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ISSN 1991-3052

SIU Studies

Vol. 5, No.1, 2016



SYLHET INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

SHAMIMABAD, BAGBARI, SYLHET-3100.

www.siu.edu.bd/journal

SIU STUDIES

ISSN 1991-3052

Volume-5

Issue No. 1

2015

SIU Studies Office : Office of the Editor
SIU Studies
Sylhet International University
Shamimabad, Bagbari, Sylhet-3100
Bangladesh.
Phone: 0821-717193, 720771
E-mail: siustudies16@gmail.com
siustudies@siu.edu.bd

Published by : Director, Media & Public Relations
Sylhet International University
Shamimabad, Bagbari, Sylhet-3100
Bangladesh.

Date of Publication : May 2016

Printed by : Dristy Graphics
Muktijudda Sangsad Goli, Zindabazar, Sylhet.
E-mail: dristygraphics@yahoo.com

Price : Tk. 175.00
US\$ 3.00

Students' Attitude towards Teaching and Learning of English

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Abstract

In order to bring about qualitative change in the teaching learning practice in English classrooms, English in Action (EIA) is introducing various methods and techniques. The aim of this article is to explore how this change is influencing the mind of the learners at secondary schools. It will discover the change of learners' perceptions towards learning English. To do so, a study was carried out in twelve schools under DFID (UK) funded 'English In Action' intervention programme. Required data for the study was collected from EIA intervened schools of three districts namely Dhaka, Gazipur and Laxmipur. The instruments used for collecting required data are a) FGDs with students, and b) Teacher interview (TI). The findings of the study show how secondary school students perceive learning English and what sort of teaching practice they prefer.

Keywords: EIA, student, perceptions, English, learnin

Introduction

In Bangladesh, students are learning English as a compulsory subject from the 'earliest grade possible' i.e from Class/Grade 1 till Grade 12, and later at the tertiary level. (Rahman & Rahman, 2012, Hamid & Baldauf, 2008, p.16). Yet the proficiency level of the students is far below the average. Consequently, in the 1990s Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was imported as a methodology/approach to develop learners' communicative competence. (Rahman & Rahman, 2012, NCTB, 2003; Roshid, 2009). It was expected that CLT would 'revitalize' the 'weak' learners' proficiency in English by 'improving the standard of teaching and learning English at different levels of formal education' (Rahman & Rahman, 2012, NCTB, 2003; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008, p.16; Roshid, 2009). But improvement in the proficiency level of the students is still 'far from satisfactory' (Roshid, 2009 ; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). Among others, one crucially obvious reason is failure to implement CLT principles in the classrooms, although teachers are supposed to do so (Roshid, 2009; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). A massive effort for capturing what is happening in the English classrooms of primary and secondary levels in Bangladesh done by EIA in their

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Baseline Study-3 where 252 classrooms were observed further supplements the validity of the above reality. The study shows

"...most lessons observed did not encourage a communicative approach...The use of teaching aids (other than the textbook) was infrequently observed: in 2% to 6% of classes at any of the times sampled. Similarly, there were few occasions when individual students or groups were encouraged to speak in English: from 2% to 4% of classes at any of the times sampled. More frequently, teachers gave instructions for student activities (from 5% to 8% at any of the times sampled) or listened to students as they read aloud from the textbook (from 2% to 8% at any of the times sampled). Only infrequently did teachers explain something in English (from 0% to 5% at any of the times sampled)." (EIA, 2008, p. i)

So it is obvious that although the Ministry of Education has been trying to implement CLT in Bangladesh for more than a decade through teacher training and textbook writing projects like English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP), and others, there is hardly any improvement in English teaching-learning process (Rahman & Rahman, 2012).

Under such circumstances, EIA was introduced in 2008 in response to an appeal from the government of Bangladesh for international support to augment students' proficiency in the use of English language of the people of the country (Rahman & Rahman, 2012).

English in Action (EIA)

EIA is an international English language proficiency development programme for the people of Bangladesh. It is being financed by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and implemented by the government of Bangladesh. It is being delivered by a partnership which includes the Open University, UK and the BBC World Service Trust. As a part of the planned intervention, EIA is working for English language teacher development at primary and secondary sectors of Bangladesh so that these teachers can implement CLT principles in their classrooms and thereby develop 'communicative competence' (Hyme 1971, 1966) of the students (Rahman & Rahman, 2012).

Literature Review:

In some cases, learning a second language is a relatively important educational task that students face during their academic formation, while for others it is a straight path to bilingualism. In both cases, researchers seem to agree, "affective variables such as attitudes (perceptions) influence language learning" (Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant and Mihic, 2004). In his seminal work, Allport (1954) laid the ground for the

expansion of the concept of attitudes (perceptions). He stated that attitudes (perceptions) are a "mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which is related (pg. 45)." Since then numerous definitions have been proposed to describe the essence of the term "attitudes(perceptions)." All definitions, though, acknowledge that attitudes (perceptions) cannot be measured directly, but have to be inferred through beliefs, behaviors, feelings, and intentions. Most researchers believe nowadays that attitudes have cognitive, affective and behavioral components (Manzaneda & Madrid, 1997). The cognitive component refers to the individual's beliefs system; the affective component is based upon emotional reactions, and the behavioral component to the tendency to behave before the attitudinal object. From an operational standpoint, an individual's attitude is an evaluative reaction, positive or negative, to a referent or attitudinal object inferred from the individual's belief system toward the referent (Uribe, 2001). There is no agreement, however, which components should be included when measuring attitudes. Els (1984) explained that while some researchers only include the affective component, others incorporate all. Rokeach (1973) believed that the connection between all factors is so robust that no matter which one is measured, results will be reliable.

In the second language acquisition field, scholars have focused their attention primarily on two types of attitudes (perceptions): attitudes towards the learning of the language, and attitudes towards the community of the target language. While the first set of attitudes is educational in nature, the second is social. There are reasons to believe that attitudes towards language learning are strongly correlated with achievement in the language (Masgoret and Garner, 2003), even more that to other subjects of the curriculum (Jordan, 1941). Attitudes (perceptions) to language learning seem to be associated to other factors. For example, some researchers found sex differences; girls tend to have more positive attitudes towards learning a language than boys (Wright, 1999). And there is ample evidence that girls are more successful than boys learning a language (Clark & Trafford, 1995). What researches do not seem to concur is in the nature of such attitudinal differences. Ehrlich (1997) declared that is was not gender per se, but rather the complex sets of "gendered" practices associated with the individual in a particular setting that make a difference. Attitudes towards learning the language also appear to be influenced by the setting and the epoch (Pulcini, 1997) the learning occurs. Parents seem to have a strong impact on the attitudes of their children at least initially (Oskamp, 1977). Attitudes towards language learning also seem connected to the context where learning takes place (Gagnon, 1974).

Gardner (1985) was one of the pioneers in the study of the relation between attitudes (perceptions), motivation and the integrative motive. He maintained that motivation refers "to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward the learning of the language (pg. 10)." All four components need to be interrelated to achieve a desired goal. There are diverse reasons to study a language. Once these reasons are classified, they are identified as orientations. According to Gardner (1985), there are two types of orientations: integrative and instrumental. Integrative orientation is based upon the individuals' interest of learning a language to blend in with the community of that language. Instrumental orientations denote the learning of a language to pursue a determined benefit or reward.

Objectives of the study: The purposes of the study are to explore secondary school students' attitude towards teaching and learning English and the factors for their motivation to learning English.

Research Methodology:

Data Collection

For selecting sample schools, teachers and students purposive sampling procedure was applied. A sample of 12 schools was selected from Dhaka, Gazipur and Laxmipur districts. A total of 12 English teachers were selected for the study. Moreover, 8 students for focused group discussions (FGD) from each school were chosen which made a total of 96. Thus, the instruments used for collecting required data are a) Teacher interview (TI), and b) FGDs with students. Moreover, field notes also provided valuable data.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis methods employed in this study are designed to provide both emic (from the inside) and etic (from the outside) perspectives on school students' attitude towards learning English. The techniques of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), pattern matching (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994) were employed during the data analysis (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The analysis that follows focuses on what are current practices in EIA schools, what things are popular and what are the reasons behind learner motivation to learn English in EIA schools, and what difficulties learners are still facing in the classroom.

Current classroom practice:

From the FGDs with students and teacher interviews it has been found that teachers are trying to use English in the classroom along with Bangla. Though their level of English is not quite satisfactory, yet the ratio of the use of English has increased. Moreover, group-works and pair-works are done available in many of the classes. And use of posters at a minimum level is available. But that does not mean that all the EIA classrooms are same. In many of them some teachers mostly use Bangla, and follow the old path of rote learning. The views of learners of the current practices are quoted below:

Classroom language: It has been seen from the FGDs that most ($\frac{3}{4}$) of the teachers are using English in the classrooms.

"Our teacher mostly talked in English we also speak in English in classroom, but outside in classroom we don't."

"During the class time our teacher mostly speaks in English but we speak in Bangla."

"Our teacher use both Bangla and English in our class. But mainly use English. We also try to speak in English but when we cannot we use Bangla."

"In our last English class we studied a lesson where we worked on a table matching and true or false identifying. We worked on group. Sometimes teacher asked us questions and we answered. Our teacher mostly talked in English we also speak in English in classroom, but outside in classroom we don't."

"Our teacher instructed us in English and some of us could not understand properly then our teacher used Bangla to help them."

Contrary to the above statements, from other groups of students we have come to know about the classrooms, though less in number ($\frac{1}{4}$), that there are some classes in which Bangla is the only medium of instruction:

"In our last class we learned Lesson-6, Unit-10. After entering into the class teacher told us to read the text. Then we memorized the word meaning. All through the class teachers used Bangla. We feel good when our teacher speak in English, though it's rare."

Two CLT practices: Group-work and pair work are the practices which are used in the classrooms very frequently, which have come up from the statements of students and teachers in a discussion on classroom practices.

"In last class our teacher grouped us in some groups and we solved a model question in our class. We discussed in our groups if we face problem, also worked in pair."

"In our last class we learned about "Mother Teresa".

"In that class teacher showed us a picture. Then we work in pair to get information about 'Mother Teresa'. After that we work in groups to write down a paragraph in this topic. Teacher gave us feed back in groups."

On the other hand we are informed of one class in which rote learning is the key techniques of teaching.

"In our last class we learned Lesson-3 Unit-11. In this class teacher told us to memorize the word meanings. Most of the time teacher talked in the class in Bangla. We didn't have the chance to even asking questions."

Favoured classroom practices:

The popular classroom practices found in the statements of students and teachers are group-work, pair-work, dialogue practices, role play, playing word games and listening practices. These are some highly effective CLT practices used all over the world. They are popular among the teachers and students of EIA schools. Examples of which are given below. One of group of students says,

"We like to learn new words and study tense in our class. When our teacher speaks in English we feel good to hear her. We also like role playing (dialogue practice), playing word game and group discussion also."

One of them told, 'When teacher involve us in group work and we discuss together then I can learn English best.' Another student mentioned, 'if I talk to teacher in English I can learn best.' Yet another one said, 'When teacher involve me to speak about any topic suddenly then I can learn English best.' Another one reported pair work is best to learn English. Other students said if teacher ask them any question in English and if they fail and teacher helps them, then they can learn English best. Here is what others say,

"Among these activities we like to do group work more."

"We like to play dialogue in pair in our class. We think through dialogue practice we do reading and speaking at a time. We also like to do group work also because in group work we can learn also we can help our friends who cannot understand the lesson."

"Most of the respondents said we like to practice dialogue in pair. We also like game and question-answer practice. We think grammar is very essential for learning English so we like to practice grammar also."

"Teachers' instruction given in English, dialogue listening, homework and word game are preferred by us. So, for doing these activities we like learning English."

"Role play, group work and choral dialogue make our English class joyful. So, we like to learn English in the class."

"We like to learn English because teacher always comes up with new activity and new stories. Among all activity we like dialogue practices most."

"When teacher teaches us grammar with games we like it a lot."

"We like dialogue practices most."

"Sometimes if the teacher does group-work, we like that very much."

In the above mentioned practices grammar is taught inductively. But we also have responses which emphasizes grammar practice extensively and deductively.

"We think grammar is most helpful for us to learn English and we also enjoy grammar."

"We think grammar practice is the most important thing in our classroom activities which help us to learn English because if we know the grammar rule we can make sentences and also can rearrange the words according to the structure. Other activities are also helpful but grammar is most helpful for learning English."

"We like almost all activities but dialogue and grammar practice is our most favorite activities. We think through these activities we can learn English easily. We also like to read passage and construct sentences."

Motivation for learning English:

Behind the motivation of learning English several practical issues influence the choice of learners, which are English for the use of ICT, having better entertainment, communication purposes, career development, supporting others in learning English, transferring EIA methods and techniques in the classrooms and prestige issues.

Many of the learners consider English a tool to communicate with people all over the world.

"If our relatives come from foreign country with their foreign friend then we have to talk in English otherwise they will not understand. So we need English. "

"If any foreign visitor comes to our school and we can communicate with him in English."

"To communicate with the people of other countries we need English."

From the statements of the learners it is clear that career progression both in home and abroad requires good command in English and they are aware of it.

"If we learn English we can communicate with different people of the world not only that we will be able to get a good job also if we know good English. If we want to be a doctor or engineer then we have to study in English because these books will be written in English. So English learning is useful."

"If we want to go abroad for job or study purpose then English will be helpful to us. If we want to communicate with any big position holder then English will be necessary to speak with him."

"Learning English is essential for higher study, getting good jobs, for learning good pronunciation, to develop our country and to go to abroad."

"Learning English is useful for getting better job, communicating and traveling in abroad, understanding news, films and newspaper, to become English teacher and for economic development of Bangladesh."

Students of 2 schools out of 12 say that they want to learn good English because they want to help others to learn English, which motivates them to give more time to learning English

"Yes, we [5 students] want to be English teachers to help the students to learn English. I want to be an English teacher to decrease the shortage of English teachers in Bangladesh."

"Yes [5students], we want to be an English teacher to improve myself and to help others for learning English"

Use of mobile phone and computer is very frequent all over Bangladesh. Learners are aware of it for which they think that English is needed for the use of ICT.

"English is a foreign language and we enjoy learning it. If we can understand English well we will be able to operate mobile, computer etc easily. That's why we like to learn English."

Satellite channels of different countries are available in Bangladesh through cable connection for which young generation is having an access to other cultures. To understand and enjoy those learners think they need English.

"If we know English we will be able to read English news paper and book, also will be able to understand English drama and movie."

Many of the learners consider the ability to communicate in English a sign of high social status.

"If I can communicate with my friend in English then they will treat me specially."

"If someone asks me anything in English and if I cannot answer then it will be a shame for our teachers. That is why we like to learn English also."

"If we learn English we will be able to speak English in home, with classmate and friends and also with relatives. They will appreciate me."

"Learning English is necessary for prestigious issue. So, I learn English."

"It helps increase prestige."

Transferring EIA methods and techniques: interestingly four learners of one school have come up with the statement that:

"Yes, [4 students]. We want to be an English teacher to transfer the modern methods of English teaching which is used by EIA. I also want to make my students good English teacher. That's why we want to be English teachers."

Learning difficulties in classroom: Learning difficulties in the classroom gives a wider picture of the above analysis and discussions. Here learners view of classroom practices are brought out through what they think as obstacle to their motivation of learning English.

Use of English for a long time/excessive home work: Data show that when the teachers talk in English for a long time students lose their attentions; Excessive home work also has become for some of them demotivating, though this shows that teachers are trying to use English in the classrooms.

"If teacher assigns excess home work we don't like this."

"If our teacher speak English all time then we feel bore."

"They said they feel bad if their teacher come to the class check their home work and again assign new home work and then go back to the office only."

Irrelevant discussion in the class: Irrelevant discussion in the class slows down learner process of learning.

"Sometimes teacher speaks other personal talk instead of teaching us important topics. Then we feel bore. Very often he talks about his daughter. Sometimes some students make noise in classroom and we feel disturb. We don't like it also."

Difficulties in listening practices: Data show that students face problems in listening audio because of classroom setting, management problem, and they also think that the audio is too fast for their level.

"The noise of boat in the river or other sounds hinders us to pay attention while listening to the audio recordings. Then everything becomes boring and noisy."

"The noise of the class and side talking break our attention for listening to the audio."

"The recordings are so fast to understand. These are the main things that we do not like in the English class."

The tradition of rote learning: Students do not have a positive attitude to rote learning.

"We do not like memorizing anything for our English examination."

"When we cannot communicate in English and when we have to memorize paragraph, essay, letter and application, we feel bad."

Recommendations:

If we are to raise the involvement of the learners in learning English we need to look deeper into the classroom practices. To make our teaching play an effective and interesting role in the classrooms, teachers need training on classroom activities, classroom management, time management and as well as noise management. It is also recommended that external factors such as existing set up of the school, school policy, number of teachers in school, teachers socio-economic status, learners' background as well as socio-economic condition also need considerations. Thus, there is a high requirement of bigger investment from the part of Bangladesh Government and international parties in the Education sector. One vital issue is that the examination does not test learners' aural and oral skills, only reading and writing skills are evaluated, which can measure memorization skill of schools rather than having good command over the language. So, high focus is required on the above issues to reach the expected outcome.

Conclusion:

This study aims at exploring the changes in learners view of current classroom practices and in their level of motivation to learn English in EIA schools. The intervention has brought about significant changes in teachers' classroom practices which are influencing learners to choose the best practices for them among a good range of practices. These practices, which they like most or prefer least, are not free from their pitfalls and support but they are affecting their way of learning. The practice, certainly, increases learners' involvement in the classrooms and heightens learners' autonomy. Change in learners' awareness of learning English is the key point of learners' motivation to learn.

Acknowledgment:

The researchers would like to thank 'English In Action' for funding the study. He is also thankful to the students and teachers who took part in the research activities.

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