructures, and has low levels of literacy (52.7% for women, and 59.4% for men). It is ranked 146<sup>th</sup> out of 187 in the UNDP's Human Development Index, and 50% of the population live below the international poverty line (UNICEF, 2010; UNDP, 2011; Erling. et al, 2012). The access to, and provision of, quality TPD in a developing country context is an extreme challenge, particularly when resources are scarce and teacher competence is low. In order to meet these challenges, low cost and innovative approaches are continually required and it is argued that the work being undertaken within the EIA project, using the SBPD model of teacher professional development, has the potential to impact positively on both students and teachers to improve their EL proficiency and classroom practices.

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