

Synthesis Report

Evidence of the Relationship Between  
**English and Economic  
Gain in Bangladesh**



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# Synthesis Report: Evidence of the Relationship Between English and Economic Gain in Bangladesh

## Executive summary

This report presents an overview of research evidence that has been collected through various channels by the EIA programme regarding the relationship between English language skills and economic gain in Bangladesh. It provides an overview of three research projects:

- 1) The EIA Employer Survey, a survey of formal employers across a range of sectors and personnel from post-school colleges and universities focused upon perceptions of the need for English proficiency in their workplace, and the extent to which current employees or job applicants meet that need.
- 2) The Euromonitor Study of job advertisements, and interviews with employment agencies, focused upon the proportion of advertised positions stating English proficiency as a requirement, and the salary premium for such vacancies.
- 3) BBC Media Action Research, focused upon the relationship between tested and self-assessed English proficiency and economic status.

Key findings from these studies are as follows:

### EIA Employer Survey

- 35% of employees across industries in the formal sector need English language skills. Needs for employees with English language skills vary from industry to industry according to location, type of client, level of position and type of job.
- 77% of respondents felt that the need for English language has increased in the last two years. While speaking skills are the most prominent need, there is also an increase in the need for reading, writing and listening skills.
- 45% of respondents felt that the English language skills of their staff were not good enough for the firm's required activities. Despite this, only a small number (14%) provided English language training to their employees.

### Euromonitor Study

- Between 20% (print) and 40% (online) jobs advertised require English, with International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores in English increasingly being required.
- Candidates with good English skills were felt to have a 30–50% higher chance of being employed in the formal sector.

- The income premium for English language proficiency was 5–15% in 2010. In 2013 this had risen to a 25–30% income premium for jobs where the candidate had good English skills.

### BBC Media Action Research

- For individuals across the country and in a wide variety of employment types, there is a small but significant association between tested and self-assessed level of English and income. For those in skilled employment, English skills have a stronger association with economic gain.
- In two large scale quantitative datasets, a one-point increase<sup>1</sup> in the self-reported English level scale was associated with an average increase of over 200 Taka (roughly £1.65) in earnings, equal to 2% of the average monthly family expenditure.
- For skilled employees, a one-point increase in the self-reported English level scale was associated with an increase of 464–600 Taka (between £3.85 and £5), equal to 4% of the average monthly family expenditure.
- When the more detailed scale used in the BBC Media Action research is matched against the broader scale used in the Euromonitor study, similar results are found. According to BBC Media Action research using two different high-powered data sets, those with intermediate English earn 22-27% more than those without English, after controlling for other individual characteristics such as age and education level. This is in line with the Euromonitor (2013) figure of 25-30%. When restricting the BBC Media Action samples to just those learners in employment, the premiums increased to 35-36%. The BBC Media Action study also suggests that, while English language ability seems to have a relationship with economic gain, other variables clearly have an important effect.
- While English might play a role in individuals' earning power, other variables clearly have an important effect.

These three studies draw data from three very different sources (employers, recruitment agencies and advertisements, and employees) and the data are derived by very different methodologies (approaching the relationship between English and economic gain by interviewing employers and recruitment agencies, by analysing job advertisements and salaries, and by comparing the results of a test or self-assessment of English language skills with salary or expenditure). While any individual study or methodology is necessarily limited, the range of data sources and methodologies used, together with the synergy of findings across the three studies, increases confidence in the overall findings: that there is a positive relationship between English language skills, employment opportunities and an individual's earning power of a magnitude of 20% to 30% of average earnings in Bangladesh.

<sup>1</sup>The main measure of level of English was a self-reported score based on a respondent's self-reported level of their English proficiency on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is equal to non-English user and 10 is equal to an excellent English user. Three different scales corresponding to the level of speaking, listening and reading English were combined to create a final self-reported scale ranging from 3 (non-users of any of these skills) to 30 (excellent command of all three English skills).

## 1. Introduction

English in Action (EIA) is a nine-year programme designed to change the way that children, young people and adults in Bangladesh acquire English. The programme works in government schools with students and teachers and also targets adult learners through a range of media. Funded by UKaid (Department for International Development, DFID), the programme aims to reach millions children and adults by 2017.

The EIA Theory of Change identifies a number of assumptions that link the programme's outputs (greater access to and use of EIA methods and products) to its desired outcome (to increase significantly the number of people able to communicate in English to levels that enable them to participate fully in economic and social activities and opportunities). These assumptions recognise that the effect of the link between English and economic development in Bangladesh can first and foremost be identified by examining the impact on individuals, rather than on the economy as a whole.

The EIA DFID Annual Review in Spring 2013 recommended more work be done to test assumptions about the relationship between English language skills and economic gain. In response, this report presents an overview of research evidence that has been collected through various channels by the EIA programme regarding the relationship between English language skills and economic gain in Bangladesh. It provides an overview of the rationale, methodology and findings of three research projects:

1. The EIA Employer Survey,
2. The Euromonitor study, and
3. BBC Media Action research.

It then provides a meta-analysis of the combined findings of this research, comparing them with findings from other studies conducted in South Asia.

## 2. Employer survey

### 2.1 Employer survey 2013

This report by Mott MacDonald presents the findings of a survey that investigated the demand for, and use of, English by employers and in post-school education in Bangladesh in 2013 (Mott MacDonald 2013). It is a follow-up to the EIA Baseline Employer Survey, conducted in 2009 (EIA 2009). Data collection in both of these studies (EIA 2009, Mott MacDonald 2013) was limited to the Dhaka area.

The population of respondents included representatives from the following types of organisation:

- IT companies;
- banks;
- colleges and universities (both public and private);
- travel and tourism agencies;
- hotels and restaurants;
- ready-made garment (RMG) factories;
- non-government organisations (NGOs);
- export agencies;
- other industries (including newspapers, magazines, advertising agencies and others).

The total sample of the 2013 study included 125 respondents as representatives of these industries. As the sample size was relatively small, the results cannot be said to be representative of a wider population. 89% of the respondents were male, and the average age was 28. The majority of the respondents were personnel from senior management and/or human resource managers. Most were respondents from the 2009 study. Where respondents were no longer available, other respondents were selected so that the proportion of respondents from each sector was comparable.

Interviews with respondents were mostly conducted over the phone or via email, and face-to-face interviews were conducted if no other option existed. Respondents were asked a number of questions about their company, what English language requirements they had for their employees and how that related to their activities, the English language skills of their employees and those who apply for jobs. A question was added in 2013 to assess whether the company was more likely to employ people with English language skills and the extent to which there is any salary addition for those employees with English language skills.

## 2.2 Findings from the 2013 study

Descriptive statistics are used to report the findings from the Employer Survey, and are compared to the results of the 2009 study where appropriate.

The following findings shed light on the type of firm that the respondents represented, and the various international activities that go on within the firm that may require English. The survey found that 23% of the respondents interact with South Asian countries; 22% with East Asian countries; 20% with North American countries; 9% with European countries; 2% with Australia, another 2% with the Middle East and Africa; and 1% with Southeast Asian countries.

Responses about how much of the firm's business involves dealing with non-Bangla speakers varies hugely from industry to industry, with hotels and restaurants having the highest number of interactions in the last year. RMG companies have a low requirement for employees with English language skills, with only middle and senior managers having to deal with international buyers. 36% of respondents said that their organisation only had contact with non-Bangla speakers up to 50 times per year, while an average of only 9% (with most of them being in the hotel and restaurant industry) responded that they interact with non-Bangla speakers 3000+ times per year (see Table 1 for the average number of responses about number of times employees interacted with non-Bangla speakers in the past year).

**% of responses about number of times employees interacted with non-Bangla speakers in the past year**

	Up to 50 times	51–100 times	101–500 times	501–3000 times	3000 + times
<b>Average of all industry-types</b>	36%	9%	27%	20%	9%

Table 1: The average number of responses about number of times employees interacted with non-Bangla speakers in the past year

In relation to the specific needs for English within the firms, across all industries an average of 35% of employees needed English language skills. 77% of the respondents felt that the need for English had increased (greatly or a little) in the last two years. 18% said that the need for English has remained the same, while only 5% thought that the need has gone down.

The following is a breakdown of the necessary language skills deemed important by respondents: reading 49%, listening 52%, writing 80% and speaking 86%. There were considerable increases since 2009 in all of the language skills required, apart from speaking, which remained the same.

Regarding the level of English among current staff, 45% of respondents felt that their firm did not have the English language skills for its required activities, while 55% felt their employees did possess the requisite proficiency. Approximately 86% of respondents reported speaking and writing to be the major weaknesses among current employees (approximately 40% reported only speaking).

Regarding provision of English, only 14% of the firms involved in the study provided English language training to their employees. Those who provided training mentioned that the type of training is usually basic communication training.

Regarding employment candidates, 49.5% of the respondents thought that the available candidates have the English language skills needed, while 51% thought they do not. 64% said that they are very or quite likely to employ candidates having intermediate level English language skills. Only 15% said they are not likely or not at all likely to prefer candidates with an intermediate level of English skills.

Regarding salary levels, few respondents reported that their firm offers higher wages to candidates with English language skills (aside from the hotels and restaurants industry). However, as mentioned above, they reported that they are more likely to hire candidates if they have English language skills.

### **3. Euromonitor studies**

Euromonitor research has attempted to investigate the extent to which English language skills are an important factor in the economic growth of various developing countries, including Bangladesh (Euromonitor 2010, 2012). In these studies, a scoring system for each country's economy and education system was created in order to determine the nature of the relationship between the two. Interviews were conducted with stakeholders within the market, such as recruitment agencies, corporate businesses, educational institutions and other semi-official sources. From this, a consensus view of the salaries paid in each position/role was obtained. This was validated through secondary research, which reviewed salaries shown in job advertisements posted on job websites and print media.

#### **3.1 Findings from the 2010 Euromonitor study**

The 2010 study, which includes Bangladesh, concludes that, while economic growth may be slow in the country, English is seen as offering a key competitive advantage in a difficult employment environment. Regarding the employment market in the sectors involved in the study, Euromonitor found that English was the main business language for most of the companies interviewed. Around 86% of those interviewed felt that English language skills were an important factor in recruiting new employees (of which 43% felt that they were very important). 68% of job vacancies captured within a given week required at least an intermediate level of English.

With regards to an individual's economic advantage in terms of English language skills, the salary gap between someone who can speak English and someone who cannot was found to be 5–15%. Table 2 shows the differentiation in various professional salaries for individuals with at least intermediate English skills compared to those with no English skills.

<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Professional salaries with English skills to at least intermediate level (gross salary/month, US\$)</b>	<b>Professional salaries with no English skills (gross salary/month, US\$)</b>
<b>Director</b>	<b>2,400</b>	<b>2,000</b>
<b>Senior Manager</b>	<b>960</b>	<b>720</b>
<b>Manager</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>645</b>
<b>Senior Analyst</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>420</b>
<b>Analyst</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>375</b>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>Carpenter</b>	<b>280<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>210</b>
<b>Electrician</b>	<b>262<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>250</b>
<b>Plumber</b>	<b>295<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>260</b>
<b>Receptionist</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>210</b>

Table 2: Salary differentiation: English skills vs. no English skills (Euromonitor 2010: 100)

77% of the respondents stated that employees who speak better English advance faster in their careers than those without a good grasp of the language. This suggests that proficiency in English plays an important role in career advancement.

### 3.2 Findings from the 2013 Euromonitor study

In 2013, a follow-up study was conducted by Euromonitor for English in Action to provide up-to-date evidence on the economic benefit of English language skills in Bangladesh (Euromonitor 2013). The study was carried out to create an updated version of the salary differentiation table (Table 2 above) and to provide an indication of the proportion of jobs for which English language skills were required.

Following the same methodology as the 2010 study, Euromonitor conducted trade interviews with 10 out of the 12 largest recruitment agencies in Bangladesh, which potentially cover as much as 30–40% of the total formal employment market.

Within the employment market Euromonitor found that skills in English help people secure jobs with well-established companies (mainly in cities such as Dhaka). Employers value language skills for their potential to open up new markets and the ability to communicate with customers and clients in their own language, and particularly in jobs that require international travel.

The search of job advertisements found that around 40% of jobs advertised on job portals and 20% of jobs advertised in newspapers require English. Some corporates have also started considering IELTS scores as a benchmark to evaluate the English proficiency of applicants.

Job Title	Professional salaries with English skills to at least intermediate level (gross salary/month, US\$)	Professional salaries with no English (gross salary/month, US\$)	% of adverts requiring English
Director	2,050	1,650	35-40
Snr Manager	970	750	20-30
Manager	820	700	10-25
Snr Analyst	550	450	30-35
Anlyst	520	400	-
Marketing Exec	380	300	20-30
Man.Trainee	370	300	15-25
Receptionist	380	250	10-25
Secretary	360	230	20-25
Overall	+25-30%	-	20-40%

Table 3: Salary differentiation: English skills vs. no English skills (Euromonitor 2013)

With regard to the economic advantage of an individual's English language skills, Euromonitor reports that corporates require at least an intermediate level of English and are willing to pay more for candidates with an excellent command of the language. There is a 25–30% increase in salary for jobs where the candidate has good English skills. Table 3 (above) shows the differentiation in various professional salaries for individuals with at least intermediate English skills compared to those without. It should be noted that the 2010 study reported substantially higher salaries than the 2013 study. The cause for this is unknown, but might be attributed to salary reductions after 2010, or alternatively fluctuations in exchange rates or other indirect factors.

## 4. BBC Media Action Research

### 4.1 The study

This research examined whether there was a relationship between tested and perceived English proficiency and economic status. It used two existing datasets (from the BBC Janala Midline Survey 2011 and the BBC Janala Pre-/Post-Competency Study 2012) to explore statistical associations between tested and self-reported level of English proficiency and two variables related to economic status (monthly household income after rent and monthly family expenditure) (see Damiani & Gowland 2013 for details).

The main measure of level of English was a self-reported score based on a respondent's self-reported level of English proficiency on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is equal to non-English user and 10 is equal to an excellent English user. Three different scales corresponding to the level of speaking, listening and reading English were combined to create a final self-reported scale ranging from 3 (non-users of any of these skills) to 30 (excellent command of all three English skills). The association between tested English proficiency (using the results of proficiency tests undertaken as part of the 2012 study) and household income was also investigated.

Linear regression models were run using self-reported and tested level of English as the independent variable and household income or family expenditure as the dependent variable. Control variables such as level of education and age were also used in the models, where available, to limit their effect on the dependent variables.

The analyses showed a significant, but small, relationship between self-reported English proficiency and economic status. The self-reported level of English was able to predict a small percentage of the distribution of household income and family expenditure. In other words, a clear difference in the level of self-reported English proficiency translates into a difference in an individual's level of monthly household income or family expenditure. The benefit is greater for those in skilled occupations. The analysis of the relationship between scores obtained in English proficiency tests and household incomes has shown that both variables are also significantly related. The English test can explain household income in a very similar proportion to that of the self-assessment measure.

The findings do not show a causal relationship, which means that the change in one of the variables is not necessarily the result or consequence of a change in the other variable. However, positive associations can be found. Details of the findings from each dataset will be described in more detail below.

#### 4.2 Findings from the 2011 dataset

Across the dataset, there is a statistically significant, albeit small, association between monthly family expenditure and self-reported level of English, with level of English predicting 3.8% of family expenditure<sup>2</sup>. This finding does not necessarily mean that if an individual attains a high level of English their expenditure will increase by 3.8%. Rather, it means that of the differences in family expenditure that are found in the whole of the dataset, 3.8% can be explained by a person's level of English. This is a small but significant impact, but other variables clearly also have important effects on a family's expenditure. Overall, a one-point increase in the self-reported English level scale was associated with an average increase of 262 Taka (roughly £2.20) in the average monthly family expenditure, equal to 2% of the average monthly family expenditure.

For the subgroup of participants in employment (skilled and unskilled), self-reported level of English may predict almost 6% of the monthly family expenditure. A one-point increase in the self-reported English level scale was associated with an average increase of 337 Taka (roughly £2.80), equal to 3% of the average monthly family expenditure<sup>3</sup>.

For the subgroup of participants only in skilled occupations, the association was stronger. Self-reported level of English may predict 14% of monthly family expenditure. A one-point increase in the self-reported English level scale was associated with an average increase of 464 Taka (roughly £3.85), equal to 4% of the average monthly family expenditure.

#### 4.3 Findings from the 2012 dataset

There is also a statistically significant, albeit very small, association between monthly household income and the self-reported level of English, with the level of English predicting only about 1.5% of the monthly household income. A one-point increase in the self-reported English level was associated with an average increase of 255 Taka (roughly £2.10) in the average monthly household income. This amount was equal to 2% of an average monthly household income.

<sup>2</sup> All associations reported here are statistically significant with  $p$  value  $<.01$  or  $<.05$ , rejecting the null hypothesis.

<sup>3</sup> This analysis did not find any relationship between employment (i.e. having a job vs. being unemployed) and self-reported level of English.

This relationship is much stronger when looking only at those respondents in employment<sup>4</sup>. For the subgroup of participants in employment, the self-reported level of English may predict 2.5% of the monthly household income. A one-point increase in the self-reported English level scale was associated with an average increase of 386 Taka (roughly £3.20), equal to 3% of the average monthly household income.

For the subgroup of participants in skilled occupations, the self-reported English level may predict 4.5% of the monthly household income<sup>5</sup>. A one-point increase in the self-reported English level scale was associated with an average increase of 600 Taka (roughly £5.00), equal to 4% of the average monthly household income.

## 5. Meta-analysis

The Euromonitor studies provide a broad overview of the economic climate in Bangladesh and the need for English. Euromonitor (2010) reported that, in Bangladesh, English is seen as offering a key competitive advantage, both in getting a job and in receiving a higher salary. The 2013 study confirmed this, finding that English was the main business language for most of the companies interviewed.

The EIA Employer Survey (2013), which provides more insight into the company level perspective, confirmed the need for, and regular use of, English. How much of the firm's business involves dealing with non-Bangla speakers varied from industry to industry, with the hotel and restaurant industry attaching huge importance to English, and RMG companies finding it only important for staff at high levels. 36% of respondents reported that their organisation only had contact with non-Bangla speakers up to 50 times per year (with all respondents reporting at least this much activity), while an average of 9% responded that they interact with non-Bangla speakers 3000+ times per year. The remaining 55% reported something in between.

The EIA Employer Survey also found that an average of 35% of employees across the industries need English language skills. Needs for English differ across the industries according to location within Dhaka, type of client, level of position, and type of job. 77% of the respondents felt that the need for English has increased over the last two years. While in 2009, primarily a need for speaking skills was identified, in 2013 the majority of respondents recognised a need for all four skills. While a large number of respondents felt that their firm did not have the English language skills for its required activities (45%), only 14% provided English language training to their employees.

<sup>4</sup> The level of English could not be used to predict whether a person was employed or not, using these data alone.

<sup>5</sup> Level of English was not significant for predicting the income of participants in unskilled occupations. This means that level of English cannot explain the different level of incomes among these participants.

Regarding the hiring of new employees, Euromonitor (2013) reported that skills in English help people secure jobs with well-established companies. Candidates with good English skills have a 30–50% higher chance of being employed. Around 40% of jobs advertised on job portals and 20% of jobs advertised in newspapers require English. Around 86% of the organisations interviewed felt that English language skills were an important factor in recruiting new employees. Some corporates had even started considering IELTS score as a benchmark to evaluate the English proficiency of applicants. The EIA Employer Survey corroborated these findings, as 64% of respondents said that they are very likely or quite likely to employ candidates having intermediate level English language skills. It also found that 51% of respondents thought that available candidates do not have the English language skills needed.

Regarding differences in salary related to English language learning, the Euromonitor (2010) study found the salary gap between someone who can speak English and someone who cannot was 5–15%. In 2013, it was found that there is a 25–30% increase in salary for jobs where the candidate had good English skills, with corporates willing to pay more for candidates with excellent command of the language.

The EIA Employer Survey found that, while English may play a very important role in getting a job, there are very few respondents that report that their firm offers higher wages for candidates with English language skills (aside from the hotels and restaurants industry). Thus, the role of English in career progression is an area in which more research would be beneficial.

The BBC Media Action research gives more insight into the relationship between English language skills and economic gain for individuals. In both datasets, there was found to be a small but significant association between tested and self-reported level of English and income (measured by monthly family expenditure or monthly family income). In both datasets, a one-point increase in the self-reported English level scale was associated with an average increase of over 200 Taka (roughly £2) in earnings, equal to 2% of the average monthly family expenditure. For participants in skilled employment, self-reported levels of English had a stronger association with economic gain. For skilled employees, a one-point increase in the self-reported English level scale was associated with an increase of 464–600 Taka (between £3.85 and £5), equal to 4% of the average monthly family expenditure. When the more detailed scale used in the BBC Media Action research is matched against the broader scale used in the Euromonitor study, similar results are found. According to BBC Media Action research using two different high-powered data sets, those with intermediate English earn 22–27% more than those without English, after controlling for other individual characteristics such as age and education level. This is in line with the Euromonitor (2013) figure of 25–30%. When restricting the BBC Media Action samples to just those learners in employment, the premiums increased to 35–36%. The BBC Media Action study also suggests that, while English language ability seems to have a relationship with economic gain, other variables clearly have an important effect.

## 6. Corroboration and caveats from other research

The focus of this research on income premiums is designed to fill a gap in the current knowledge base. When looking at the findings of the research done for the EIA programme with what is being established in other research contexts across South Asia, where returns to English language learning are being explored, similar messages are emerging. Such studies, however, tend to suggest that evidence pointing to positive returns to English be interpreted with caution. This is because much research so far – including the Euromonitor studies (2010, 2013) and the EIA Employer Survey (2013) – has primarily been concerned with individuals working in waged employment in the formal economy. While the number of people working in these sectors is large in real terms, it only represents a small percentage of Bangladesh's population (11%, according to ADB 2012). This means that statistics reported in the Euromonitor studies and the Employer Survey may not reflect the value of English language skills for the wider population.

Research such as that conducted by BBC Media Action, however, gives more insight into the value of English for people across socio-economic groups, among skilled/unskilled workers and in areas outside the capital. More research of this kind, with a specific focus on the role of English in rural areas and in the informal sector, would provide much-needed insight into the needs and uses of English among the majority of Bangladeshis, as well as those working in the formal sector in Dhaka.

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