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Elizabeth Selemeni Meke and Arifa Rahman

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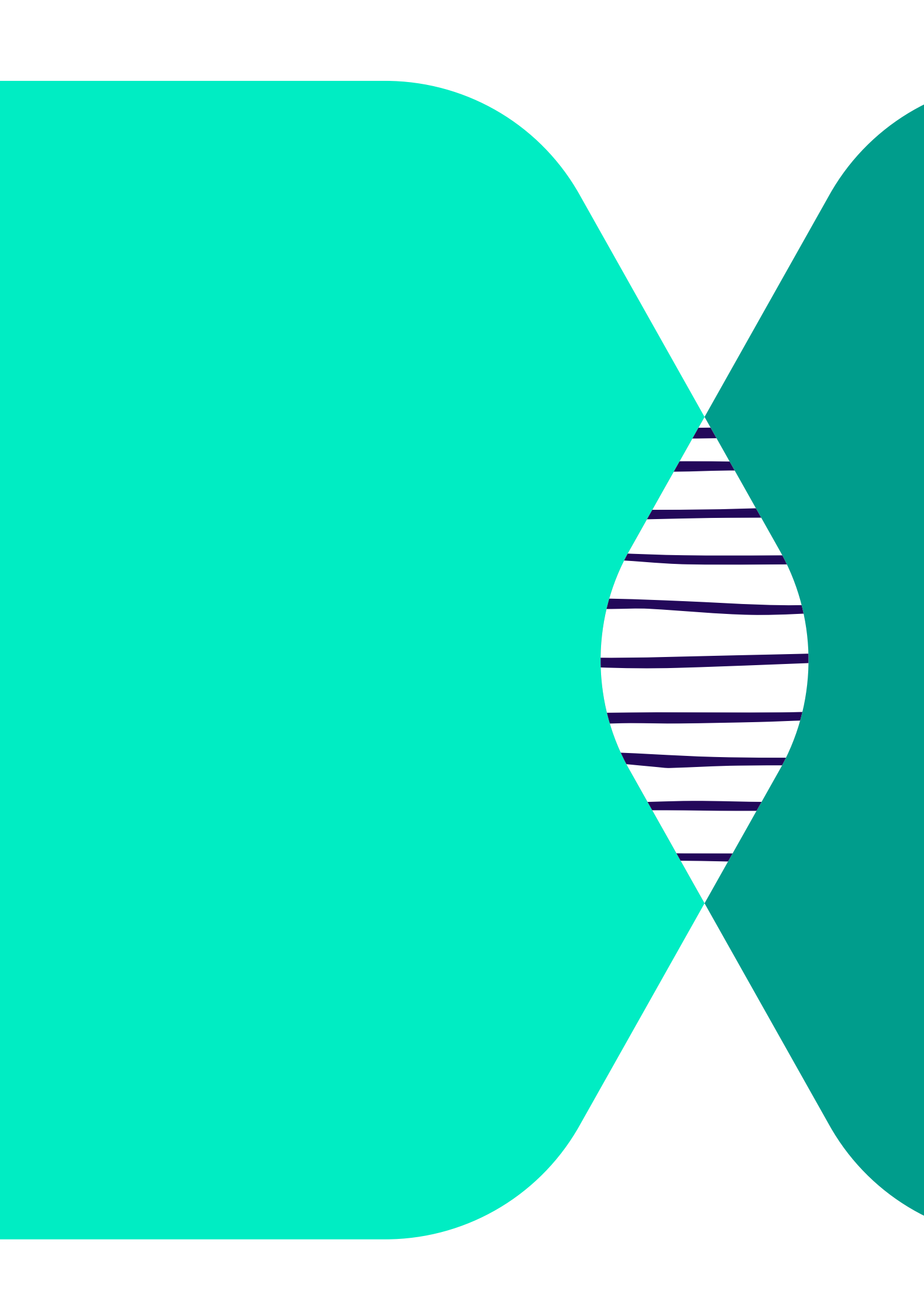
Widening Participation

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

The project aimed to explore effective teaching practices in primary school classrooms, in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan.

The project, running from February 2021 to October 2023, was motivated by the global challenge of teaching English as a school subject in resource-constrained environments. English is often taught in difficult circumstances, including large classrooms, limited resources and teachers with varying levels of English proficiency. Despite these challenges, the report aims to identify and share successful teaching practices and offer insights into how teachers and learners approach English learning in these contexts. The study addresses these research questions:

1. What classroom practices do teachers of English in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan engage in to support English learning?
2. What are the similarities and differences in classroom practices between Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan?
3. How do primary school children in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan engage with different language learning pedagogies?
4. Are there differences according to gender in how children perceive the value of English and the classroom practices they prefer?
5. In what ways does translanguaging support the learning of English in the primary school classroom in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan?

The research was conducted through classroom observations, children's focus groups, and interviews with teachers in the four countries. The report contributes to global efforts toward achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 (Quality Education) and 5 (Gender Equality).

## Literature review

The literature review highlights the challenges of teaching English as a core subject, particularly in countries where English is not the first language. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is widely promoted but often ineffective in resource-constrained contexts. Instead, local, contextually relevant pedagogies should be recognised and explored.

## Methodology

**Interviews:** In each country, ten teachers were interviewed about their qualifications, experience, teaching methods and the challenges they face. The teachers were selected based on their willingness to participate, and the study aimed for a balance of male and female teachers across rural, semi-rural and urban settings.

**Focus groups:** Focus groups with children aged seven to eleven explored their experiences with learning English. Some groups were divided by gender to encourage open discussion, and the children were asked about their perceptions of classroom activities, textbooks and the use of languages in class. The findings suggest that while children generally enjoy learning English, they value their native languages to support their understanding.

**Classroom observations:** Researchers observed and filmed classroom lessons to capture teaching practices in action. The project team analysed the videos to identify common themes and practices, such as whole-class teaching, which were prevalent in all four countries.

These videos were then used to develop teacher training resources, demonstrating effective practices across different contexts.

## Findings

### Pedagogical Approaches

The study found that teachers often adopt a teacher-fronted approach, with classes typically following a set structure: greeting, review of previous lessons, introduction of new material, activities and homework. Despite challenges, teachers demonstrated creativity and effectiveness in managing their classrooms. For example, songs, storytelling and games were used to engage students.

### Gender

The research explored how gender dynamics play out in the classroom. In some countries, boys were often called upon first by teachers, a phenomenon referred to as 'male firstness'. Initial findings suggest that gender inequalities in the classroom continue to exist, although some teachers actively work to address the gender gap.

### Translanguaging

One of the key findings of the study is the widespread use of translanguaging in classrooms, particularly in Bangladesh, Mexico and Uzbekistan. Teachers used students' native languages to support English learning, helping to reduce frustration and anxiety. Students themselves favoured translanguaging, noting that it made learning more accessible and enjoyable. In contrast, the use of

local languages was less common in Malawi, where English is the official language of instruction from grade five. However, even in Malawi, teachers did not always conduct entire lessons in English.

## Implications

The findings of the study have several important implications:

The study emphasises the need for teacher training that is tailored to the local context. Rather than introducing entirely new teaching methods, teacher educators should focus on improving existing practices that are already effective in resource-constrained environments.

The study highlights the importance of addressing gender inequalities in the classroom. Teachers should be made aware of how their practices can either perpetuate or challenge gender stereotypes. Furthermore, teacher training programmes should include components on gender sensitivity and equality.

The positive reception of translanguaging by both teachers and students suggests that this practice should be more widely embraced in English language teaching. Translanguaging helps bridge the gap between students' native languages and English, making learning more inclusive and less stressful.

## Conclusion

The report concludes that despite the challenges of teaching English in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan, teachers are finding innovative ways to engage their students and promote effective learning. The study contributes to the broader understanding of English language teaching in the Global South and provides valuable insights into how translanguaging, gender dynamics and pedagogical practices can be used to improve learning outcomes. By sharing these findings and developing teacher training materials based on the research, the project aims to support educators in similar contexts worldwide. The study also calls for further research into areas such as the long-term impact of translanguaging and the role of gender in language learning. This report is a step towards understanding and addressing the complex challenges of teaching English in diverse, resource-constrained environments while promoting practices that support both teachers and students in their pursuit of quality education.

# Research project team

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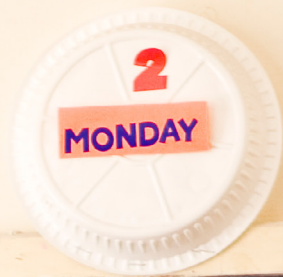
# Acknowledgments

The project team wishes to thank all the teachers and children who took part, giving their time, welcoming us into their classrooms and willingly sharing their work. Their generosity has provided countless learning experiences for the researchers. Thank you all for this gift.

We also wish to thank the British Council's Widening Participation scheme for funding the project and for its patience as we battled with the pandemic and other matters to get the work done. As we watched the Olympics in Paris in 2024, we empathise with the long-distance cyclists, swimmers and runners. Indeed, Steve Copeland and Ellen Darling often felt like our personal coaches, supporting us, sometimes cajoling us, but always believing in us.

And finally, a thank you to all our colleagues working in the area of early English language learning. Your work has inspired us and has also challenged us to focus on what we can contribute to this exciting and burgeoning area. We hope this project meets this challenge in some small way.





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# 1 Introduction

Providing effective teaching in English as a school subject in the 21st century is a major challenge for state primary schools globally. Growing numbers of children at increasingly lower ages are being taught additional languages in what Johnstone (2009, p. 33) called ‘possibly the world’s biggest policy development in education’. Overwhelmingly, the language taught is English, considered a key 21st-century skill. Pressure from parents and businesses drives the phenomenon (for example, Garton et al., 2011). It is now common for children in primary schools in formal education systems globally to be taught English from Year 1 (five to six years old).

While many schools which have adopted English in the state-funded primary sector are well-resourced, with qualified and experienced English language teachers, a very high number are not. These tend to be countries which are in receipt of Official Development Assistance (ODA) from wealthier countries. Countries classed as ‘least developed countries’ (see <https://www.oecd.org/content/oecd/en/topics/sub-issues/oda-standards.html>), those with a gross national income of less than \$1,045, often have large classes (40+ students), few resources, teachers with limited training and low levels of English, and school populations that drop out of education to work, marry or raise a family (although it is important to note that conditions are specific to each country – see Copland et al., 2024 and this report).

While many believe that it is better not to offer English in the primary sector than to teach it badly (for example, Coleman, 2011), a view with which the authors have sympathy, the reality is that English language teaching remains on the curriculum in challenging contexts. This has created a ‘wicked’ problem (Rittel and Weber, 1973) which to date has hardly been addressed: how can English learning be successful in contexts where it is (unwittingly) set up to fail?

It is tempting either to ignore the problem or to subscribe to the notion that nothing can be done to improve the situation of these teachers and their students. This project took the opposite view. Buoyed by teachers we have encountered over the years who teach English with enthusiasm, creativity, and effect, our project aimed to identify and share successful teaching practices of teachers in four countries on the ODA list: Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan. Through doing so, we wished to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education. In addition, we also wanted to begin to examine how girls and boys experience English learning and teaching and their views on the importance of English to their education. Findings from this strand contribute to Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equality. Finally, given recent research into bilingual practices in language classrooms (for example, Yang and Jang, 2020), we wanted to examine how teachers and learners use different languages in class to support English learning. Our research questions are:

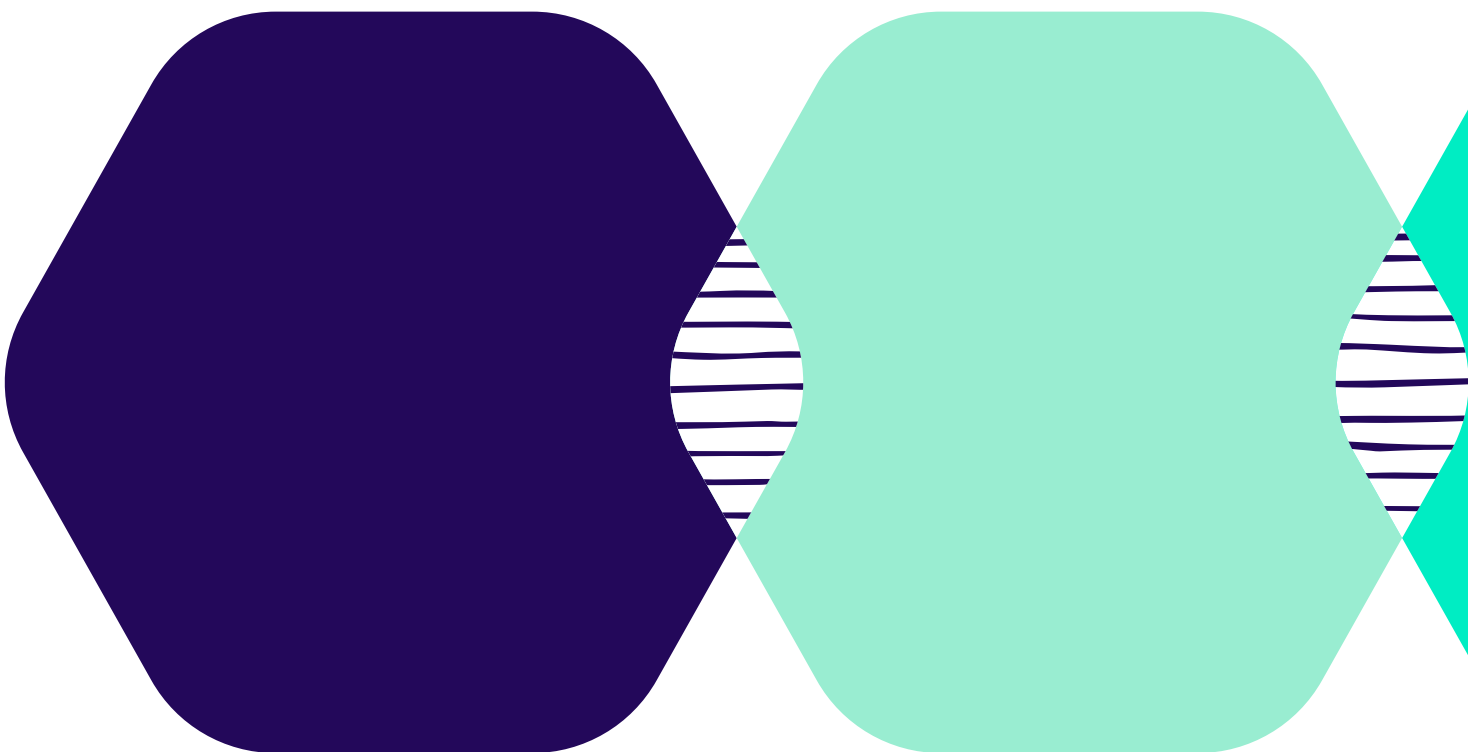
1. What classroom practices do teachers of English in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan engage in to support English learning?
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The project ran from February 2021 until October 2023. During this period, schooling was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic to varying degrees. The pandemic also affected the timing and delivery of the in-country impact events.

The outputs from the project, in addition to this report, include three working papers and three briefing papers (for policymakers), three webinars, two colloquia at the IATEFL Conference in Belfast in 2022, and four impact events. The project team has also prepared teacher education resources which

include video content from the four ODA countries involved in the project. These resources will be made freely available online on the British Council's [Teaching English](#) website.

This report starts with a brief review of the literature and then provides an overview of the methodology and findings leading to a discussion and implication section.



## 2 Literature review

Children across the world today are taught English as a core subject in their primary school education. However, providing effective teaching in English as a school subject in the 21st century is a major challenge for public primary schools globally. It is

beyond the scope of this project and report to cover all these challenges and, given our research questions, we focus on three areas: pedagogy, gender and translanguaging.

### 2.1 Pedagogy

While there are increasing calls to ensure English language teaching is locally relevant and contextually contingent, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) continues to be promoted in many countries (Shamim and Kuchah, 2018). CLT is a student-centred pedagogy developed in well-resourced adult classrooms in the west for 'native' English speaking teachers (Enever and Moon, 2009; see Copland et al., 2019 for a critique of the term *native speaker*). However, full-scale adoption of teaching and learning models developed in the western cultural context do not seem to work effectively in resource-constrained contexts like those often present in the Global South (Ekembe, 2016; Schweisfurth, 2013). Therefore, when using such models in classroom teaching in non-English-speaking countries, and especially those that are in resource-poor schools, it is necessary to adjust and apply them flexibly according to the local cultural background and language environment.

Chik et al. (2018) make the case that pedagogies which might be decolonising and more contextually

relevant than CLT are under-researched. There is little recognition of the successful pedagogies used by teachers teaching English as a school subject in difficult circumstances (Kuchah, 2018), and Smith (2015) suggests that ELT as a profession could learn a good deal from the pedagogical expertise of teachers in these contexts. Examples of such approaches include teachers sharing their own language learning stories and positioning learning English as a skill over which learners have some control (Gautam and Sarwar, 2018). These are approaches which demonstrate teachers drawing on their funds of knowledge to motivate and inspire learners (González et al., 2005). Hence this study endeavoured to explore local classroom practices and to understand how effective teaching is locally constructed by teachers and children and the affordances such practices bring to teaching English as a school subject in state primary schools (Gautam and Sarwar, 2018; López-Gopar, 2018).

As noted by Garton and Tekin (2022), a number of child-appropriate activities has been identified as



being potentially effective in teaching children. These include songs, stories and games. However, there is still a lack of empirical evidence of the effectiveness in such activities for English learning and their implementation in classrooms (for example, Davis's (2017) review of research into

songs identified only nine articles). While the effectiveness of such approaches is beyond the scope of this research, there was a focus on child-friendly pedagogies and the engagement of young learners with them.

## 2.2 Gender

The concept of gender is contested. While some might consider it an 'individual' variable or characteristic, in our view it is a 'complex system of social relations and discursive practices, differentially constructed in local contexts [e.g., Malawi, Uzbekistan, Mexico and/or Bangladesh] ... [that] interacts with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, and social status in framing students' language learning experiences, trajectories, and outcomes' (Norton and Pavlenko, 2012, p. 504). Within these social relations, historically, women have been excluded and experienced discriminatory practices, a reality evidenced by the fact that more girls than boys globally remain out of school and two thirds out of the 750 million adults without basic literacy skills are women (UNESCO (2015) Education 2030 Framework for Action).

According to Yoong (2018), the connection between gender and language was first examined in a systematic way in the 1970s with some studies having an explicit political purpose: gender equality (e.g., Lakoff, 1973; Spender, 1985). In language studies, the work of Judith Butler (1990) has been particularly influential. She sees gender as something people 'do' rather than 'have'. According to Butler (1990), gender is dynamic, fluid and performatively constituted in interaction, rather than an inherent trait. In English language teaching, specifically, recent years have seen an increase in interest in the field (for example, Norton and Pavlenko, 2012). These studies have focused on different areas, such as (1) identity; (2) teaching materials and textbooks; and (3) teacher education.

There has also been increasing interest in gender in schools. Brussino and McBrien (2022) suggest that gender stereotypes persist in many countries, and that some continue to hold a binary understanding of gender, which reinforces stereotypes and stereotyping. They cite evidence from the OECD that, in the first year of primary education, girls already 'undervalue their abilities and academic

performance in mathematics' (OECD, 2015, cited in Brussino and McBrien, 2022 p. 4), which they argue is a result of stereotyping from an early age. This assertion may also hold for countries in receipt of ODA. For example, Ifegbesan (2010) conducted a questionnaire study of 250 teachers in Nigeria and found that most teachers 'directly or indirectly promote gender stereotypes' (p. 29), while a 2023 British Council report on gender inclusive practices in Ethiopia suggests that many teachers may unconsciously promote gender stereotypes.

An area that has attracted some attention in studies of gender is the concept of 'male firstness'. Defined as 'the persistent placement of masculine terms before feminine ones' (Willis and Jozkowski, 2019, p. 273), researchers have extended the concept beyond linguistics. For example, in English language teaching, researchers have drawn on male firstness to examine sexism in coursebooks (for example, Aguilar, 2021). However, we can find no studies which look at male firstness in early English language learning classrooms, in terms of, for example, boys being nominated by teachers before girls. Our study reveals some very tentative findings in this area.

The British Council has been active in promoting research into gender inclusive education in the Global South, particularly in Africa (see Oyinloye et al., 2023 for a synthesis of this research and CRADLE (2023) for an example of research conducted in Ethiopia). Nonetheless, there is little research which focuses exclusively on children, gender and ELT, especially in public elementary primary schools in countries in receipt of ODA. Our study is a tentative first step towards opening up this area and continues the important work carried out to date by the British Council.

## 2.3 Translanguaging

Despite recent interest in multilingual approaches to teaching English (for example, Copland and Ni, 2018), educators continue to debate whether to use or not use other languages (abbreviated here as LX in teaching English). For decades, monolingual approaches have received significant attention (and preference) in ELT to support students both academically and socially, frequently disregarding their linguistic background (Kleyn and García, 2019). These approaches continue to hold sway in many contexts (Copland et al., 2024). At the same time, as a result of globalisation, societies are adapting and adopting more multicultural and multilingual norms and this has led to a relatively new foreign language teaching and learning strategy known as *translanguaging*, which has become an effective tool for bilinguals' communications (García and Li Wei, 2014).

The term *translanguaging* is the concept coined by Cen Williams in the 1990s to describe the practice of utilising two languages in class (originally Welsh and English), which contrasted with many prior approaches which restricted languages in class for a variety of reasons. (Lewis, Jones and Baker 2012). In the first decade of the 21st century, Ofelia García (2011) extended the meaning of the term, suggesting that:

*Translanguaging includes code-switching, the shift between two languages in context, and it also includes translation; however, it differs from both of these simple practices in that it refers to the process by which bilingual students perform bilingually in the myriad ways of classrooms: reading, writing, taking notes, discussing, signing, etc. Translanguaging is not only a way to 'scaffold' instruction and make sense of learning and language; rather, translanguaging is part of the metadiscursive regimes that students in the twenty-first century must perform. (García, 2011, p. 147)*

Translanguaging, therefore, is a cognitive or communicative activity that combines multiple languages (and other semiotic resources, such as gesture, see Blackledge and Creese, 2017) to make meaning. Theories of translanguaging posit that multilingual subjects (the children and teachers in our study) have one meaning-making 'pot' (see Ni and Copland, forthcoming) in which languages all sit. This forms a repertoire of available resources for a speaker to draw on; in the case of students, they draw on their resources to access the curriculum and develop their English knowledge and skills.

The citation from García (2011, above) focuses on students and their translanguaging. Our study focused on teachers' translanguaging. According to Choi et al. (2020), teachers use translanguaging intentionally and with flexibility, selecting linguistic resources to suit their context, purpose and audience. Four potential educational benefits of translanguaging are discussed by Baker (2011), who, with Lewis et al. (2012), makes the case for the idea's significance as a pedagogical strategy: it could encourage a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of the subject; it could promote the growth of a less developed language and it may make collaboration and connectivity between home and school easier. (Lewis et al., 2012).

This research project focuses on the ways in which translanguaging is used by teachers in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan, where both teachers and children are emergent bilinguals who are developing their linguistic repertoires and learning from each other. The study was also interested to investigate the ways in which translanguaging may support learning English in the primary classroom.

# 3 The contexts

This section provides information about the educational contexts of the four countries in which the research took place.

## 3.1 Bangladesh

The primary education sector in Bangladesh is managed by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). Although the National Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2010) extended primary education from five years to eight, this has not been implemented, and primary education still spans grades one to five, starting at five years old. There are 65,620 state-run primary schools and more than 80,000 private and NGO schools in Bangladesh (Annual School Census Portal 2022, <https://dpe.portal.gov.bd>). State primary schools are free for all students up to grade five, but most private schools charge fees. NGO schools are sometimes free and sometimes charge nominal fees. Primary schools are often co-educational and the school year follows the calendar year (January–December).

English is a core compulsory school subject from grade one to higher-secondary grade 12. State-produced textbooks of English are distributed free to all students in January. English classes are 45

minutes long and are held five days a week. A private school class may have about 30 children, while state schools have 40–70 children in a class. NGO schools will have from 20–40 students and may offer fewer hours of classroom teaching.

Primary English teachers are generalist teachers who also teach other subjects. Their entry qualification is a graduate degree in any subject. After recruitment, state-school teachers are required to do a one-and-a-half year-long (recently reduced to one year) pre-service training called Diploma in Primary Education within three years of entry, although this is not mandatory for private or NGO school teachers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers' English language proficiency is low and they use mostly Bangla (L1) and switch between Bangla and English in the English class (translanguaging), although policy dictates they should use English only in the English class.

## 3.2 Malawi

Primary education in Malawi is from grades one to eight. The official starting age of Primary Schooling is six years old, which means a learner should have completed primary education by the age of 13. However, it is not uncommon to see learners older than 13 in Malawi's primary classes due to high repetition rates and late entry into the primary schools, for example, as a result of pupils having to travel long distances.

In terms of the general context in which English is taught, primary education in Malawi has generally low internal efficiency, characterised by high repetition rates, high dropout rates and low completion rates. According to the 2021 Education Management and Information Systems (EMIS) report (Malawi Ministry of Education, 2021), the net enrolment of learners in primary school was 88 per

cent; completion was 50 per cent; transition rate to secondary schools was 36.5 per cent; qualified teacher to pupil ratio was 1:62; permanent classroom to learner ratio was 1:102; dropout rate was 4.4 per cent; repetition rate was 21 per cent; and English textbook to learner ratio was 1:3, just to mention a few indicators.

English is taught as a school subject from grade one of primary schooling and becomes the language of instruction from grade five. Primary school teachers do not specialise in any subjects; rather, they are trained to teach all subjects. English as a subject is given two periods per day. A period lasts 30 minutes in grades one and two, and 35 minutes from grades three to eight.

Effective teaching and learning of English are affected by, among other things: teacher shortages;

infrastructure constraints; large classes; high dropout rates, especially for the girls; inadequate teaching and learning materials; low English

proficiency levels for teachers; and low teacher motivation.

### 3.3 Mexico

Despite social inequalities and nationalistic views that attempt to resist the ‘invasion’ of the English language in Mexico (López-Gopar and Sughrua, 2014), English is part of the Mexican education system both in private and public schools. Since the 1990s, following the younger-the-better language ideology, the Mexican government has developed a number of programmes aimed at starting from kindergarten age, the most recent of which is the National English Program (PRONI) starting in 2015.

The PRONI curriculum states that the teaching of English should begin in the third grade of kindergarten, when children are typically five years old. English, according to the PRONI curriculum, should take place every day for at least an hour. However, education is organised regionally in Mexico and, taking the reality of Oaxaca, this is not

the case. In most public schools, English starts in 5th or 6th grade of elementary schools, when children are ten years old. Classes take place twice a week or three times a week for 50 minutes. In addition, these classes do not run throughout the school year, due to unstable federal funding. On average, children take English classes for four or five months during the academic year. Classes are typically taught by graduates of BA English language teaching preparation programmes or young people, who are not language teachers, but who can prove a B2 language proficiency level on the CEFR. Even though these teachers are specialists, they are not considered actual teachers but outsiders in these schools. This view is reinforced by teachers’ low salaries and lack of job security.

### 3.4 Uzbekistan

There are several types of public school in Uzbekistan: ordinary public schools, specialised boarding schools (for children with special needs), specialised schools (English language, science, music, sport, drawing, etc.), presidential schools, and Barkamol Avlod schools (post-school activities). State general school education is free for 11 years. Uzbekistan is a multilingual country, and, therefore, teaching in schools is carried out in seven languages of instruction: Uzbek, Karakalpak, Russian, Kazakh, Tajik, Turkmen and Kyrgyz. Primary education lasts four years.

The government of Uzbekistan wants English to become a second language that is fluently used in society, especially by the younger generation. Therefore, English became a compulsory school subject in primary school from grade one as a result of reforms in the field of teaching foreign languages in 2013.

All language teachers must hold a BA or MA degree from a university in the field of foreign language and literature, or philology, while in-service and pre-service teacher training of schoolteachers has become the focus of educational reforms. Since the enforcement of local language reform No. PP-5117 in 2021, all English language teachers who reach a

proficiency level of C1 on the CEFR have been awarded a 50 per cent bonus on top of their monthly salary. The aim of this is primarily to encourage teachers to upgrade their language levels so that they can teach more effectively (see <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/5426740?ONDATE=15.04.2022>).

English lessons are held two to four times a week for 45 minutes, depending on the type of school. The average class size for the primary school is 25–40 students, but in many schools the classes are divided into two subgroups of 12–20 pupils for all foreign language lessons (Russian and English in Uzbek schools and Uzbek and English in Russian schools). While Russian is still taught as a foreign language, its prominence has decreased, with the government prioritising the promotion of Uzbek and English. However, there are bilingual education programmes and specialised Russian-medium schools.

Each group has its own English teacher and studies in a separate room. In a rural school, the class may not be divided into two groups because of staff shortages or a small number of students. The current policy is mostly based on English only, but it does not restrict the use of the native languages, Uzbek and Russian in the classroom.



# 4 Methodology

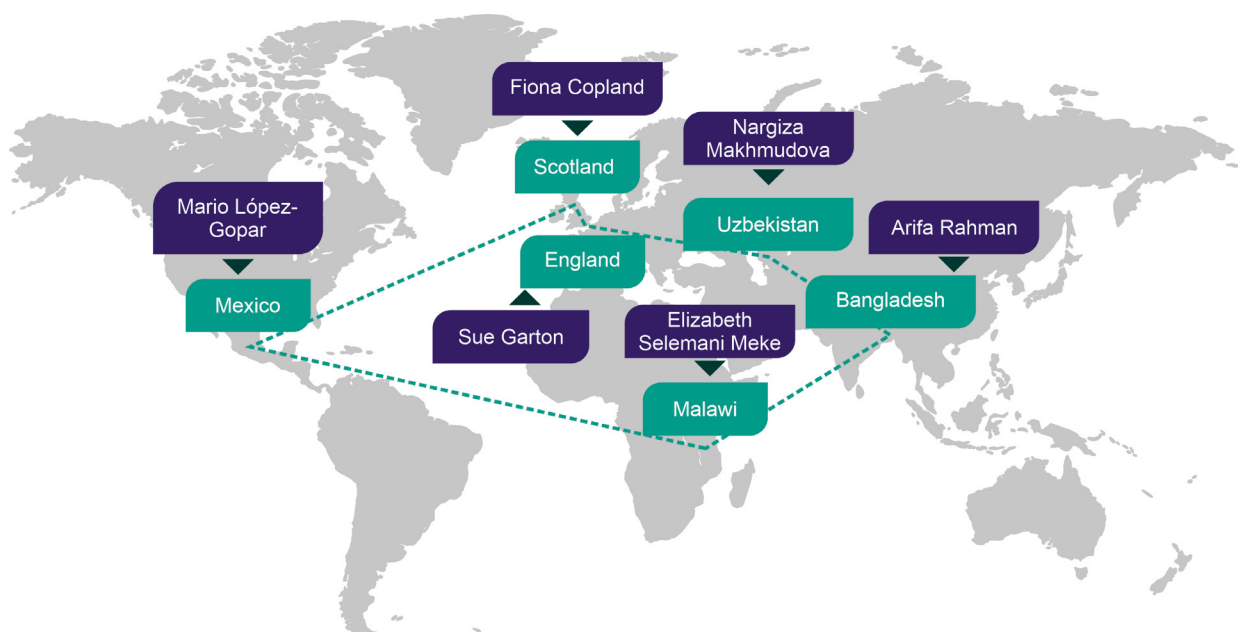
The UK team (Copland PI, Garton CI, and Ireland RA) had worked together previously and had decided to respond together to the British Council Widening participation call. As the focus of the call was Global South countries, the UK team focused on countries from different regions of the world. Given the ambition and complexity of the project and the time commitment, UK colleagues were keen to work with partners in the Global South with whom they already had an academic relationship. Criteria for country selection were:

- Representation from each of the three main categories of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list of recipient countries of ODA

- English being taught in state-funded primary schools
- Global spread of countries
- International co-investigators had previously worked with the UK team.

Bangladesh and Malawi are both in the 'least developed countries' category, Uzbekistan is in the 'lower middle-income' category and Mexico is in the 'upper middle-income' category. The co-Investigators (Gopez-Lopar, Meke, Makhmudova and Rahman) were already known to the UK team from previous projects and activities. Figure 1 shows the countries, geographical spread, ODA group and named CIs.

**Figure 1 Project countries**



*Note: ODA categories for partner countries: Bangladesh, least developed; Malawi, least developed; Mexico, upper middle-income; Uzbekistan, lower middle-income.*

After joining the project team, overseas partners then recruited a Research Assistant to support them with the research. The project was carried out in three stages. In stage 1, the preparatory stage, we took time to develop joint understandings of key features of the project: the local educational contexts in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan; gender; ethics; and research methodology. We scheduled two-hour meetings at fortnightly intervals for these meetings, which the PI and CIs took turns to host.

In the next phase of the project, we interviewed ten teachers in each country (n = 40) following the interview guide in Appendix A. Criteria were established before recruiting teachers. All had to work in state-funded education or equivalent and at least one teacher in each country had to be based in each of rural, semi-rural and urban contexts. The teachers were considered good teachers in their context and both female and male teachers were represented. The ways in which the specific teachers were recruited varied in the different contexts.

In Bangladesh, access to schools was difficult, as head teachers were often dismissive of our requests without a reference from a higher authority in the Ministry, so contact was established via an officer at the Upozilla Resource Centre. Bangladesh has eight divisions which are divided into 64 districts, and then subdivided into 495 upozillas, so the Upozilla Resource Centre oversees the primary school sector, managing resources and providing teacher training. Given the role of private and NGO schools in Bangladesh, different types of schools were approached and teachers who were willing to take part (several refused) were selected.

In Malawi, the researchers targeted teachers who were teaching grade 6 learners in the selected study schools. Where there was more than one teacher for grade 6, the study team chose the one who was teaching English. The head teachers of the schools were key in identifying the teachers.

In Mexico, some teachers were recruited via personal contacts, while others were contacted initially via the coordinator of PRONI (the English program in Mexico) who shared the information about the project with other teachers.

In Uzbekistan, the teachers were contacted through the Uzbekistan State World Languages University, which suggested 10 of the 30 state schools it works

with for the project. The University contacted the head teachers and then the CI and RA went to the schools to talk to the teachers.

Our aim in the interviews was to gather information about the teachers' qualifications, experience, approach to teaching English (including how they draw on local languages) and the challenges they face. Details of the interviewees, including gender, experience, qualifications, length of interview and school location can be found in Appendix B.

The interviews were conducted in the teachers' preferred language where possible, and translated and then transcribed. After a team meeting in which we discussed how to analyse the interviews, each research team carried out a thematic analysis on their interview data. These findings were collated by the UK team.

Also in stage one, we conducted focus groups with groups of children between seven and eleven years old in each country, in a local language. Focus groups consisted of one girl group, one boy group and one mixed group, as it was felt children might be more likely to express themselves openly in single sex groups. Because of local considerations in each country, including Covid restrictions, focus groups were conducted in different ways. Appendix C presents a table of the questions that were asked, along with the various strategies adopted, and Appendix D outlines the approach taken in each country and provides details about each focus group.

A thematic analysis was also conducted on this data. However, because of the differences in how the data was collected, the data is not comparable. Instead, the data offers insights into children's views in each of the four countries.

Finally, in stage one, children in each country were recruited as young researchers to carry out surveys in their schools (and in Uzbekistan, also with children's parents) in order to research with children as well as on them (López-Gopar et al., in press; Pinter, 2023; Pinter and Zandian, 2013). Children received training in being a researcher and decided on the questions they wanted to ask. The Research Assistants in each country helped the children to form the questions appropriately before the surveys were conducted. Again, because of local conditions and expectations, there were slight differences between each country. These are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1: Local differences in children’s research**

	Bangladesh	Malawi	Mexico	Uzbekistan
No of child researchers	5 girls + 5 boys + Mixed group (3 boys and 3 girls) Total 16	8 girls + 7 boys	5 girls + 6 boys	5 girls + 5 boys
Training children to be researchers	Sessions over 3 days	Sessions over 2 days	6 x 1 hour Zoom sessions	Sessions over 3 days
No of respondents	50	45	278	20 + 10 parents
Method	Oral interviews. Taking field notes	Booklets with written responses	Google forms	Survey booklet + written parent survey

Research Assistants in each country analysed the data and fed the findings back to the children. In Mexico, children also received training in how to analyse survey data and so they assisted the Research Assistant. As these surveys each comprised unique questions created by the children, the data is not comparable. Nonetheless, it provides information about the children’s views of learning English in each context.

Three teachers in each country (n = 12) were selected to take part in stage two of the project, which comprised researchers filming the teachers’ classes for 20 classroom hours and observing them. Selection was based on teachers’ willingness to take part, ease of access to schools for the researchers, gender (to ensure at least some male teachers took part) and willingness to become co-researchers on the project. Table 2 shows the gender and location of the teachers.

**Table 2: Gender of teachers in Stage 2, and their contexts**

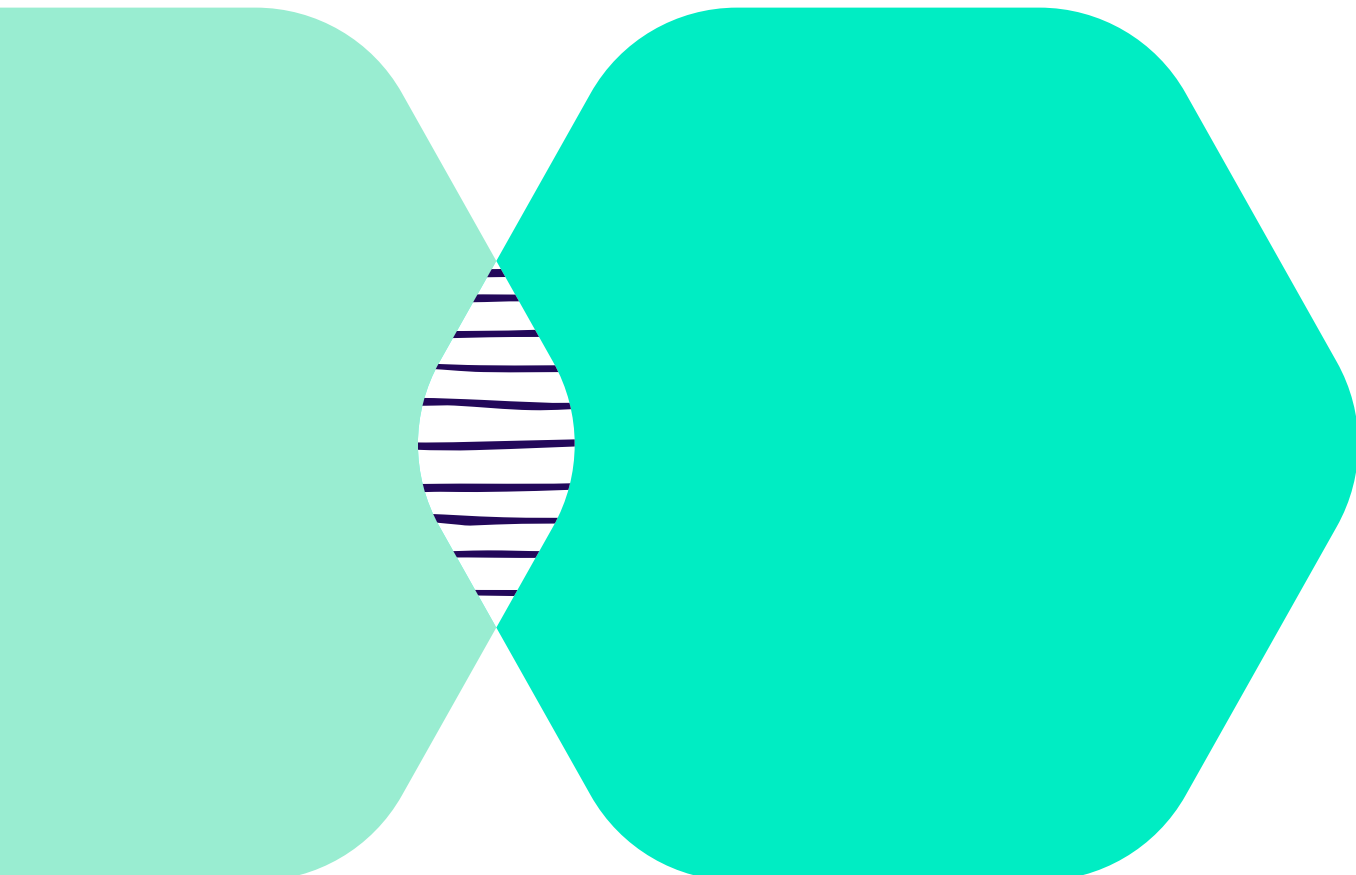
	Gender	School Area
Bangladesh	F	Urban
	F	Semi urban
	F	Rural
Malawi	M	Rural
	F	Semi urban
	F	Urban
Mexico	F	Urban
	F	Rural
	M	Semi rural
Uzbekistan	F	Rural
	F	Semi rural
	F	Urban

The researchers were also required to select schools which represented conditions in the country, neither the best equipped nor the least resourced. Researchers were provided with two high-quality cameras and a tripod for filming: one camera was static and the other roaming. They received basic filmmaking training, and they had access to a consultant who could support the practicalities of filming. Nevertheless, the focus was not on producing professional videos but on capturing everyday teaching and learning. Researchers, with the teachers, then chose extracts from the films which they believed showed effective teaching in the context. These extracts were stored on the University of Stirling's SharePoint.

When all the filming was complete and the extracts selected, the research team attended a five-day meeting at the University of Stirling. During this time,

researchers from each country shared their country's extracts and explained why they and the teachers believed the teaching was effective in their contexts (e.g., online, in very large classes, in noisy classrooms). The team then discussed the extracts and drew comparisons with their own videos and with classroom practices in their countries.

At the end of the week, the team, working with a facilitator, decided on the thematic areas to be developed into units for online teacher training purposes. A key principle for the materials was that there were sufficient video clips to demonstrate approaches, with a reasonably even spread across the four contexts.



# 5 Ethics

Working on cross-cultural projects can create challenges for international teams. If the project's principal investigator is based in the UK (as in this case), an application has to be made to the home institution which has to grant permission before a project can start. However, the requirements of UK institutions can be unfamiliar or even at odds with ethical norms in other countries. In this project, therefore, we adopted Habermas's (1995) discourse ethics so that talk between the CIs formed the basis of ethical decisions. Our discussions were also informed by a culturist perspective (Scherer and Palazzo, 2008) so that we tried to have an openness towards unfamiliar views (see Copland and Creese, 2015, for a full discussion). Through taking these stances, our discussions allowed us to arrive at ethical approaches which were reasonable to all.

One area about which we had long and open discussions was signed consent. Most UK higher education institutions would prefer research projects to obtain participants' signed consent

because of the legal weight they provide. This is particularly the case when children and vulnerable people are involved in research, in such cases signed consent is usually sought from an adult/carer. However, parental signed consent was not considered appropriate in three of the four countries involved in the project. Rather, the local norms were to seek consent from head teachers, who act in *loco parentis*, that is, they provide consent on behalf of parents. Therefore, in the ethical approval submission to the University of Stirling's General Ethical Panel, we sought permission to take a *loco parentis* approach in three of the countries, explaining the reasons for doing so. Permission was given.

In addition, the University of Malawi, one of the project partners, requires that all projects also receive approval from its ethics committee, even if the principal investigator is from a different institution. Therefore, a submission was made there, and it too was approved.



# 6 Findings

In this section we report on the key findings for each research question.

**RQ1** What classroom practices do teachers and children with low levels of English in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan engage in to support English learning?

Classroom videos revealed that classes in all four countries were generally teacher-fronted and often followed a similar pattern, with teachers starting classes with greetings and warm-ups, reminding learners of the previous lesson, introducing the day's lesson, carrying out a series of oral and written activities to cover the content, and giving homework. In some cases, the teachers also checked homework at the start of the lesson and also checked student learning through oral evaluation at the end of the class. The form of the warm-ups varied and there were, for example, songs and prayers in Malawi, and morning exercises to local music with instructions in English in Uzbekistan.

Although classes were mainly teacher-fronted, the teachers used a range of strategies to ensure that the teaching was interactive and that the children were involved. One of the most common strategies was the use of elicitation by the teacher with question and answer sequences functioning to support English learning and encourage learners to speak. One teacher in Malawi, where there were more than 100 learners in a class, commented that:

*sometimes, I ask everyone to stand up, so that only those that will speak shall sit down so I get many hands wanting to speak than when they are seated.*

While another noted that they asked questions because

*when you ask learners and they fail you know they have not understood and you revise and when they answer correctly you know they have understood.*

Teachers also showed creativity in their Q&A sequences. In Malawi, a teacher asked a question and then threw a ball to the learner she wanted to

answer. If the learner could not answer correctly, he/she threw the ball to a friend. The observer noted how the learners were motivated to respond to the questions and how they became alert throughout the lesson. In Bangladesh, a teacher demonstrated prepositions of place using objects from around the class, such as learners' rucksacks or even their pockets to place a ball or pen and then eliciting from students,

*Where is the ball/pen?*

In tandem with the Q&A sequences was whole-class repetition and drilling. Students were frequently called upon to repeat answers or to say new words or phrases. However, there was little variation in how this was achieved, perhaps because the purpose was to keep the class engaged as well as learning.

Teachers in all four contexts employed a variety of age-appropriate activities, including games and songs, which were used for various learning purposes, for example, to emphasise a particular language point, to bring learners' attention back to the front and onto the teacher, and for class management, especially when learners were making noise.

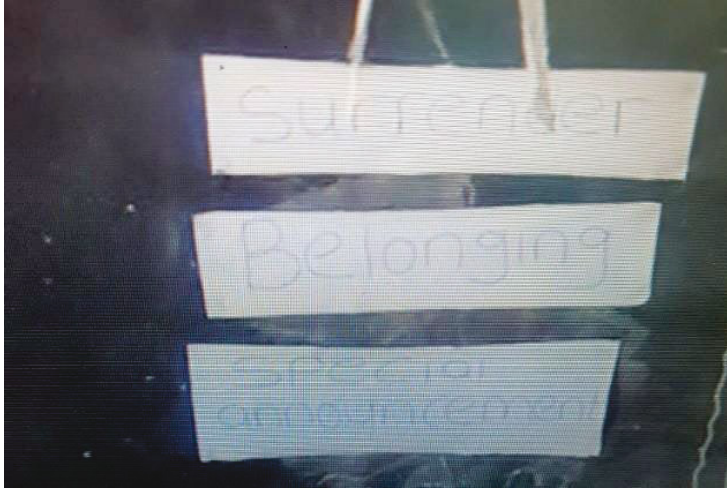
Although the teachers in Mexico were teaching online for the duration of the project, they drew on a full repertoire of activities. They showed videos, sang songs and played interactive games. They also introduced more traditional activities, such as gap fills, to practise grammar and to support the development of listening skills. There was also an example of on-line project work, where one of the teachers took the children through the steps of making a piggy bank using plastic bottles. She taught them the concept of recycling and the concept of saving money. She introduced the vocabulary she was going to use for that activity, explained the meaning and had the children practise the pronunciation out loud. Then, she showed them a video about it and finally they made the piggy bank (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Teacher working on verbs used to create a piggy bank**

Challenging circumstances meant that the teachers had to be very creative in using the available resources. Malawi is a context where teaching and learning materials are considered inadequate by the teachers and very large classes are the norm. Usually, the only person with a coursebook is the teacher. This means teachers are left with no option other than to use locally available resources and familiar items (realia) to engage learners in learning English. One good example, from Malawi, was observed in a class of 116 learners, comprising 60

girls and 56 boys. A male teacher, aged 27, was teaching an English lesson about a lost cellphone. In the lesson, learners were supposed to read a passage in their textbooks regarding a lost cellphone and respond to questions that followed. However, due to a shortage of textbooks, the teacher decided to record the passage using his phone as a special announcement from the police about a lost cellphone. He played the audio recording in class using his phone and a small speaker, as illustrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3 Example of creative use of available resources**

**Figure 4** Materials for vocabulary learning

In the absence of textbooks, teachers copied poems, short stories and paragraphs from the textbooks onto sheets of paper and then stuck them on the board in front of the class for all learners to read from. They also used word cards to support English learning, especially vocabulary learning, as shown in the image in Figure 4.

Even in Uzbekistan, where resources are not an issue and classes are small, teachers were creative. For example, to practise directions, one teacher laid out an obstacle course on the floor using classroom objects (books, paper tray, etc.). Children took it in turns to be blindfolded and follow directions to avoid the objects.

Although classes were mainly teacher-fronted, some pairwork and a little more groupwork were introduced in some classes. In Bangladesh and Uzbekistan, in smallish classes (around 20) teachers asked students to work on tasks in small groups. Although instructions proved tricky and required some repetition, children soon settled down and engaged with the work. In Malawi, where there were over 100 children in the class sitting on the floor, the teacher put the learners into groups with a flip-chart size piece of paper for each group and the groups had to write a story. As in Bangladesh and Uzbekistan, students struggled with the instructions and it took some time for the task to get going. There were also classroom management issues: the children had to sit on the floor to do the activity, there was barely enough room, and the class was extremely noisy. Despite the teacher navigating these issues calmly, she later reported that the

instructions were time-consuming and the whole activity took too long.

A key practice adopted by nearly all the teachers in the study is translanguaging, used by teachers, in some cases, to overcome perceptions of their own lack of English skills, but in all cases, to connect to learners who themselves have low levels of English. Translanguaging is discussed in more detail under RQ5 below.

#### **RQ2** What are the similarities and differences in classroom practices between Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan?

Overall, the classes observed were remarkably similar across the four countries, despite the differences in the contexts. As outlined above, teachers in all four countries taught the whole class together (mainly from the front), used similar strategies to involve the children in the lesson, adopted age-appropriate and engaging activities and were extremely creative in their use of resources. Translanguaging practices were followed by all teachers in their classes, using both English and the children's first languages for different pedagogical purposes.

There were, however, some notable differences in both emphasis and the ways in which activities were carried out due to local circumstances. The most obvious difference between Bangladesh, Malawi, and Uzbekistan on the one hand, and Mexico on the other, was that in Mexico the classes were online whereas in the other three countries they were face-to-face. This required the teachers in Mexico to



adapt the textbook substantially. However, although the mode of delivery was different, the types of activities were similar.

Another difference was that the number of learners in a class in Malawi was much higher than in the other three countries. In order to engage such a large number of learners, the teachers in Malawi frequently used chants involving the whole class to get the students' attention and to refocus them. The very large classes also meant that games were not frequent and that there was direct and explicit focus on language and extensive use of elicitation, both individual and whole class.

The availability of resources was also very different across the four contexts, with quite well-equipped classrooms in Uzbekistan and the availability of good software for on-line teaching in Mexico. This is in stark contrast to the relatively under-resourced classrooms in Bangladesh and the resource-poor, overcrowded classrooms in Malawi. Whilst the physical environment presented major challenges to the teachers in Malawi and Bangladesh, their commitment and creativity meant that they were able to offer a rich learning experience to the children, evidenced by the students' engagement with the classes and their positive attitudes to English.

### **RQ3** How do primary school children in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan engage with different language learning pedagogies?

Data from the children's focus groups, surveys and classroom observations showed generally high levels of engagement from the majority of the children in all four contexts.

When asked which activities they preferred, the children identified a relatively wide range of activities, although these differed slightly from country to country. Moreover, they pointed not only to what are normally thought of as engaging activities for children such as songs, but also to more 'traditional' activities, such as composition. Playing games was considered one of the most engaging activities by the children in Bangladesh, Mexico and Uzbekistan. Children in Bangladesh said that they would like to have more grammar games. Malawi was the exception, as games are not used as frequently because of the very large class sizes. It may be that the children understand playing games is not possible and so it was not among their

preferences, or they do not consider games an appropriate activity for the English class. A video of the children talking about their language learning preferences is available.

Children in all four countries were engaged by a variety of activities. In Mexico, both boys and girls liked colouring, drawing and activities about animals. Making sentences was identified as a favourite activity in Bangladesh, Malawi and Uzbekistan. Reading aloud was considered engaging by children in both Bangladesh and Uzbekistan, while the Bangladeshi children also liked repeating words, sentences and phrases in English. Interestingly, while the Uzbek children liked speaking themselves, they varied in their responses to listening to their classmates, with some students saying they felt indifferent, while others claimed it made them attentive and motivated them.

Unlike children in the other countries, the children in Mexico said they were engaged and motivated by external factors. They were thinking about travelling to the places where English is spoken, and they liked the idea of speaking English and using it in their future careers. One of the students said:

*I feel so happy when I learn English because it gives me the opportunity to travel to other countries; for example, if you go to Japan there are people who speak English there and you can communicate easily with them.*

Children from Bangladesh, Mexico and Uzbekistan expressed a strong preference for translanguaging as it helped them to engage with English, and this is discussed in more detail below.

### **RQ4** Are there differences according to gender in how children perceive the value of English and the classroom practices they prefer?

All children in the study showed mainly positive attitudes towards learning English, regardless of gender. This could be because the children who took part in the focus groups were those with positive attitudes or because they felt they could not be critical. There was evidence of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Children in Bangladesh felt that English is important and said that they were interested in it. For the children in Malawi, boys and girls both said it is their favourite subject and that they need it to access secondary and university education. The Mexican children said that they were

happy to learn English because it means they will be able to travel around the world, get a good job and speak with tourists. They recognised that English is important to be able to speak to people in different countries. The Uzbek children were sure they would need English to enter university and to get a well-paid job. However, this did not prevent boys from expressing boredom when the teacher spoke only in English, as they know that, even if they are attentive, they are not able to understand.

Whilst not strictly connected with English classes, there are interesting observations concerning gender differences in the wider context, including career choice and responsibilities outside the classroom, which can impact on schooling. In terms of professional aspirations, there is evidence from the children's focus groups of traditionally gendered career choices, such as nurse, teacher, model and hairdresser for girls, and professional footballer, soldier, pilot and astronaut for boys. However, we also found numerous examples of what might be seen as 'non-traditional' career choices from the girls, but not from the boys. Girls want to be bank managers (Malawi), lawyers, police officers, businesswomen (Mexico) and doctors (Malawi and Uzbekistan). The children also made the link between English and career choice, with the children in Bangladesh saying that English is important in achieving their career aspirations, while those in Mexico said it is important for getting a good job. However, the children in Bangladesh also said that, above all, they wanted to do jobs that are respected in society e.g., teacher and doctor.

There were mixed perceptions when it came to gender and achievement in English. The children in Bangladesh maintained that differences in achievement depend on effort, not on gender. Those who came to class every day and listened to the teacher got good grades. However, in the separate gender focus groups, both boys and girls agreed that the girls do better in English. The children in Mexico did not perceive any gender differences in achievement and claimed that both genders answer difficult questions. However, half of the Mexican teachers believed that girls are better at English for various reasons, including that they do the best homework, are more creative, are more focused and faster, and are more flexible and open. In Uzbekistan, the boys think that they perform better in English while the girls insist that they cope better with the language. In Malawi, the majority of children in both

the child-led surveys and the focus group discussions indicated that boys and girls compete with each other in getting good grades and also in responding to difficult questions.

Some gender differences were evident in the types of activities that boys and girls preferred in class. Teachers in Malawi said that boys enjoy role playing because that is an opportunity to 'show off'. Teachers in both Mexico and Uzbekistan noted that girls prefer creative activities, such as drawing, painting, singing and making things, while boys prefer more physical activities and playing video games. This was confirmed by the children in Mexico, who said that girls like to draw, colour and play games (puzzles, crossword puzzles) and that these activities made them like English more and pushed them to work hard. Boys like to draw, do physical activities, play board games and investigate. One boy said

*I like the activities where I have to investigate because I like to know more about certain topics, animals and things.*

Boys in Bangladesh also generally enjoy games, while girls like reading and doing classwork. However, not all the teachers felt that there was any difference in children's preferences according to gender, and there is no evidence in our data that teachers in any of the countries adapt their teaching to cater for such preferences, although research in this area is required.

Although the original research question concerned children's preferences, the data also showed examples of teachers' practices which both reinforced stereotypes and promoted gender equality. For example, there is evidence in the video recordings of firstness, that is, boys being chosen first, or volunteering first. However, teachers in Malawi were aware of this issue and made an effort to alternate between nominating girls and boys to answer questions, with one teacher announcing their intent to focus on equality to the class when they said, 'now a boy' or 'now a girl'.

**RQ5** In what ways does translanguaging support the learning of English in the primary school classroom in Bangladesh, Malawi, Mexico and Uzbekistan?

In all four contexts, both teachers and children used translanguaging extensively to support learning English. In the interviews, the teachers identified two overarching reasons for doing so: the children's low

proficiency level, and their difficulty in understanding concepts. For example, a teacher in Malawi, referring to the use of translanguaging, said that:

*Doing so helps the learners to grasp the lesson content.*

One of the teachers in Bangladesh commented:

*How can children understand the lesson when they cannot understand English at all?*

The affective dimension was also underlined, with one of the Mexican teachers saying:

*I know that it should perhaps be in English completely, but there are times that I see their little faces, like, frustrated when they don't understand something or another, so I say oh no, no, no, and well, we are done. I try to explain it all in English at first and then if they don't understand me, I explain it in Spanish, too, especially the instructions, because in that way they can ... it is clear to them so they know what they are going to do.*

This quote and other comments from Mexico could imply a certain level of guilt from the teachers about using the L1, which has also been found in previous research (Copland and Neokleos, 2011). However, this was not evident in the teachers' attitudes in the other three contexts, where translanguaging was seen as being useful and necessary.

The teachers identified specific functions of their translanguaging, both intentional and spontaneous. Using the children's first language (or a language with which they were familiar, here abbreviated to LX) for instructions and explanations was identified in Bangladesh, Mexico and Uzbekistan. Teachers also often used translation, first using English and then translating into the children's LX, or vice versa. One teacher in Bangladesh, who used Bangla before English, explained that it was important for the children to understand the ideas and content before they focused on English.

The observations showed far less use of translanguaging in Malawi. This is likely due to the different status of English, compared to the other three countries. In Malawi, English is a second language and is taught as a school subject from grade 1. However, from grade 5, it becomes the language of instruction. While there are examples in the observations of teachers using a local language, it was not as frequent as in the other contexts where

English is not used in some aspects of daily life.

The children confirmed the teachers' perspectives, affirming that they really like their teacher to translanguage as they could understand better and they felt more comfortable. When the learners in Malawi were asked in the children's survey how they feel when the teacher mixes the language in an English lesson, the majority (85 per cent) indicated that they feel happy; 11 per cent said they feel bored and 4 per cent indicated that they felt sad. The children in Bangladesh said that they preferred their teacher to be bilingual using Bangla and English, but at the same time, the better students wish their teacher would speak a little bit more English, as this would help them to learn more. The children in Uzbekistan also said they would like the teacher to use both English and Russian during the class, so that they can understand everything explained by the teacher. The learners in Bangladesh, Mexico and Uzbekistan expressed a wish that their coursebooks should be bilingual.

Learners in focus groups in Malawi alluded to translanguaging in delivering not only English lessons but also all other subjects that are taught in English. One student said that:

*Teachers generally use English to teach when teaching us but sometimes they combine with Chichewa our local language especially when we fail to understand some English vocabulary and also when the teacher wants to emphasise a point. Also, most learners cannot express themselves properly in English, so they mix English and Chichewa.*

As to their own language use and their feelings, the children in Bangladesh said they mostly use Bangla in class but also try to answer in English, which was confirmed by the classroom observations. They also said they become anxious and feel nervous if asked to speak in English as others might laugh at their mistakes. A very similar perspective was expressed by the Uzbek children who said that they felt anxious, worried and uncomfortable when teachers only use English or enforce an 'English only' policy. The children believe that it is difficult to participate in activities and learn something as they are afraid they might not fully understand. It seems that translanguaging increases children's sense of well-being and their confidence in English.

# 7 Discussion and implications

## 7.1 Classroom practices

Literature on teaching English to children has, in general, championed an interactive classroom with pair work and group work as central activities (see Schweisfurth (2013) and Shamim and Kuchah (2016) for a critique of this approach). However, our data shows that, while interaction is important, pair work is seldom used ('think, pair, share' was hardly in evidence). Group work is only occasionally introduced and, in some cases, difficult to control. Instead, whole-class teaching and learning was favoured. Teachers have specific routines to support this practice, for example, Q&A, drilling, chanting and games, which were generally well-executed, with children understanding their roles in these activities. However, teachers did not often vary their routines, and this is an area which could be addressed in teacher education programmes.

An output of the project is a collection of materials to use with teachers-in-training based on project videos (which will be available in due course from the [British Council](#)). When the research team was piloting these in the four different countries during impact visits, one of the most popular units across the contexts was 'Drilling'. As they took part in different drill types (e.g., substitution, back-chaining, different voices), teachers responded enthusiastically, practised using them, and told the researchers that they could adopt some of the drill types in their own classes. This example demonstrates how more variety in common teaching practices can be introduced through teacher education.

As discussed above, teachers were also highly creative in their classes, often drawing on locally available resources and cultural norms to engage the learners, for example, the Malawi teacher who adapted a reading activity to a listening one because

children did not have coursebooks and the Uzbek teacher who used classroom artefacts to create an obstacle course. Teacher education courses could highlight the importance of teachers' creativity to overcome barriers to learning that many contexts throw up (e.g., large classes, online learning, lack of coursebooks, uninspiring coursebook material, lack of speaking practice in coursebooks).

Although classrooms are remarkably similar in the four contexts in terms of the focus of learning and pedagogical practice, there are also clear differences in terms of class size, resources, teaching media, language content in coursebooks, amongst other things. Nonetheless, the project also suggests that teachers can learn from teachers working in contexts both similar and far removed from their own. In the research team's impact work with teachers-in-training in the four countries, we showed videos from the four different contexts. Trainee teachers were thus exposed to: teaching English online; very large, under-resourced classrooms; small, very well resourced classrooms; groupwork; teacher-fronted classrooms; multiple ages in the one class; and translanguaging, amongst other things. They also watched videos of primary school children talking about what they liked and did not like about their English classes. Trainee teachers were generally interested in all the videos and how teachers taught in the different contexts, making contrasts with their own classrooms and considering how they might work if they found themselves, for example, having to work online or teaching a very large class. The videos also provided a window onto the global educational contexts and cultures, which many had not experienced previously. Materials for teacher training purposes from the research project will be made available to teacher educators globally.

## 7.2 Children's engagement

As we have said, children in the four countries are generally positive about learning English and, even at a young age, understand its value for communication and enhancing their life chances. Discussions with children about why learning English is important, perhaps based on teachers' own experiences, should be considered by classroom teachers as well as parents (see, for example, Gautam and Sarwar, 2018), as this has could enhance motivation. However, as children get older, it is also important that teachers engage learners in critical discussions about the role of English in the world and how English can be the cause of disadvantage as well as advantage (see López-Gopar, 2016).

Moreover, children are serious about learning English and understand that it is hard work. Activities that adults might think children will not like (e.g., reading, making sentences) are appreciated by some learners in the study. They also like games. Games have been widely adopted in classrooms for children and adults and the literature is generally positive about games (and gaming, see for example, Sayer and Ban, 2014). However, it is important that teachers are able to evaluate games critically so that they understand their different potentials (for

learning, engaging, changing the pace, and so on). This could be a focus for teacher training programmes and of future research.

Children are also able to express their views about how they learn and how they like to learn. Their desire for the teacher to use their L1 in class to support learning is shared across the four contexts. While translanguaging is increasingly recognised as an effective teaching strategy, it is less widely acknowledged or officially adopted in the four contexts in which we conducted this research, leading some teachers to feel guilty about using it (Mexico) or avoiding it (Malawi). Children's views about learning are legitimate (Pinter, 2023) and should be considered by educationalists when creating policy or training teachers, for example.

Children can be trusted. When the idea of children's surveys was first raised in the research team, there was some scepticism about whether children would be capable of carrying them out and how such an activity would be perceived in the schools taking part. This concern led to different approaches in the different contexts (see Table 1). Nonetheless, researchers and teachers were unanimously pleased with how the children became involved and how

**Figure 5** Children designing the surveys



serious they were when conducting the activity (see Lopez-Gopar, Lopez Ocampo and Pérez Nava (in press) for a full discussion of how the research team in Mexico worked with children on the surveys). In the impact visits, children were invited to talk to policy makers and teacher educators about their experiences on the project. They spoke about

### 7.3 Gender

One finding from the project was that girls and boys both made mostly gendered choices about future careers but while girls also considered careers that were not traditionally female, boys only considered traditionally male roles. Given the young age of the children, it is concerning that stereotypes are already becoming established, an issue identified by Bussino and McBrien (2022) in countries in the OECD, and by Ifegbesan (2012) in Nigeria. Sustainable Development Goal no. 5 is 'Gender Equality' and boys making definitive choices about the jobs they are willing to do (and by extension, are not willing to do) demonstrates that there is work to be done in this area. Teachers should be trained to challenge early ideas about suitable jobs (and roles) for girls and boys. Coursebook writers should also be urged to show boys in roles traditionally

feeling empowered, important and scholarly, as well as recognising that carrying out the surveys required patience, perseverance and tact. They also indicated that they would like to do more activities of this type. Teacher educators could consider how this might be done.

considered female – nurses, teachers, carers – to counteract stereotyping. While it is true that coursebook writers have made efforts to show females taking on traditional male roles and unusual roles (e.g., Kökçü and Gündüz, 2023), there is less evidence of males taking on traditionally female roles (ibid).

An emerging finding from this research is the seeming prevalence of male firstness in classroom interaction. In the videos, boys seem often (but not always) to be nominated before girls and asked to perform tasks first. They also seem to self-nominate faster than girls. Nonetheless, some teachers seem to be aware at least of the issue of boys dominating classroom interactions with the teacher and make an effort to ensure girls are included.

### 7.4 Translanguaging

Translanguaging was frequent in all contexts except Malawi, where Chichewa was used occasionally by teachers but other local languages less so. Teachers in Bangladesh, Mexico and Uzbekistan used children's other languages naturally and frequently throughout the class to support learners and learning. Teachers and students in all contexts agreed that students' English skills were not sufficient, particularly in the lower grades, to follow the class in English and that L1 was important to help students to access the curriculum. Even in Malawi, where English is an official language and the medium of instruction from grade 5, teachers found it a struggle to conduct the whole class in English because of these limitations (indeed, many of the teachers' classroom routines such as singing and praying were conducted in Chichewa).

Children were even more adamant than teachers that translanguaging enhanced their learning. Without support in other languages they found learning English could be frustrating, boring, anxiety-inducing and nerve-wracking. Children in Bangladesh, Mexico and Uzbekistan even suggested that coursebooks should be bilingual, a common approach in some countries (for example, Japan) but not in these four contexts. A small number of children said they enjoyed the challenge of an English-only classroom, but it was not clear whether this was because they had been persuaded that English only is pedagogically beneficial or because they were willing to work out meaning and not understand everything the teacher said. For the most part, however, translanguaging in this study seemed to contribute to children's well-being and to their language learning.

## 8 Conclusion

This investigation of teaching English in primary school contexts in four different ODA countries has revealed that our optimism at the start of the project was justified. Although they face challenges and restrictions, teachers delivered contextually appropriate, creative and motivating classes while activities with children suggested that they are invested in their learning and have sophisticated insights about it.

Teachers draw on a range of practices, many of which are common to all contexts. Whole-class teaching was widespread and frequent, which suggests that teacher educators should focus on the conditions and approaches that contribute to successful implementation rather than introducing new ways of learning that might be incompatible with local conditions. We concur with Smith (2015), who argued that ELT as a profession could learn a good deal from the

pedagogical expertise of teachers in Global South classrooms: the materials that the research team has developed from the project should support this endeavour.

Some teachers demonstrated awareness of gender issues and addressed them to some extent in classrooms. Nonetheless, many teachers would benefit from understanding how classroom practices can respond to gender inequalities. In addition, gender stereotyping remains problematic and could be challenged by teachers and teacher educators.

A clear finding is that translanguaging is popular amongst (most) teachers and welcomed by (most) students. This finding can feed into the growing interest in multilingualism in education, suggesting that it is a natural practice which supports both teaching and learning.



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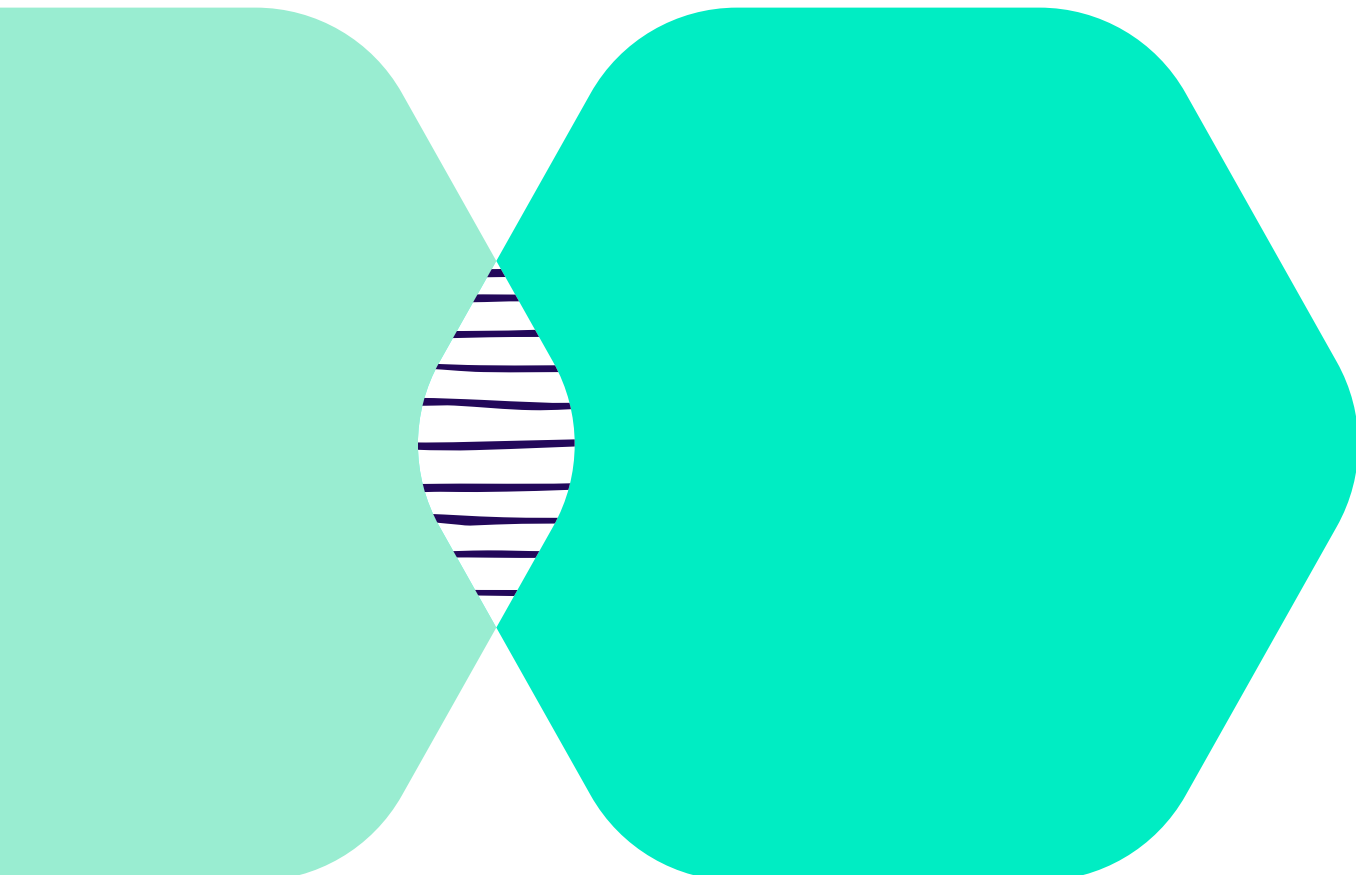
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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Teacher Interview Guide

### 1. Background

#### **Interviewer to note following information, or ask the teacher:**

- Location of the school (urban, rural, semi-urban)
- Type of school (boys, girls, co-ed)
- Number of students in school
- What languages do children and staff speak?
- Number of teachers in school
- Approximate age of teacher
- Gender and ratio of boys to girls
- School facilities: Classroom infrastructure – concrete? tin? bamboo? Windows? Lights? Fan? Blackboard/ whiteboard? Pictures/ posters on walls? Waste can/basket in classroom? Technology?
- Playground? P.E.? Toilets/ separate for girls/boys? Drinking water? Basic first aid? Sports? School visits (e.g., museum/ zoo)? Cultural activities?
- Class length?

### 2. About the teacher

- What is your educational background (e.g., BA in TESL)?
- How did you become an English teacher?
- How long have you been teaching/teaching English?
- How long have you been teaching in primary school?
- How long have you been working in this school?
- What is your role in the school (are they specialist teachers, homeroom teachers or both)?
- Which grades do you teach? How many hours in each grade? How many classes do you teach a week?
- How many children are there in the English classes? Ratio of boys/girls?

### 3. English proficiency and language use

- How would you rate your proficiency in English? (probe if different in the 4 skills; different levels in different domains)
- What do you do to maintain/improve your English?
- What is your language policy in the classroom (English only or (multi)bilingual)? Why?

- What do you think about “English-only” policies in classrooms?
- What is your perspective about using multiple/two languages while teaching English (e.g., using English and L1)?
- What differences do you notice in children’s engagement during lessons when learning in ‘English only’ as compared to learning using ‘English and local language’?
- How comfortable/confident do you feel about using English in class?

#### **Extra questions where English may be the medium of instruction**

- What is the recommended language of instruction in primary schools?
- How is the language policy implemented? What are the challenges?
- What is your opinion about using English as a language of instruction?
- What challenges are faced in using English as a language of instruction? How can they be handled? (Probe for challenges for both teachers and learners)
- What suggestions can you give to improve implementation of the language policy?

### **4. Textbooks and Materials**

- What type of materials do you use for English lessons?
- Tell me about the English textbooks for your grade /standard? Are texts standard or do you have a choice? Does the state provide books? Are they state-designed textbooks?
- What do you like/dislike about the books?
- Is there a teacher’s book? Do you use it? What for?
- What do you think about how gender is handled in your coursebook? Do girls and boys feature doing the same things and having the same opportunities?
- What supplementary materials do you use to support your teaching of English as a subject?
- Do you ever teach without materials?
- What challenges do you face in the use of the English textbooks? How do you handle them?
- Do you use video materials in your lessons? If so, what for?

### **5. Teaching Strategies and methodology**

- Do you follow a lesson plan? Is it a formal or informal document? Who designs the lesson plan?
- What teaching and learning strategies/activities do you use in the teaching of English in your class? Which ones do you find effective and why?
- What challenges do you face in using the mentioned strategies/activities? How do you handle them?
- Describe a typical English class.
- Do you have children with learning difficulties or special needs? What strategies do you adopt to support them?
- What is your opinion on boys’ and girls’ perceptions regarding the value of English.
- What learning activities do they like best?

- What are your favourite strategies/activities? Why do you like them?
- What do you like teaching least? Why?

## 6. Assessment

- How is assessment done? Examples of modes of testing
- At what level does assessment take place – local or national – and with what frequency?
- Does assessment affect what is done in the classroom? How?

## 7. Challenges

- What kind of challenges do you face while teaching English to primary school students?
- What kind of challenges do you face while evaluating your students?
- What kind of challenges do you think your students face while learning English?
- What would you like to change in English language teaching at your school?

## 8. About the students

- Who are the strongest students in your classes? Why are they strong, do you think?
- Which students like English?
- In what ways is learning English valuable for your students? Or not?
- How do the students sit in class? Why?
- Are students happy to speak English in class? Why/why not?
- How will English be useful for students in their future lives, do you think?
- Are girls and boys treated the same in your school? In your classes? Examples?
- What are the challenges of teaching boys? Of teaching girls?
- How do students travel to school? How far away do they live?
- What do students do before and after school? Is it different for boys and girl?

## 9. About Covid

- Did the school close during Covid? If yes, for how long?
- Did your school offer classes online? If yes, what? If not, why not? Can you describe the kind of activities you did?
- Did your school offer books or worksheets? What were the challenges of distributing these?
- Do students in your classes have access to smart phones/computers?
- What have the consequences of Covid been for the students' English learning do you think?
- Do you think Covid education restrictions have impacted more on girls or boys? Why?

## Appendix B: Details of the teacher interviewees

Name Pseudonym	Gender	Years of experience of teaching English	Qualification	English Qual <sup>5</sup>	Type of school	Format of interview	Length of interview	Observed? Yes/No <sup>2</sup>
<b>BANGLADESH</b>								
Ali	M	14	MA (English), BSc Science. Teaches English in primary school.	On-line courses on ICT and Teaching language, run by URC/TRC (Upazilla/Thana Resource Center and DPI (Directorate of Primary Education)	Rural		1.5 hours	No
Anika	F	18	B Ed, M Ed	One-year Cert of teaching from PTI	Rural	Via mobile phone audio recorded.	2 hours	No
Nusrat	F	8	MA, Accounting	Online workshop (3 days)	Semi-urban	Via mobile phone audio recorded	1 hour.	Yes
Diya	F	18	BA, MA (Islamic history), M Ed, Brac University	1-year Cert in Education, PTI, 5-day ELT in schools, BC	Urban	Via mobile phone audio recorded	1 ½ hours	No
Banu	F	3 but has returned to her own field.	MSc in Architecture	Bits of training arranged by school.	Urban	Zoom meeting	1 hour	No
Shumi	F	9	BA, MA Accounting B Ed	Cert of Master Trainer – one-year course, PTI	Urban	Via mobile phone audio recorded	2 hours	Yes video'd
Karim	M	14	MA, Accounting One-year Cert in Teaching from PTI	Cert of Master Trainer. IT related courses – on-line	Semi-urban	Via mobile phone audio recorded	1 hour	No
Maiha	F	19	MA (Political Sc), B Ed, M Ed	One-year certificate in Education, at PTI. Week long ELT teacher training, British Council	Semi-urban	Via mobile phone audio recorded	2 hours	No
Hamid	M	8	BSc, B Ed.	2-week English teaching, URC, organized by PTI	Rural	Via mobile phone audio recorded	2 hours	No
Tania	F	12	MA English. B Ed	None	Semi-urban	Via mobile phone audio recorded	1.5 hours	No

Name Pseudonym	Gender	Years of experience of teaching English	Qualification	English Qual <sup>s</sup>	Type of school	Format of interview	Length of interview	Observed? Yes/No <sup>2</sup>
<b>MEXICO</b>								
Alba	F	6	BA in language teaching in the UABJO.	CENNI certification, TOEFL, TKT and APTIS	Semi-rural	online	1 hour and 53 minutes	Yes
Guadalupe	F	6	ESL in USA, and courses in Harmon Hall (MEXICO)	ESL, TKT, TOEFL and Language Skills	Semi-rural	online	1 hour and 16 minutes	No
Montserrat	F	9	4th semester of language teaching in the UABJO.	TKT, CENNI and APTIS	Urban	online	1 hour and 12 minutes	Yes
Michelle	F	6	BA in language teaching in the UABJO.	TKT, CENNI and TOEFL	Semi-rural	online	1 hour and 06 minutes	No
Roger	M	6 y	BA in language teaching	TOEFL, TKT, CENNI and APTIS	Urban	online	2 hours and 13 minutes	No
Carmen	F	9	BA in language teaching	TKT	Urban	online	1 hour and 52 minutes	No
Omar	M	25 to 30	A degree in civil engineering and a BA in foreign language teaching	Oxford and CENNI	Semi-rural	online	1 hour and 54 minutes	No
Fernando	M	8 to 9	BA in language teaching, a master's degree in sociolinguistics and training by the PRONI	TOEFL, TKT and APTIS	Rural	online	2 hours and 39 minutes	Yes

Name Pseudonym	Gender	Years of experience of teaching English	Qualification	English Qual <sup>5</sup>	Type of school	Format of interview	Length of interview	Observed? Yes/No <sup>2</sup>
Fabiola	F	11	BA in languages at the Realistic University of Mexico in Puebla	TKT and CENNI	Semi-rural	Online	1 hour and 23 minutes	No
Esme	F	15	English courses since elementary school, her parents speak Zapotec, she has a BA in teaching of languages and Portuguese, Italian and French courses	TKT, and another by the PRONI	Semi-rural	Online	2 hours and 07 minutes	No
<b>UZBEKISTAN</b>								
Mrs. Rosalia	F	6	BA	B2	Urban	face-to-face	36 mins	
Mrs. Zarinka	F	3	BA	C1, CEFR	Urban	face-to-face	1 hour 29 mins	
Mrs. Pokisa	F	2	BA	B2, IELTS	Urban	face-to-face	1 hour and 14 mins	
Mrs. Abdu	F	20	BA	B2, AWARD "THE BEST TEACHER OF THE YEAR"	Urban	face-to-face	1 hour and 34 mins	Yes
Mrs. Shoko	F	14	BA	B1	Urban	face-to-face	46 mins	
Mrs. Mukofat	F	16	BA	B2	Urban	face-to-face	58 mins	
Mrs. Shokha	F	3	BA	B1	Rural	face-to-face	1 hour	Yes
Mrs. Noza	F	9-10	BA	C1, APTIS, IELTS	Urban	face-to-face	1 hour and 21 mins	Yes
Mrs. Mila	F	3	BA	B2	Urban	face-to-face	1 hour	
Mrs. Farangis	F	2	BA	C1, IELTS	Urban	face-to-face	54 mins	



Name Pseudonym	Gender	Years of experience of teaching English	Qualification	English Qual <sup>1</sup>	Type of school	Format of interview	Length of interview	Observed? Yes/No <sup>2</sup>
<b>MALAWI</b>								
John	M	8	MSCE and teaching certificate	-	Rural	face-to-face	Approx. 1 hour	No
Mary	F	3	MSCE and teaching certificate	-	Rural	face-to-face	Approx. 1 hour	No
Lukia	F	20	MSCE and teaching certificate	-	Urban	face-to-face	Approx. 1 hour	Yes
Mary	F	13	MSCE and teaching certificate	-	Semi urban	face-to-face	Approx. 1 hour	Yes
Susan	F	7	MSCE and teaching certificate	-	Rural	face-to-face	Approx. 1 hour	No
Romeo	M	7	MSCE and teaching certificate	-	Rural	face-to-face	Approx. 1 hour	No
Martin	M	27	MSCE and teaching certificate	-	Semi urban	face-to-face	Approx. 1 hour	No
James	M	3	MSCE and teaching certificate	-	Rural	face-to-face	Approx. 1 hour	No
Steven	M	8	MSCE and teaching certificate	-	Rural	face-to-face	Approx. 1 hour	No
Deric	M	3	MSCE and teaching certificate	-	Rural	face-to-face	Approx. 1 hour	No

<sup>1</sup> MSCE = T Malawi School Certificate of Education

## Appendix C: Children’s Focus Group Interview Schedule

Questions	Strategies
<b>Section 1. Perspectives on learning English</b>	
1. How does everybody feel about learning English? Why?	
2. Is learning English good for you and everybody? Are there any benefits in learning English? Explain.	– Feeling wheel or emoticons
3. Do you use English outside the class? How do you feel about it? What for?	
4. Would you like to learn another language other than English? Which one? Why?	– Feeling wheel or emoticons
<b>Section 2. Perspectives on language use in the classroom</b>	
1. What languages does your teacher use in your English class?	
2. What languages do you use in your English class?	
3. How do you feel if your teacher uses only English in class?	
4. How do you feel if your teacher uses your language and English in class?	– Feeling wheel
5. Do you speak in English in class? How do you feel about using English in your class? Why or why not? Why do you feel that way?	– Emoticons, feeling wheel, drawings  – Feeling wheel
6. In your class, when someone speaks English, how do others react?	
<b>Section 3. Perspectives on English class and classroom activities</b>	
1. What do you like/not like about your English classes?	
2. What are the most popular activities in the English class? Why?	
3. What are some activities that you would like to do less in class?	
4. Can you describe one of your English classes? What happens?	– Prompt Q
<b>Section 4. Perspectives on textbooks and materials</b>	
1. What do you like about your English textbooks and what don’t you like about them? Explain.	
2. How would you like them (English textbooks and other materials) to be?	– Prompt questions
3. Describe the teaching material that would be interesting and engaging for you? What should it be comprised of (in terms of activities, visual aids, layout and etc.)?	– Discussion on “likes and dislikes”  – Brainstorming, word clouds, word collages pre-prepared and presented on the whiteboard by the RA can be helpful for children to share their opinion on these questions.
4. What other materials, except the textbook, does your teacher use? What do you think about them?	

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### Section 5: Perceptions about the exams

1. What kind of testing do you have in your class?
2. How do English tests make you feel?
3. Are the tests easy or difficult for you?
4. Do you need to memorise a lot for the tests?
5. Do you think getting good grades in English is important? Why?

– Emojis or Drawing (frustrated, annoyed, excited, nervous, happy...)

– Prompt question

– YES/NO (SHORT ANSWERS

– Free Writing or Anonymous letters)  
(as some children may feel shy to speak about their thoughts) comprised of at most 2 to 3 lines.

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### Section 6: Gender

- Perspectives on gender (may be asked in single sex groups too)
- Does everyone in your English classes get the same chances to speak in English classes do you think?
- Who do you think is good at English in your class?
- Who answers the difficult questions in your class?
- What do you like doing in English classes? What don't you like doing? Do you ever miss school? Why?
- Where do boys and girls sit in your English class?
- What do you want to be when you leave school?
- Do you think that is possible? What will you have to do?
- Will English help you when you leave school?
- What do your parents think about you learning English?
- How long does it take you to get to school?
- Is the journey safe?
- What do you do before and after school?

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### Section 7. Perspectives on Covid

1. What happened during Covid to your schooling?
2. Did the school stay open or did it close?
3. If it closed, did the school offer online lessons/worksheets?
4. If so, did you join in the lessons? Why/why not?
5. How else did you learn during Covid?
6. Did you take classes online with another institution?
7. Were you able to practise English during Covid? If yes, how?
8. Did you have to do more to help your family during Covid? If yes, what?
9. How do you feel about it?

-Feeling wheel, emoticons, drawings

\* Because these are very personal Qs, maybe each of them can write something about it.

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## Appendix D: Details of the Children's Focus Groups

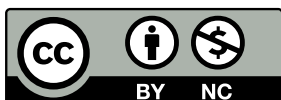
Focus group	Number of children	Gender	Age	Length	English used?	Prompts used?
<b>Bangladesh</b>						
1	5	Girls only	10-12	1.5-2 hours	Yes, when talking of content items from coursebook. All other times, L1 Bangla used.	Art book
2	5	Boys only	10-12	1.5-2 hours	Only used English when speaking of content items from coursebook. Otherwise Bangla used.	Art book
3	6	Mixed	10-12	1.5-2 hours	Only used English when speaking of content items from coursebook. Otherwise Bangla used.	Art book
<b>Mexico</b>						
1	5	Boys only	11	1 hour 37 minutes	No	Art Book
2	6	Girls only	11	1 hour 19 minutes	No	Art Book
3	6	Mixed	11	1 hour 56 minutes	No	Art Book
<b>Uzbekistan</b>						
1.	5	Boys only	10-11	30-35 min	Russian and Uzbek languages were used. Only personal information was in English. (What is your name? etc.)	Art Book
2	5	Girls only	10-11	30-35 min	Russian and Uzbek languages were used. Only personal information was in English. (What is your name? etc.)	Art Book
3	10	1-2-1 Interview of 5 boys and 5 girls	10-11	1 hour	Russian and Uzbek languages were used. Only personal information was in English. (What is your name? etc.)	Art Book
<b>Malawi</b>						
1	5	Boys only	10 – 12	Approx. 1 hour	Mainly chichewa	No, just the FGD guide.
2	5	Mixed	10 – 11	Approx. 1 hour	Mainly chichewa	
3	5	Girls only	10 – 11	Approx. 1 hour	Mainly chichewa	No, just the FGD guide



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We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. We work directly with individuals to help them gain the skills, confidence and connections to transform their lives and shape a better world in partnership with the UK. We support them to build networks and explore creative ideas, to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications. We work with governments and our partners in the education, English language and cultural sectors, in the UK and globally. Working together, we make a bigger difference, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world. We work with people in over 200 countries and territories and are on the ground in more than 100 countries. Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body.

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