

The Demand for English Language in the Workplace and in Post- School Education



One of the series of Baseline Studies undertaken for English in Action in 2008-2009

Why this study was undertaken?

- English in Action (EiA) aims to develop language learning and teaching over a 9-year period. It is funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DfID).
- The goal of EiA is to "contribute to the economic growth of Bangladesh by providing English language as a tool for better access to the world economy". The purpose of the project is 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".
- A critical question, however, is the extent to which there is actually a demand for English language in Bangladesh. As no empirical study was found in Bangladesh to answer this question, this baseline study was undertaken to examine the existing demand for communicative English in the workplace and in post-school educational institutions in Bangladesh.

How and where assessments made?

A total of 200 interviews were carried out during the November & December 2008 with managers and employers in various Government departments, NGOs, banks, IT Companies, garment factories, export agents, hotels and restaurants, trade associations, and post-school educational institutions in and around Dhaka.

The study was developed by the EIA Team at the Open University, UK. Fieldwork and data analysis for the study was carried out by Uniconsult International Ltd. Based in Dhaka.



Key Findings

“The results show that the need for English is quite high among the business community in Bangladesh”

- About one-third of the respondents indicated that they needed to deal with foreigners 25 times or more in a year.
- Over 50% of the respondents mentioned that they needed to interact with Europeans and about 70% of them said that they used English in such interactions.

“Business organisations need to use English even in their day-to-day activities”

- The main activities that the respondents needed to do in English included: (1) Business negotiations, (2) Writing reports, and (3) Responding to telephone enquiries.
- 75% of the respondents mentioned that Business Negotiations and Writing Reports in English needed to be carried out on a daily basis.

“A vast majority of the respondents said that it was spoken English which they needed most”

- Almost 90% of the organizations represented in the sample stated that Spoken English was a necessary skill that they would like to see in school-leavers.
- More than two-thirds of the respondents indicated that their employees did have the necessary English skills, but where there was a weakness it was with communicating in English.
- Only 20% of the organizations had any provision for in-house English training.

Key Conclusions

The demand for communicative English competency is quite high in Bangladesh and there is a shortage of this skill in the country. Most organizations represented felt that it was important that school-leavers should have good spoken English skills. However, very little in-house training is currently provided by Bangladeshi organizations to improve the communicative English language proficiency of their employees.