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Chapter 7

Title: Primary English language teaching in Bangladesh: classroom practices and teacher identities

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Abstract

This chapter draws on the data from a large-scale donor-funded (£50 million) mobile-technology-based ELT project called English in Action (EIA) in Bangladesh which lasted for nearly 10 years (2008 – 2018) and aimed to promote communicative language teaching (CLT). The chapter gives a brief account of English language education and teacher education in Bangladesh, especially focusing on primary ELT practices. This is followed by a brief introduction to the EIA project to contextualise the paper. The data used consists of surveys with primary English language teachers (N= 103), and large-scale classroom observations (N= 440). The results show both traditional and CLT-oriented primary classroom ELT practices. Drawing on language teacher identity research such as Varghese et al. (2005), I identify fluid and multiple teacher identities (e.g., *Authority*, *Resister*) in the survey and classroom observation data, unlike widely used life history and narrative interviews, with regard to these classroom practices in the sociocultural context in which teachers operated. The chapter critiques large donor-funded ELT projects and ends with implications for primary English language teacher education, teacher educators and ELT researchers.

Keywords: primary English language teaching; English language education in Bangladesh; English in Action; language teacher identities; primary English language classroom practices

1. Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) has seen significant changes at the curricular level in many Asian countries including Bangladesh given the global hegemony of English and its widely perceived links with economic growth. The curricular changes have resulted from government language education policy changes in these countries where English is introduced to the school curriculum from an early stage (Butler, 2015; Littlewood, 2014). As a result, English language teachers are introduced to various forms of communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT) as innovative approaches to ELT in these countries despite concerns and challenges (Butler, 2011). However, the published literature on ELT in Asia has tended to focus on language-in-education policy rather than primary English language teacher (PELT) practices (e.g., Baldauf et al., 2011; Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017). There are indeed some PELT studies from some Asian countries, for example, examining teacher professional development needs (Kabilan & Veratharaju, 2013) and teacher practices in the implementation of a new English curriculum (Hardman & A-Rahman, 2014) in Malaysia, in-service teacher training and available teacher resources in South Korea (Garton, 2014), efficacy of in-service teacher professional development in Indonesia (Zein, 2016) and implementation of primary English language policy in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2011). Some other studies explored challenges and prospects of PELT in earlier grades in East Asia (Rao & Yu, 2019) and policy fallacies in India and Thailand (Hayes, 2017). These cited studies, however, appear to be either small-scale (except the first cited Malaysian study) and exploratory or theoretical discussions. In the case of Bangladesh, the literature is predominantly on language-in-education policy (e.g., Hamid & Erling, 2016; Hamid & Honan, 2012) and therefore, there is little information about PELT practices in Bangladesh (cf. Shrestha, 2013), which has undergone substantial English language education policy changes over the last forty years (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014). Against this backdrop, this chapter aims to explore PELT classroom practices and language teacher identities in relation to a large-scale PELT development project in Bangladesh.

Language teacher identity (LTI) has emerged as a significant field of research in language teaching research. Indeed, a recent review indicates that it has received much attention in the literature since 2010 (Kayi-Aydar, 2019). There is a growing body of research in this field which shows LTIs as shaped by various factors, specifically power, politics, privilege (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999, 2012), sociocultural contexts (e.g., Johnson & Golombek, 2020; Tsui, 2011), race, ethnicity and gender (e.g., Varghese et al., 2016). It is argued that LTIs are fluid and multidimensional (e.g., Varghese et al., 2005; Varghese et al., 2016). This means LTIs are situated, complex and dynamic, and the same teacher may enact multiple identities that change or evolve, dependent on their sociocultural, educational and institutional contexts, and roles. LTIs have been researched in second language education widely although this research on primary school teachers is limited. For example, previous studies have examined emotions, vulnerability and conflicting identities of in-service secondary teachers (Song, 2016), teacher identity as discourse and practice among second language writing teachers (Lee, 2013), and socially constructed shifting identities of pre-service primary teachers (Macías Villegas et al., 2020). Equally, the methodologies used in LTI research are primarily narrative approaches (Kayi-Aydar, 2019) including life histories (Higgins & Sandhu, 2014). However, if we accept LTI as ‘what language teachers do in the classroom expresses how they construe themselves as teachers’ (Johnson & Golombek, 2020, p. 121), then, it is equally important to examine teacher classroom practices to explore LTIs in addition to what teachers self-report. There are only a few studies which have examined LTIs through teacher classroom practices in combination with interviews (e.g., Lee, 2013; Vélez-Rendón, 2010). Both Lee’s and Vélez-Rendón’s studies draw on Vygotsky inspired sociocultural theory as a framework as argued in Johnson (2009). From a sociocultural perspective, teacher cognition including LTI is shaped by teachers’ participation in social interaction mediated by people, tools, concepts and wider sociocultural contexts. Therefore, teacher identity is not fixed, but dynamic and fluid. To my knowledge, there is a significant lack of studies from this perspective in PELT research which this study aims to address. This study draws on sociocultural theory, the existing literature and the data to identify dynamic roles and identities (e.g., change agent, knower) of primary English teachers in Bangladesh.

This chapter draws on the data from a large-scale donor-funded (£50 million) mobile-technology-based ELT project called *English in Action* (EIA) in Bangladesh which lasted for

nearly 10 years (2008 – 2017) (for EIA, see Shrestha, 2012, 2013). Particularly, the data is based on three large-scale EIA studies: EIA (2009), EIA (2010) and EIA (2011). The author worked as an English language education specialist in the project and thus, this chapter draws on his research within primary teacher education and extensive personal experience in primary ELT in the country.

The chapter aims to address three research questions:

1. What are PELTs' classroom practices?
2. What are PELTs' perceptions and beliefs about English language teaching?
3. What LTIs can be revealed by these classroom practices, perceptions and beliefs?

2. English language education in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has always been associated with the mother language movement (also known as *Bhasa Andolon* in Bangla) because the nation was founded on the basis of this which started on 21 February 1952. About 98% of the country's population speaks Bangla and the majority of the people (83%) are Muslim (Hamid & Honan, 2012; Imam, 2005; Rahman et al., 2019). It was a British colony until 1947 and was East Pakistan until its independence as Bangladesh in 1971. Soon after this, Bangla was the medium of education at all levels except in Madrasah schools and some elitist English-medium schools in the cities (see Hamid, 2010; Hamid & Honan, 2012).

However, as English gradually gained ascendancy as a global language (Graddol, 2006), the Bangladeshi government's national language policy prioritised it as an economically valuable language contributing to human capital development in Bangladesh as in many other low and middle-income countries in Asia and elsewhere (Erling, 2017; Hamid, 2010). It is argued that English is introduced to earlier grades in primary schools driven by the policies of international donor agencies such as Department for International Development (DFID, UK) and USAID rather than taking into account of the readiness of English language teaching professionals in the country (Hamid, 2010).

The Bangladesh government has taken English language teacher training initiatives to improve the profile of English in the country and prepare a workforce that is able to fully participate in the global economy as in other developing economies (see, for example, Littlewood, 2007). These initiatives also appeared to be driven by international donor

agencies (Hamid, 2010). These agencies present English language competence as associated with 'development' and economic growth (Erling, 2017; Hamid & Erling, 2016). Yet despite this, and the investments made by the government and the funding agencies such as DFID and the World Bank, the level of competence among students and their teachers is often low (Kirkwood, 2013). Although Bangladesh has already started using CLT as an ELT methodology, producing textbooks and training teachers in this methodological style, the actual implementation of CLT is found to be less than satisfactory. For example, the Teaching Quality Improvement (TQI) study showed that classroom practice in ELT is still traditional grammar-translation method (TQI-SEP, 2007). This is further confirmed by other later studies too (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2008; Das et al., 2014; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Rahman et al., 2019). However, short-term positive outcomes have also been reported in a few papers on the English in Action (EIA) project in Bangladesh (e.g., Eyres et al., 2019; Shrestha, 2012, 2013) although their sustainability beyond the project may be questioned. However, as argued by Hamid and Honan (2012), research on PELTs in Bangladesh is still extremely limited.

3. Primary English language teacher education in Bangladesh
Bangladesh has one of the largest populations of primary level English language learners in the world due to English being a compulsory subject. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) (BANBEIS, 2018), there were about 34 million children enrolled in 134,147 primary schools (Grades 1 – 5) in Bangladesh. This means a significant number of teachers are required to teach these children English language. In 2018, there were 685,400 primary teachers with 62% of them being female. Among them, only just over a third (267,674) of them had a teaching qualification (Certificate in Education or Diploma in Education) (BANBEIS, 2018). As in many other countries, primary school teachers in Bangladesh teach almost all subjects including English. This suggests that many primary teachers who teach English to millions of children are not professionally prepared to teach them.

According to BANBEIS (2018), there are 59 Primary Training Institutes (PTIs) including three private ones which train pre-service primary teachers across the country. There has been little research on the effectiveness of these PTIs to prepare primary teachers. A handful of papers are published on this which argue that PTIs do not offer practice-focused teacher

education curriculum as it is biased towards theory and most teacher educators are untrained (e.g., Ahsan et al., 2012). There is little information about pre-service primary English language teachers. In the last 20 years or so, Bangladeshi government has initiated project-based in-service training for teachers, primarily for secondary school teachers and relying on external donor-funding (Hamid, 2010; Hamid & Erling, 2016). This means PELTs have little or no professional development opportunities. These teachers also have a low level of English language proficiency as most of them hold school qualifications only. In fact, a recent EF English Proficiency Index 2019 indicates that Bangladesh has a very low proficiency level (CEFR¹ Level A2) and stands at 71st position out of 100 countries in Asia (<https://www.ef.co.uk/epi/regions/asia/bangladesh/>). Yet, the Bangladesh government seems to continue to rely on donor-funded projects for English language education reform which do not necessarily address the sheer lack of English language teacher capacity in the country nor associated socio-political issues (see Hamid & Erling, 2016; Imam, 2005).

4. English language education reform: The English in Action project

In the spirit of reforming English language education, a number of donor-funded projects have been completed in Bangladesh. Almost all of them related to secondary school teachers (e.g., English Language Teaching Improvement to introduce communicative English language teaching and design textbooks for Grades 9 – 10) or general teacher education (Hamid, 2010; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). The most expensive English language education project was English in Action (EIA), a £50 million, 10-year (2008 – 2018) project to ‘help’ 25 million people in Bangladesh improve their ability to use English language for social and economic purposes, requested by the government of Bangladesh, and funded by Department for International Development, UK (EIA, n.d.). This project designed and developed teacher professional development activities and resources enhanced by the use of mobile technologies, for use by primary (Grades 1 – 5) and secondary (Grades 6 – 10) school teachers, thereby intending to reach millions of school children. The project had a consortium of international partners: BMB Mott McDonald, The Open University (UK) and The BBC Media Action Group. EIA was an innovative project that employed low-cost mobile technologies such as mobile phones as tools to support and bring about changes in ELT

¹ CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference for languages. It is a widely used language proficiency framework developed by European Union and used widely globally.

classroom practices. The project developed English teacher development programmes that promoted collaborative and CLT-oriented pedagogical practices.

5. Data sources

This study draws on multiple sources of data, following a mixed-methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The data was collected during the life of the EIA project as part of the ongoing research on the impact of the project on English language learners, teachers and classroom practices. The data used in this chapter consists of surveys and classroom observations of primary school teachers' lessons (40 – 45 minutes each) from across six Divisions in Bangladesh (see Fig. 1). The first set of data is drawn from an EIA baseline study (EIA, 2009) which consisted of 90 classroom observations, providing insights into PELT classroom practices prior to the EIA project and it involved no survey. This data was collected by 15 Dhaka-based EIA researchers from primary school English lessons in Dhaka (capital city) and surrounding districts, and Sylhet (see Fig 1). The data was quantitative in that it focused on the frequency of a teacher behaviour in a particular English lesson by using a classroom observation schedule. A 'time sampling' technique was used to record what the teacher and their students did at every 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th and 30th minute of the lesson by choosing from a list of pre-determined list of activities (e.g., reading from the textbook, asking closed questions, asking open questions, giving feedback to students, etc.). This technique was used in a previous baseline study (TQI-SEP, 2007) and was found reliable. Thus, the technique was expected to serve the study purpose. The researchers also recorded what happened at the start and towards the end of each lesson by ticking a list of activities in the observation schedule (e.g., start: greeting to students, recapping previous lesson, etc.; end: recapping the topic of the lesson, setting homework, stopping lesson and leaving the classroom with no other activities, etc.) in order to capture wider teacher classroom practices which may indicate traditional and/ or CLT-oriented teacher practices.

Fig. 1:

Map of Bangladesh



(Source: Wikimedia https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bangladesh_regions_map.svg under Creative Commons Licence)

The second set of data comprises teacher surveys (EIA, 2011), and lesson observations (EIA, 2010) in EIA project schools across Bangladesh. The survey was adapted from a

questionnaire designed by Savignon and Wang (2003). Other than the changes to contextual information/ statement (i.e., focus on teachers instead of learners), the survey questions were kept the same because they were related to CLT in an ELT policy change context as in the original study. This 5-point Likert scale survey contained statements focused on teachers' attitudes towards and perceptions about English language teaching practices (e.g., beliefs about English language learning and teaching practices). The questions were written in English initially by the EIA team and then translated into Bangla by independent researchers from the Institute of Education and Research (IER, University of Dhaka). A total of 103 teachers responded to the survey. The lesson observation data (N= 350 lessons/ teachers) was collected by capturing what the teachers and the students were doing in each one-minute interval in the lesson. As in the baseline, a checklist classroom observation schedule was used to record teacher behaviour focusing on aspects such as teacher presenting and giving feedback, and students listening and writing and what language they used (Bangla or English), and it aimed to measure classroom interactions and aspects of communicative language teaching as in Spada (1987). Spada used an observation scheme that was sensitive to CLT-oriented practices, specifically focusing on the classroom *activity* in relation to activity type, participant organisation (pair, group), content, student modality (time spent on different language skills) and material (written, audio, visual). The current study focused on these aspects of classroom practices.

6. Data analysis approach

The data was analysed by considering in-service teacher classroom practices in relation to CLT and language teacher identities (LTIs). The analysis had two levels. The first level of analysis involved conducting descriptive statistical analysis of both the classroom observation and the survey data by focusing on central tendencies (Roever & Phakiti, 2018) in classroom practices (PELTS' behaviour), teacher perceptions and beliefs. This analysis helped to address the first two research questions: PELTs' CLT-oriented and traditional classroom practices, and their perceptions and beliefs about these practices. This, then, led to the second level of analysis which involved exploring LTIs in light of the findings from the first analysis by drawing on the notion of LTI as socioculturally-situated, fluid and multidimensional (Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Varghese et al., 2016). This means teachers were seen as having not just one but multiple identities which kept changing according to the context.

The analysis of LTIs was framed by the sociocultural view that teacher cognition and their classroom practices are influenced by the mediating role wider sociocultural, educational and political factors play in language teacher education (Johnson & Golombek, 2020). This analysis addressed the third research question.

7. PELTs’ Classroom practices

In this section, teacher classroom practices as observed in the baseline study and the EIA study will be presented in relation to traditional and CLT practices and thus, it addresses the first research question. The baseline classroom observation instrument had three clear segments: activities at the beginning, during and end of the lesson. The *beginning* activities included those before the 10th minute of the lesson. The *during* lesson activities were recorded at the 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th and 30th minutes and the *end* activities after the 30th minute of the lesson. The findings are presented in this sequence. However, the EIA-focused study, following Spada (1987), examined how much the teacher and their students talked in which activity and which language they used (Bangla or English). While the baseline study teachers had no EIA related training, the EIA study included teachers who were at least six months into the EIA training programme.

7.1 Baseline study

7.1.1 Starting activities

The classroom observation in the baseline focused on how the teacher started the lesson. Table 1 shows the proportion of the observed lessons that included each activity when the teacher started their lesson. It presents the activities by frequency across 90 lessons. Most primary teachers (89%) began their lesson by greeting learners in English. The other two most frequent activities were writing the lesson on the blackboard and clarifying the lesson objectives to students. Just under a third of the lessons showed teachers connecting language learning with previous lessons. The frequency of the listed activities suggests limited use of CLT in the observed lessons.

Table 1

Beginning activities

| Teacher Activities | % of lessons observed (N=90) |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
|--------------------|------------------------------|

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Acknowledges the presence of students with a greeting (e.g. 'Good morning everyone') | 89 |
| 2. Writes the lesson on the blackboard (e.g. Unit 3, Lesson 2) | 47 |
| 3. Clarifies the objectives of the lesson to the students | 43 |
| 4. Begins teaching with reference to previous learning | 31 |
| 5. Recaps the previous lesson (in this subject) | 27 |
| 6. Checks that all students have access to the appropriate books | 27 |
| 7. Begins teaching without explanation of what the lesson will cover | 24 |
| 8. Simply refers students to a page (of the textbook) | 23 |
| 9. Without explanation tells students to open books at the relevant page (e.g. 'Turn to page 20 in your textbook') | 14 |
| 10. Questions students about their recollections of the previous lessons | 11 |
| 11. Asks students where they are up to (for teacher's own information rather than as a recap for students' benefit) | 6 |
| 12. Borrows textbooks from a student | 4 |
| 13. Provides feedback to students on homework assignments | 1 |

7.1.2 Activities during lesson

The classroom observation data included what activities the teacher did every 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th and 30th minute of the lessons. Table 2 summarises the observed activities and their proportion (%) across 90 lessons. The three most frequent activities in each of those minutes are in bold. As the table shows, two of the most frequent activities were *teaching from the blackboard* and *asking closed questions*. The third most frequent activity was *moving around the classroom monitoring and facilitating students as they work individually*. These three activities not only indicate no or little use of CLT in the observed lessons but also show a teacher-centred or didactic pedagogic approach.

Table 2

Activities during lesson

| Teacher's activities | % of lessons observed (N=90) | | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | 10 th minute | 15 th minute | 20 th minute | 25 th minute | 30 th minute |
| 1. Teaching from the blackboard, e.g. drawing a diagram or making notes | 32 | 27 | 23 | 21 | 22 |

| | | | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| on the board to support explanation of a concept or topic | | | | | |
| 2. Reading from the text book | 18 | 3 | 4 | - | 3 |
| 3. Asking closed questions (e.g. they may be answered directly from the text book) | 7 | 13 | 12 | 13 | 12 |
| 4. Listening to students as they read aloud from the textbook | 6 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 2 |
| 5. Using teaching aids (e.g. posters, pictures, real objects, ICT devices) | 6 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| 6. Giving instructions for student activities, e.g. organizing pair work or group work | 5 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. Explaining something in Bengali | 5 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 8 |
| 8. Moving around the classroom monitoring and facilitating students as they work individually | 4 | 7 | 14 | 12 | 9 |
| 9. Explaining something in English | 3 | 2 | - | - | - |
| 10. Moving around the classroom monitoring and facilitating group work | 2 | 4 | 10 | 9 | 6 |
| 11. Silently writing notes on blackboard for students to copy | 2 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| 12. Encouraging individual students or group to speak English in classroom activities | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| 13. Listening to students' ideas | 2 | - | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| 14. Allowing time (silence) for students to respond to the teacher's questions | 2 | - | - | - | - |
| 15. Asking open questions that require creative thought (i.e. no text book answer) | - | 3 | 4 | - | 4 |
| 16. Watching the class (from desk) as they complete exercises | - | 2 | - | 2 | - |
| 17. Giving feedback to students on their work | - | - | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Checking the classwork | - | - | - | 2 | - |
| 19. Other activity (Please specify) | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 |

7.1.3 Ending activities

The final part of the baseline classroom observation involved recording how the primary teachers ended their lessons. Table 3 presents a summary of the lesson ending activities across 90 lessons. As with the other activities above, the teachers mostly conducted teacher-focused activities such as *providing feedback on students' work*, *recapping the*

lesson and setting homework. The fourth frequent activity, asking summary questions, which is minimally interactive occurred in only 34% of the observed lessons.

Table 3

End of lesson activities

| Teacher activities | % of lessons observed (N=90) |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. Provides feedback on the way students have worked during the lesson | 58% |
| 2. Recaps what the lesson has covered | 55% |
| 3. Sets homework or assignments to be completed before the next lesson | 39% |
| 4. Asks summary questions to assess students' understanding of the concepts covered in the lesson | 34% |
| 5. Collects students' class work for marking | 15% |
| 6. Tells students where the lesson is leading, i.e. what will follow in the next lesson | 13% |
| 7. Tells students to close their books and dismisses them | 12% |
| 8. Stops teaching and leaves the room without doing any of the above (1-7) | 5% |

7.2 EIA study

The classroom observation in the EIA project (EIA, 2010) was conducted by recording what the teacher and their students were doing at every minute of the observed lesson. The focus was on what they were doing when talking and which language they used (i.e., English or Bangla). This indicates whether these English lessons had aspects of CLT as promoted by EIA. The findings are presented for both teachers and students across 350 lessons.

7.2.1 Teacher activities

The data showed that teachers talked 34% of the time in average and students 27.1%. When teachers talked, they used English 71% of the time and Bangla 29%. This is in sharp contrast to the baseline data in which Bangla dominated most lessons observed. Figure 2 shows the types of classroom activities teachers engaged students in and their proportions

across 350 lessons. The findings indicate that the teachers involved students in all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. This was not the case in the baseline study.

Figure 2

Types of classroom activities

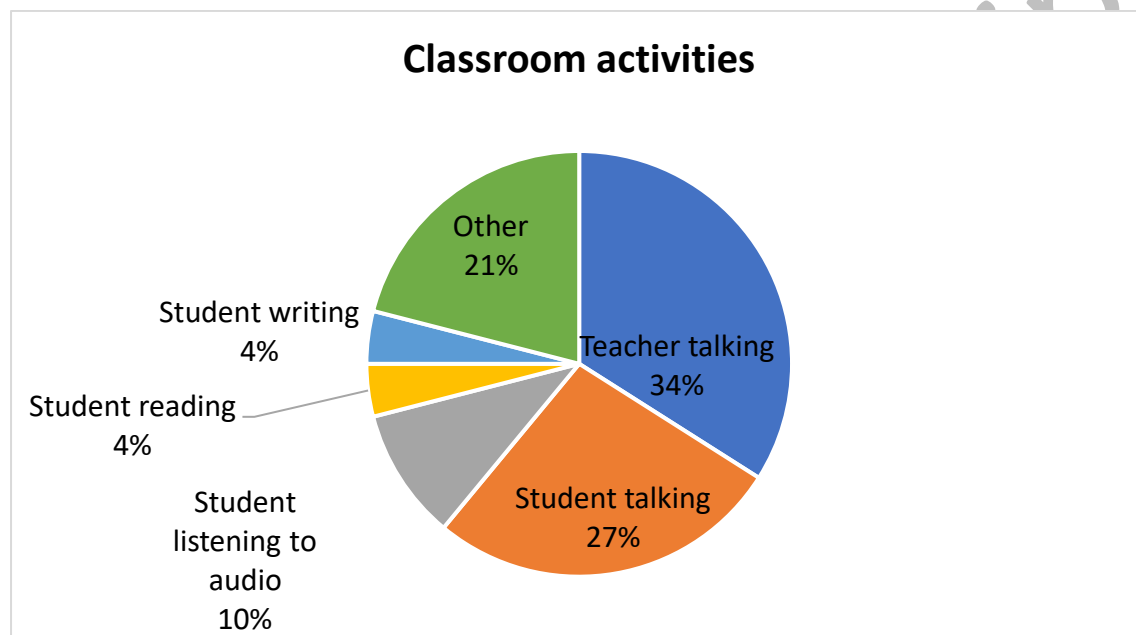


Figure 3 further details the types of teacher talk. The findings indicate that there were mainly four types of teacher talk in the lesson: *Asking questions* (28%), *Organising* (27%), *Presenting* (23%) and *Giving feedback* (19%). These findings suggest that teachers tried their best to involve students in lessons, especially by *asking questions* and *organising* activities (e.g., pair and group). Here is an example of *organising*:

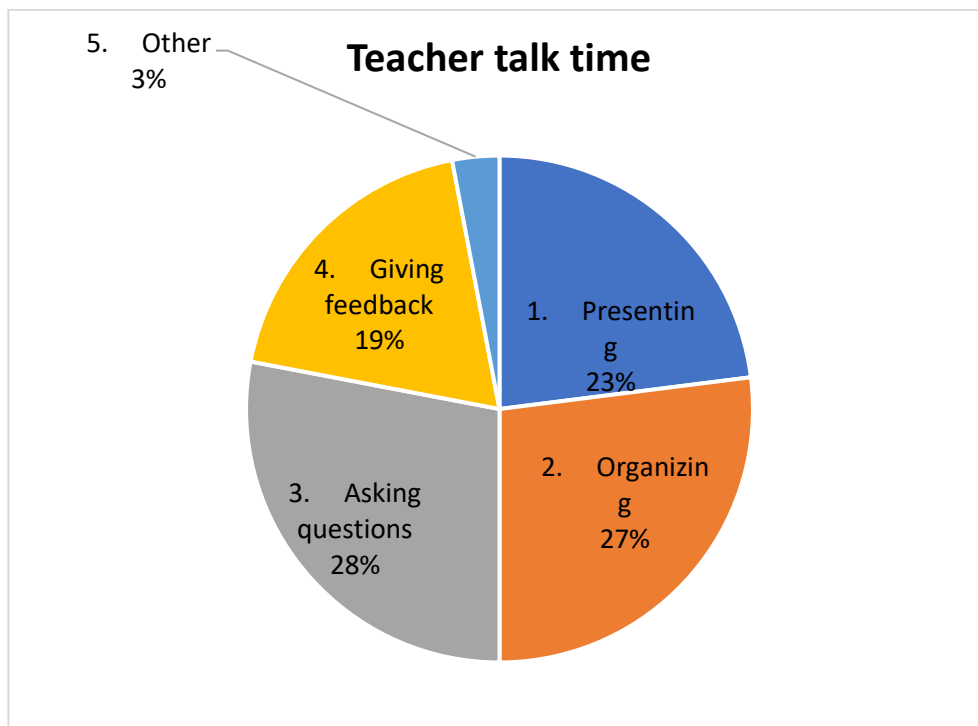
OK students, now turn and face your partner.

I want you to look at me and listen carefully.

In addition to talking, the teachers were using gestures and body language to complement their classroom discourse strategy (Walsh, 2011; Zein, 2019) so as to encourage student interactions.

Figure 3

Types of teacher talk

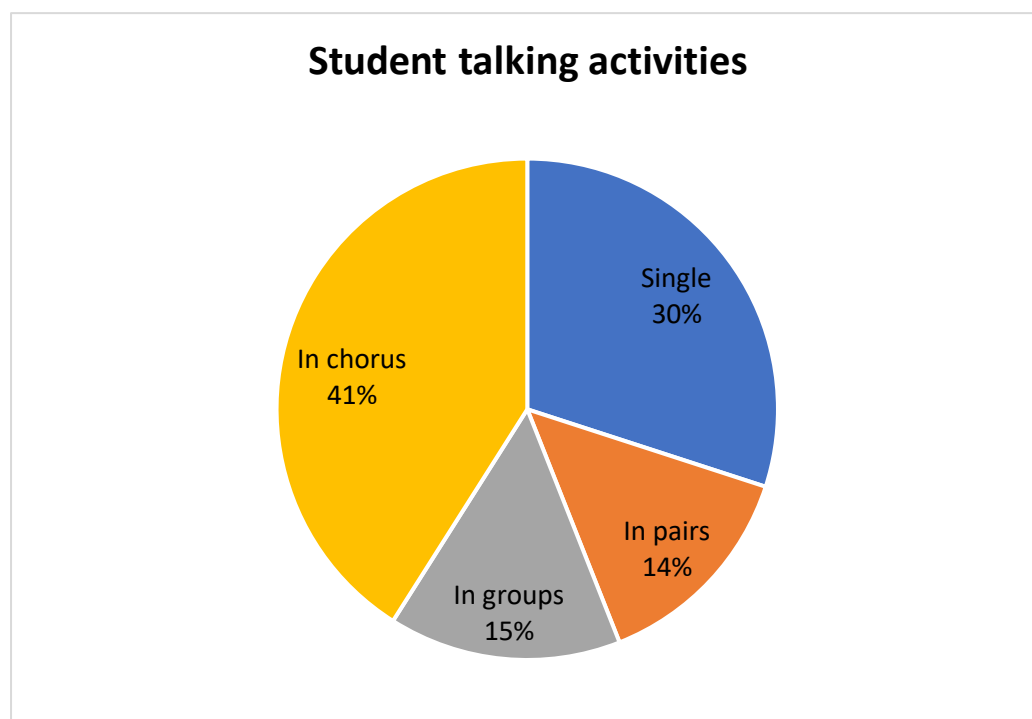


7.2.2 Student activities

As shown by Figure 2, students participated in all four English language skills. Listening to the audio was absent in the baseline data. Across 350 observed lessons, students spent 88% of their talking time in English and 12% in Bangla. This indicates a significant use of English by students. Additionally, Figure 4 shows the types of student talk activities in the lessons. It indicates that most of the time students were either *talking individually* (e.g., to answer the teacher's questions) or *in chorus* when the teacher asked them to repeat which is common in primary classrooms. The high frequency of both *individual* and chorus talking implies traditional classroom practices and limited use of CLT. However, instances of students talking in pairs and groups mostly in English suggest an application of CLT which was almost non-existent in the baseline study.

Figure 4

Student talking



8. PELTs' beliefs and perceptions

Teacher beliefs and perceptions were examined through a survey (EIA, 2011) with 103 primary teachers in the EIA project. There were three areas that these instruments targeted: (1) Perceptions of their own teaching practices; (2) Attitudes towards traditional and CLT practices; and (3) Beliefs about traditional and CLT practices.

8.1 Perceptions of their own teaching practices

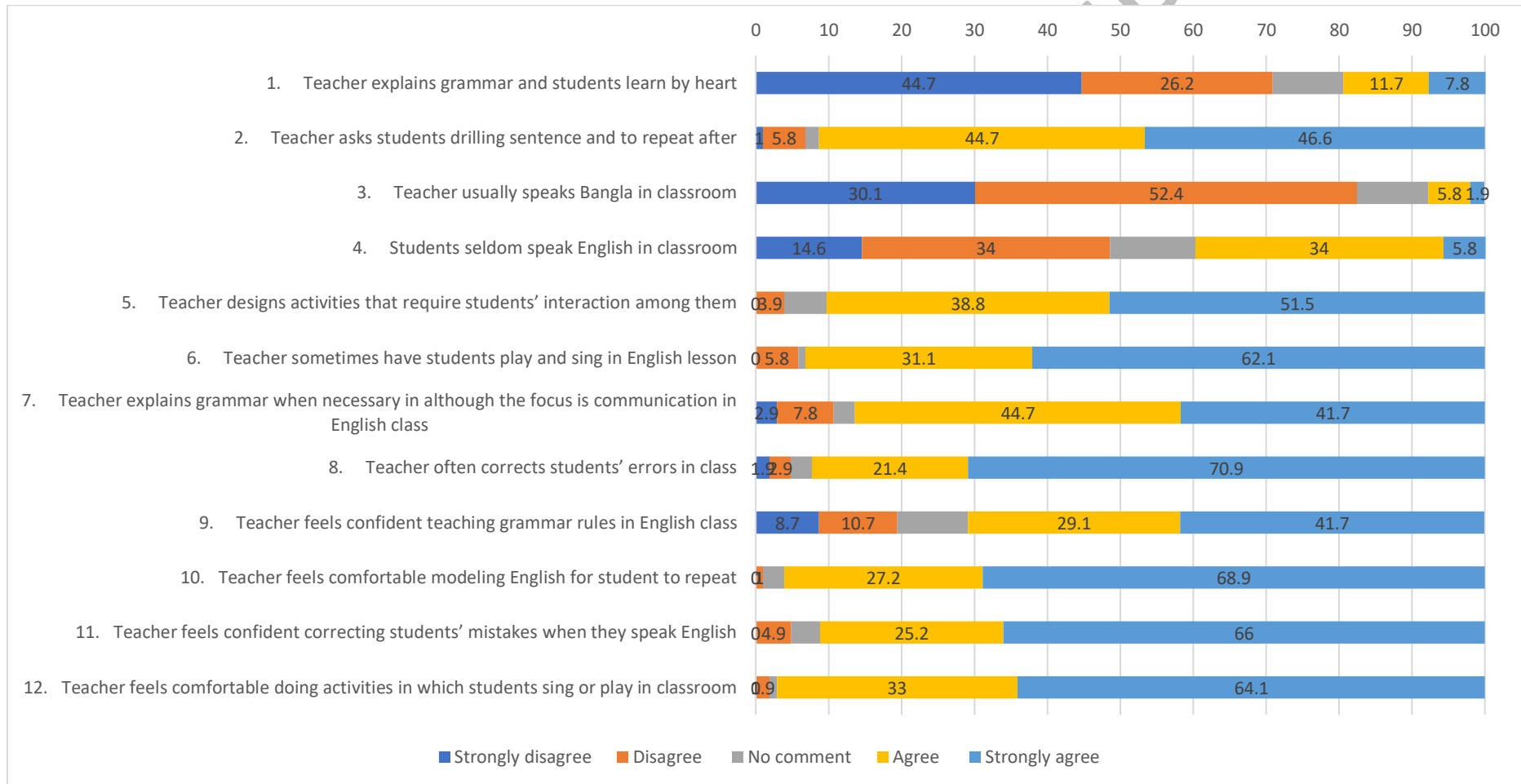
The survey results (N=103) showing teacher perceptions of their teaching practices, traditional and CLT, are presented in Figure 5. The numbers denote the percentage of teachers. A vast majority of teachers did not see their practices as grammar teaching and rote learning (70%), do not use Bangla but English (80%) in contrast to the baseline study, encourage students to play and sing (over 93%), a change in their practices towards CLT.

However, the majority of them perceived a high value of error corrections (92%) and drilling (91%) in their practices, aspects associated with traditional practices.

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Figure 5

Teachers' perceptions about teaching practices



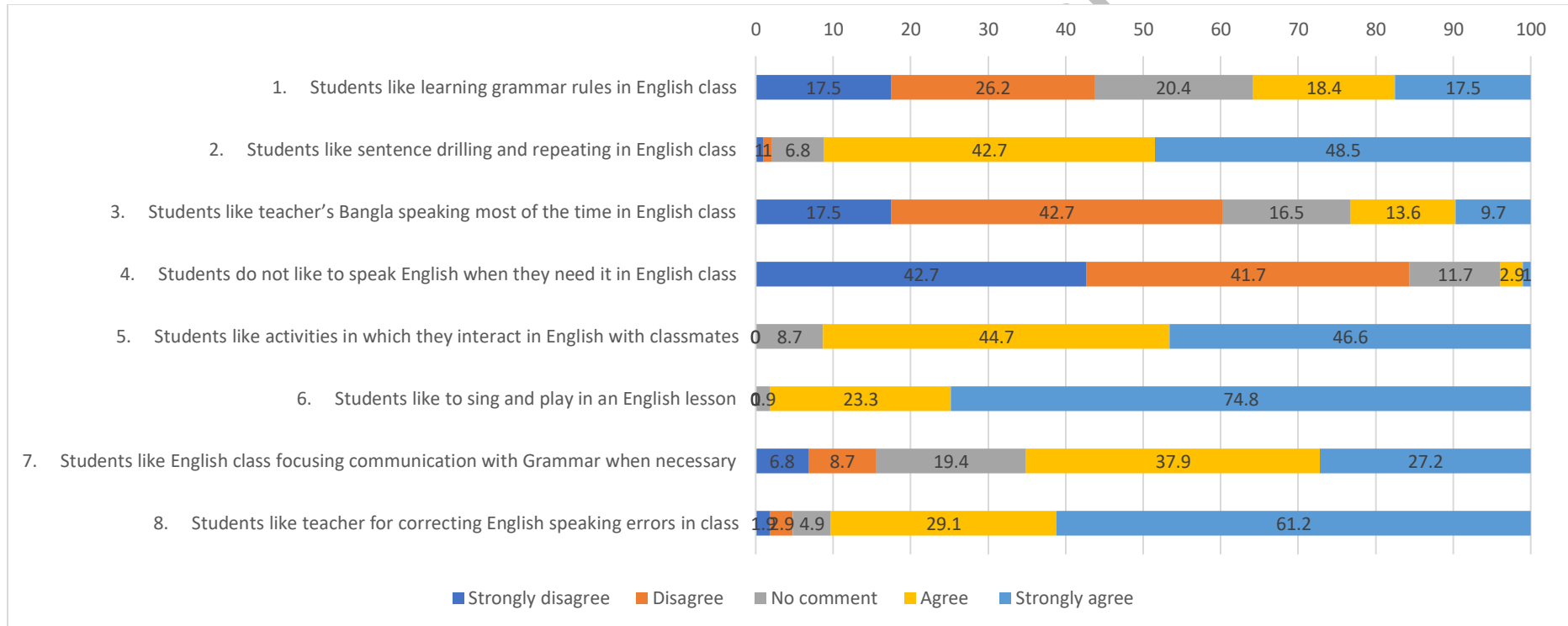
8.2 Attitudes towards traditional and CLT practices

The survey results on attitudes towards traditional and CLT practices are summarised in Figure 6. Most teachers felt that their students like interactive activities in English (91%), sing and play in English (98%) and like communication-focused lessons (65%). Nevertheless, they felt that their students like drilling (91%) and error corrections in their lessons (90%), aspects of traditional practices.

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Figure 6

Teacher attitudes

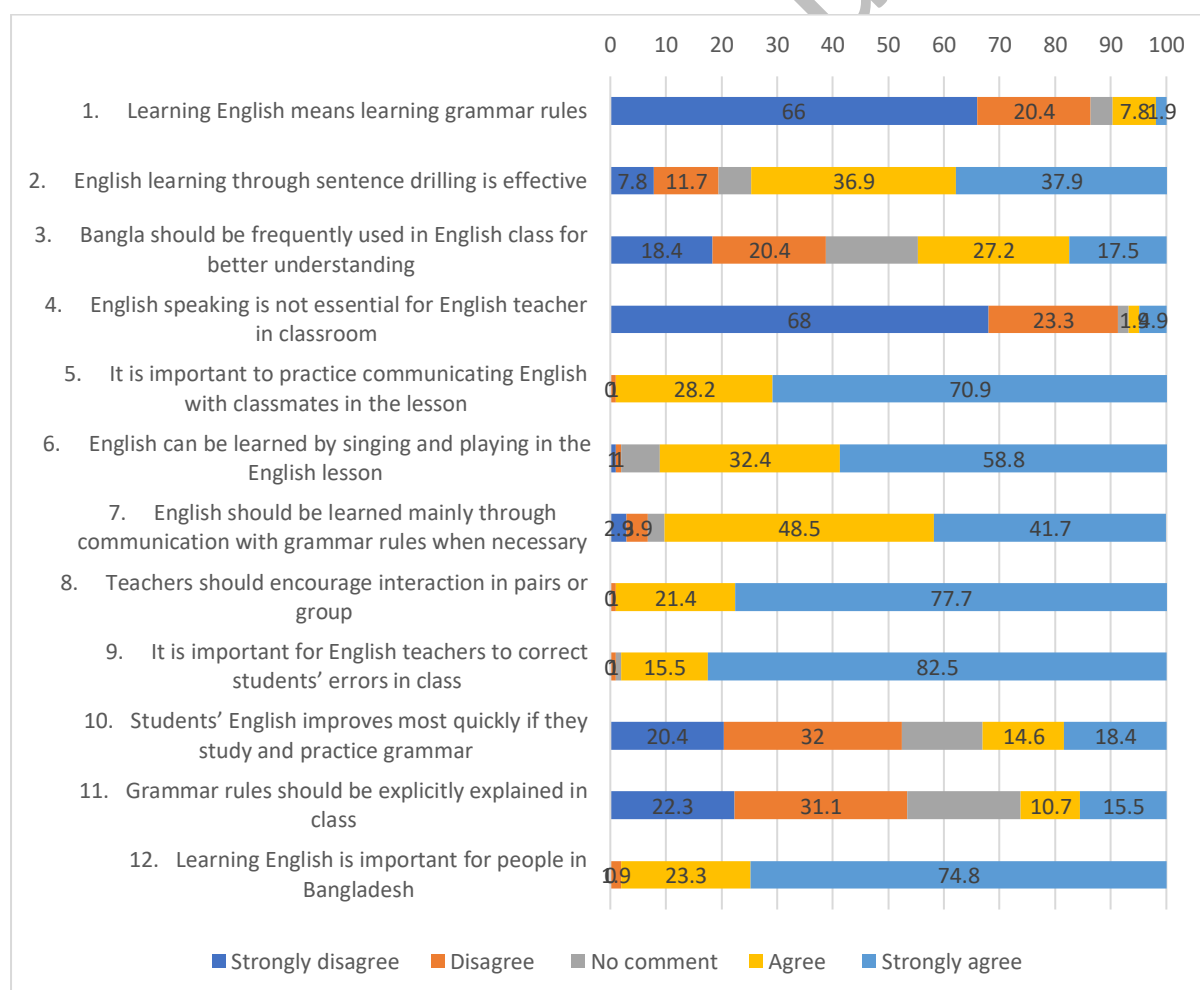


1.3 Beliefs about traditional and CLT practices

Figure 7 presents teacher beliefs about traditional and CLT practices. As with perceptions and attitudes, most primary teachers believed that CLT practices such as communicating in English (99%), pair and group work (99%) and singing and playing in English (91%) are important. Conversely, they also believed that traditional practices such as error corrections (98%), sentence drilling (74%) and practising grammar (34%) are significant for learning English.

Figure 7

Teacher beliefs



2. Classroom Practices and English Language Teacher Identities (LTIs)

The previous section depicted a picture of primary English language teachers' (PELTs) practices prior to and during the EIA project in Bangladesh. This section aims to address the third research question: What LTIs do PELTs' classroom practices, perceptions and beliefs reveal? As noted at the beginning of this chapter, teachers' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs, their identities and classroom practices are all interrelated (Johnson & Golombek, 2020). I discuss the findings from the previous two sections by drawing on the notion of *language teacher identity* as socially situated and multi-layered (Edwards & Burns, 2016; Varghese et al., 2005). In other words, teacher identity is constructed socially, culturally and politically and depending on the context, this identity is examined as being multiple and fluid. Traditionally, The multiplicity and fluidity of LTIs have been primarily examined by using life history and narrative approaches (Higgins & Sandhu, 2014) which lend themselves well to this type of LTI research. In this section, however, I aim to demonstrate that it is possible to capture fluid and multiple LTIs through surveys and classroom observations too. These identities are presented separately although they appeared in individual PELTs' classroom practices and thus they were multiple and fluid.

9.1 Authority

Most of the baseline study data suggested that teachers controlled the classroom from the front and also they talked most of the time. This shows their teacher *authority* in the classroom practice (Hamid & Honan, 2012). Within the EIA-focused study, teachers highly valued *learning grammar* and *drilling* which are common to traditional practices in Asia and Bangladesh. These practices and beliefs suggest that despite a more collaborative pedagogic practice promoted through CLT-oriented EIA teacher development programmes, teachers continued to retain their power and *authority* in the classroom (Perumal, 2008).

9.2 Implementor

The teachers in the EIA project were expected to follow the CLT practices provided through professional development materials. In this sense, these teachers are *change agents* (van der Heijden et al., 2018) and *implementors* of the project for the pedagogical reform because they followed CLT practices most of the time as in other studies (e.g., Tao & Gao, 2017). This kind of identity is often motivated by a desire for professional development

which enhances their career profile. They may have assumed this identity due to the EIA monitoring and evaluation procedure and potentially their desire to have access to the well-funded project (e.g., use of teaching resources and mobile technologies) in the scarcely-resourced context of their schools.

9.3 Conformist

The other teacher identity is obeying what the EIA project asked them to do in their classroom, making them a *conformist* (Varghese et al., 2005). The teachers often reported positive images of CLT (e.g., singing and playing in English, using more English) and downplayed traditional practices (e.g., teaching grammar rules) even though the wider Bangladeshi ELT practices were traditional as shown by the baseline study and others (Hamid & Honan, 2012). This might indicate that their CLT practices may not be sustained beyond the project as argued by Rahman et al. (2019). For example, these teachers might revert to traditional language teaching practices rampant in Bangladesh due to the lack of ongoing monitoring and professional development support as in the EIA project.

9.4 Resister

It can be argued that the teachers in the EIA study are *resisters* because they continued to follow key aspects of traditional practices (e.g., *error correction* and *drilling*) and believed in their importance despite CLT-focused EIA training for six months. This could be as a result of a top-down reform approach to in-service teacher education which suddenly gave 'more freedom' to students which necessitated teachers reclaiming their teacher *authority* and *resist changes*. Equally, the 'UK-imported' CLT practices may have lacked sociocultural sensitivity to suit Bangladeshi classrooms and thus teachers resisted certain aspects of CLT practices (Canagarajah, 1999; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008).

9.5 Power struggler

English language is presented to the people of non-English speaking countries like Bangladesh as a socioeconomic tool to gain access, power and privilege (e.g., Hamid, 2016). Due to this perception of English, primary English teachers in the EIA study saw the EIA training as an opportunity to gain *power* and a sense of *owning* English language as revealed by their personal attitudes and beliefs which shape their identities (Varghese et al., 2016). Additionally, they seemed to attempt at owning aspects of the new CLT pedagogy in their classroom practices albeit with limited success. However, this desire for power and

ownership did not seem to have materialised as the teachers appeared to be struggling due to their own language proficiency (Kirkwood, 2013) and their continuous inclination towards traditional practices of *drilling* and student *error corrections* (i.e., teacher power) although they wanted to show that they follow CLT practices (i.e., student power). Therefore, they were caught in *power struggles* between the two types of classroom practices, indicating threats to sustaining their EIA promoted CLT practices they achieved during the project.

3. Conclusion and implications

This chapter examined Bangladeshi primary English teachers' classroom practices and their personal attitudes, beliefs and perceptions with regard to ELT practices, specifically traditional and CLT practices through large-scale data sets. The first level findings were then discussed by focusing on multiple and fluid language teacher identities as revealed by the baseline and the EIA-focused research data. The baseline data showed that the predominant ELT practices in Bangladeshi primary classrooms were traditional and teacher-centred. There was little focus on student interactions and communication. The EIA-focused research data, however, presented a mixed picture of the classroom practices, showing high instances of both traditional practices such as *drilling* and *error corrections* and CLT-oriented practices as promoted through the donor-funded EIA project like *teachers encouraging students to sing and play in English* and *organising pair and group activities* in their lessons. The latter implies some success of implementing CLT in Bangladeshi primary classrooms. It should also be acknowledged that the classroom observation data collection approach was limited to time-sampling and ticking pre-determined boxes, thus losing sight of the dynamicity of classroom practices (e.g., as captured by video recordings) (e.g., see Hamid & Honan, 2012 for critique).

In terms of LTIs, I argued that the classroom observation and the survey data showed fluid (changing) and multiple identities as suggested by previous studies (Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Varghese et al., 2016). Unlike in the majority of the previous research on LTIs which primarily used *life history interviews* (Tao & Gao, 2017) and *narrative approaches* (Higgins & Sandhu, 2014), this chapter drew on classroom observation and survey data to examine LTIs. I identified five teacher identities: *Authority*, *Conformist*, *Implementor*, *Resister* and *Power struggler*. The fluidity and multi-layering of LTIs could have been readily generated through life history and narrative approaches. However, this chapter showed that it is also

possible to explore such LTIs through teacher survey and classroom observations. These identities were co-constructed by teachers themselves, the wider sociocultural beliefs and the large-scale donor-funded EIA project. The teachers co-constructed their identities as they saw themselves in relation to their peers (inside and outside the EIA project) and professional development mentors; they came with their knowledge of wider sociocultural beliefs about teachers in Bangladesh which interacted (and sometimes contradicted) with the newly acquired CLT-oriented practices promoted by the EIA project, thereby creating new LTIs. These identities suggest that teachers cannot let go of their traditional practices easily to replace them by the new CLT practices. As a result, they take on changing multiple identities to survive professionally and potentially keep the donor-funded project owners satisfied. This might suggest that these teachers' CLT-orientated practices and identities may not continue beyond the funded project as claimed recently by Rahman et al. (2019). This raises questions about the top-down approach to language education reform adopted by the (Bangladeshi) government and donor-funded English language teacher development projects in Bangladesh and other low and middle income countries in Asia which may rather be in need of developing national and local language literacies (Erling, 2017).

In spite of insightful findings, this study has some limitations. As noted earlier, firstly, the focus on large-scale meant a lack of individual voices of teachers to reflect their identities and classroom practices. Secondly, this study did not examine PELTs' classroom practices by investigating classroom discourse as in previous studies focusing on classroom discourse studies (Walsh, 2011; Zein, 2019) considering classroom interactional competence due to the large-scale nature. Finally, narrative interviews with PELTs may have enhanced the findings of the study.

The findings in this chapter, despite some limitations, have some implications for primary English language teaching in Bangladesh. Given the dominance of traditional ELT practices in Bangladesh, any in-service teacher development should take into account of local pedagogies, teacher needs, and their beliefs and existing practices. The government should not impose a top-down approach on teachers by frequently introducing and relying on new donor-funded ELT projects for English language education reform but consider the integration of local pedagogies, educational cultures and a bottom-up approach as argued in previous studies such as those in Coleman (2011). There should be detailed studies on the

long-term impact (whether positive or negative) of donor-funded projects like EIA on English language teachers beyond the project which severely lack.

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