

# Learning English: Its use and benefits

## *Views from Bangladesh*



**Dr. Robina Shaheen, Md. Masudul Hassan, Ashok Kumar Paul**

*6<sup>th</sup> BELTA International Conference, 18-20 January, 2013*

*NAEM, Dhaka*

# Roles for English

- increasing employability
- facilitating international mobility (through migration, tourism and studying abroad)
- key for unlocking development opportunities and accessing crucial information
- an impartial language in contexts where other available languages would be unacceptable.

(Coleman, 2011)

# Use of English in Bangladesh

- Most sectors in Bangladesh require some degree of English banking, IT retail sectors demanding the most English speakers
- 24% of companies require a basic level of English
- 38% require an intermediate level of English
- 38% require a good level of English.

# Use of English in Bangladesh

- Graduates in Bangladesh with higher levels of English proficiency generally find jobs faster in private companies.
- The average minimum wage indicated by the Bangladeshi government was US\$66.00 per month in 2009, while the average starting salary for an English-speaking professional was US\$354 per month (Euromonitor, 2010).



# Use and Benefits of English

- The findings presented here are from research carried out by English in Action

English in Action (EIA). (2011).

*Perceptions of English Language Learning and Teaching Among Primary and Secondary School Teachers and Students Participating in English in Action (Study 2b3b)*

Dhaka, Bangladesh: EIA.

# Methodology

- Data collected from six divisions
- Data collection instruments and methods
  - Questionnaire
  - Group and individual interviews



# Sample and Respondents

Respondents	Sample
Primary teachers	103
Secondary teachers	49
Primary students	612
Secondary students	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interviews</li><li>• Questionnaires</li></ul>	288
	1693

# Using the learnt English (teachers' views)





# Teachers use English for...

## In the classroom

- More than 80% teachers agreed that they use mostly English in their classrooms

## Outside the classroom

- Limited use outside the classroom because of:
  - Shyness
  - limited access to technology like internet/TV
  - rural people will not understand

# Teachers use English for...

Other uses of English (reported by fewer teachers):

- Watching English films
- listening to English news
- Reading English newspaper
- For private tuition
- Speak with friends, family members and colleagues
- To communicate with people abroad

# Students use English for... (teachers' views)

- With each other in schools
- Outside the classroom
  - *“All students have started to participate actively in the class and they are not scared about speaking in English now. For example: When I ask them 'How are you?' They give me the answer in English and also ask me 'and you'?”*
  - *“In the past most of my students especially weak students were not responding in the classroom. But now by using iPod to conduct class, all students try to respond well. They try to answer and share their opinions in English. ”*

# **Benefits of using English (teachers' views)**



# Benefits of using English

- **Economic**
- **Social**
- **Communication**
- **Educational**
- **Access to technology**
- **Cultural**



# Economic Benefits

- Better job prospects (85%) (home and abroad)
  - “If they want to go abroad for higher study or for work purposes they needed to know the international language better. If they want to do business they will have to talk with their buyers in English.”
- Increased computer skills
- Going abroad
- Financial success



# Social Benefits

- Prestige and respect in the community
  - “I feel proud to be an English teacher because it is prestigious, demanding and respected at the community. It is a noble profession.”
  - “English will bring positive change in their life. Those who know English can improve in every side of life. They can stay very well in their social life.”



# Communication

- Communicate with people from around the world
  - “English is an international language for communication, business, service, etc. To be a proud member of an international arena my students need to learn more English.”





# Educational

- Gain access to higher education
  - “my students learning English is getting access to higher education.”
  - “They will be able to get a scholarship from universities abroad if they can prove their skills in English.”



# Access to technology

- Success to technology
  - “To use the internet, mobile phones and computers, students need English. When students have good knowledge of technology, this can change their lives.”
  - “I think English learning is essential for ICT literacy and to improve student's lives in the future.

# Cultural

Change lives, develop a new, worldlier lifestyle, positively impacting on their family situation

- “Acquiring good English will actually change their life, their future.”
- “From my own point of view, learning English can change their lifestyle; they will be able to know the world culture by knowing English.”



# **Benefits of using English (students' views)**



# Benefits of using English (students' views)

## Primary

- Professional
- Communication
- Education
- Entertainment
- Social status

## Secondary

- Communication
- Further studies/ better exam results
- Reading books
- Watching movies, Operating computer/mobile phones
- Getting a good job



# Professional

Most of the Primary students perceived English language as a means to finding a good job

- “Yes, we like learning English. Because English can give the opportunities [of] getting different jobs. e.g. for getting a big job. For become a doctor, Army Officer etc”

They would like to become English teachers

- “I want to be an English teacher to teach English to the students...”

Some students stated that English language is useful for going or working abroad

# Communication

Communicate with foreigners and relatives from abroad.

- “If the foreigners come to the school, to speak with them, we need English. Because they do not understand Bangla”
- “Well, if I can speak in English then - I can speak in English with relatives.”



# Education

Student saw it as a useful tool for study purposes.

- “Definitively, we learn English because English helps us to higher education”
- “Well, if I learn English I would do well in exams especially in English”

Some Primary students enjoy the activities such as singing, role play and games in their English lessons



# Entertainment

The next theme emergent from the data on student attitudes to English was entertainment

-“Yes, I do like learning English. Because I love to learn English and for this I enjoy English stories, rhymes...”

-“I enjoy English cartoons like Tom and Jerry, Godzilla etc...”

- “I will be able to play the games in computer and mobile phone. Also I will be able to understand cartoons better...”

# Social status

“We want to learn English because...other will say speak well about us.”

“If I know English, I will be able to talk and others will possess good impression about me”



# Secondary Students

97% believed that learning English is important for them

This topic was further investigated through the Student Group Interviews

- Communicate with others
  - “English is useful to communicate with the people all over the world. We can learn many things through English”
- Further studies /better exam results
- Reading books watching movies, operating computer/mobile phones

# Secondary Students

Large majority (88%) believed that English language would help them **get a good job** [whilst nearly one in ten (7%) responded the opposite]

- better job not only in Bangladesh but also abroad
- To become an English teacher
  - “I wish to be a teacher. If I get chance, I'll be an English teacher. Everyone can learn properly, I'll teach them with affection and without any rebuke. I'll try my best in teaching”

