

THE TEACHING, KNOWLEDGE TESTING (TKT) ESSENTIALS WORKSHOP FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS AT THE BASIC LEVEL: QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to find out the special attributes and the weaknesses of the 'TKT Essentials' approach to teaching English Language at the basic levels by analyzing the perceptions of participants in the just concluded TKT Essentials workshop in Enugu State, Nigeria. The survey research design was used for the study and the purposive sample was adopted whereby the participants in the workshop formed the sample. A 20-item questionnaire was used to collect the data. Mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (SD) were used to answer the research questions. The study revealed that the TKT Essentials has some special attributes found to be new and different from the existing methods. The study also revealed some weaknesses observed in the TKT Essentials approach. Recommendations included massive retraining programme to upgrade every teacher of English Language as well as supervisors of schools to be able to enforce it in the classrooms.

Introduction:

Quality Assurance is defined as the practice of managing the way goods and services are provided to make sure they are kept at a high standard (Hornby, 2005). This being the case, then assuring quality is a major challenge of the educational system if the products of the system are to be kept at a very high level.

Quality assurance has been defined as any systematic process of checking to see whether a product or service being developed is meeting specified requirements. It is only in quality assurance that the success of our educational system depends. According to Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 'Quality Assurance' is the process of verifying or determining whether the product or services rendered meet or exceed customers' expectations. In the educational system, quality assurance involves and affects all the processes that contribute to the end-products of an institution. Quality assurance is central to the success of any establishment particularly in an education institution. In the past, quality assurance was carried out by inspectors of schools who visited schools on routine basis. Today, quality assurance practices have improved and become more elaborate. This is geared towards maintaining quality output. Omeje (2010) is of the view that quality education stems from sound teaching, sound teaching stems from sound quality of the teacher and the teacher educator within a milieu of sound facilities and prioritized funding. Similarly, Obioma (2012) believed that in an attempt to build a model of educational effectiveness, the first step is the selection of quality inputs, and the ability to manage such inputs well. These inputs include: education managers, infrastructural facilities, teachers, non teaching staff, learners, curricular and non-curricular/instructional materials, learning environment, classrooms, libraries, laboratories/workshops etc. If this is done then school leavers should be able to perform up to expectation. Successful products of an educational system are expected to have the ability to: communicate effectively, manipulate numbers, read and write, be useful to themselves and the society and be able to develop skills for continuous learning (Obioma, 2012).

It is important to note that the extent to which the Nigerian education system is able to achieve the above listed outcomes, is the extent to which its quality assurance mechanism is able to achieve its objectives. The question of quality assurance was also raised and highlighted in the National policy of education (FRN 2004) the need for all citizens to have access to quality education so as to ensure a globally competitive educational system especially when provisions was made for workshops and conferences.

As mentioned above, the quality of teaching and learning is central to the success of the education industry. This includes taking cognizance of teacher quality and capacity, instructional materials, professional development of teachers, readiness of learners and learning environment etc. This paper is interested in the methodology, being the teaching - learning approaches and the capacity/professional development of the teachers.

In other to achieve the above, the education system organizes learning experiences that will eventually lead to the desired outputs. Many subjects are involved in this process. English is one of the key subjects in the school system that must be carefully handled to ensure that the above outcomes are realized. The Nigerian government therefore collaborates with several organs and ministries to enhance quality in her educational system. One of such bodies is the British Council that mounts workshops for the training of trainers. These trainers engage in retraining of teachers for the purpose of improving the quality of their professional capacity.

Capacity building workshops are a veritable tool for preparing teachers for the onerous task of teaching students thereby assuring quality. Over the years, the British Council has played a very active role in promoting the teaching of English language as their cultural heritage, throughout the world. Today, the place of English in international affairs has increased the scope of coverage and so the British Council has equally responded by packaging English as a global product. Among the many recently developed products they have are the Teaching Knowledge Testing (TKT) Essentials and the Content Language Integrative Learning (CLIL). For the purpose of this paper, the study shall focus on the TKT Essentials and how far it has worked in Nigeria.

What is TKT Essentials Course?

TKT Essentials stands for Teaching Knowledge Testing Essentials course. The TKT Essentials course is designed to introduce teachers of English to the basic theory and practice associated with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach to English Language teaching. Communicative approach is a way of teaching English which is based on the principle that learning a language successfully involves communication, rather than just memorizing a series of rules. Teachers try to focus on meaningful communication, rather than focusing on accuracy and correcting mistakes all the time.

TKT Essentials is quite a new programme/project of the British Council in Nigeria. Several batches of trainers have been produced over a period of three years and series of training has been conducted for primary school teachers to upgrade their pedagogical skill to the more modern and effective ones like the TKT Essentials Course.

Since the last two years, the trainers have been retraining primary and secondary school teachers to improve their capacity as English language teachers. Of recent the British council in collaboration with the Enugu State Universal Basic Education Board (ESUBEB), organized a two-week workshop for the re-training of English Language teachers in Enugu State.

Studies in education show that workshops are very crucial to the development of the capacity of the teacher. The National Policy in Education states that teacher education shall continue to take cognizance of changes in methodology and in the curriculum. Teachers shall

be regularly exposed to innovations in their professions *through workshops*. There is provision for in-service training to up-date and up-grade the teachers and take care of all inadequacies (FGN2004). Capacity building workshops are able to take care of inadequacies and thereby ensure quality. Through workshops new methods, techniques and strategies are introduced and perfected.

This will enable teachers of English to endeavor to make teaching and learning to be learner centered. A learner centered teaching is motivating to the learner. The learners are fully involved in the learning process by partaking in the numerous activities. Therefore teachers are expected to provide support for students to explore and develop their understanding. Teachers should create the opportunity for students to learn along with their teachers and peers in constructing knowledge (Vygotsky in Igbo 2007). In this case, teachers serve as facilitators and guides in discovering knowledge not as directors of knowledge. Teachers therefore create brainstorming sessions for students to come up with intelligent inputs. (Vygotsky 1987) commented that every time you teach a child something, you deprive him from learning.

They therefore learn the language not just for the sake of the language but also as a sound base for understanding other courses of study. Ene (2008) noted that English language use in the Nigerian educational system is very important especially these days of increased demand for use of the language due to globalization.

Statement of the Problem

It has been argued that one major factor militating against our education system is poor language base. Even many graduates are shamelessly poor in the area of language use. It is incredible that even some of the teachers of our children mix tenses, concord, use unidiomatic expressions and even incoherent language. There is absolute need for teachers who are proficient in language use as well as in the language teaching methodology. Capacity building workshops will help to improve teacher quality and increase their chances of producing better quality school leavers. The researcher believes that a good language teacher should employ methods and techniques borne out of workshops experience that will fully involve the students in numerous interesting activities that can enhance their learning the language. How far the TKT Essentials approach meets this requirement is the main focus of this study. What are the special attributes of the TKT Essentials approach? What are the weaknesses of the TKT Essentials approach? The answers to these questions constitute the concerns of this study.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of the study is to sample the views of teacher trainees to determine;

- (i). the specific attributes of the TKT Essentials Approach to teaching English language.
- (ii). the weaknesses of the TKT Essentials Approach to teaching English Language.

Research Questions:

1. What are the specific attributes of the TKT Essentials Approach to English Language Teaching?
2. What are the weaknesses of the TKT Essentials Approach to English Language Teaching?

Method:

Survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study consisted of 144 teachers who were involved in a workshop recently organized for primary school teachers in Enugu. It was organized by British Council and Enugu State Universal Basic

Education Board(ESUBEB) in two centers. All the 144 teachers who served as participants in the concluded workshop were used. The sample was obtained using purposive sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. A 20 item questionnaire, arranged on a 4-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) rated 4,3,2 and 1 respectively was used. The instrument was face validated by lecturers from Curriculum studies from Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. The researcher personally administered and retrieved the copies of the questionnaire from the subjects and a total of 140 was returned. Mean statistic and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions.

Results:

Research Question 1: What are the special attributes of the TKT Essentials Approach to English Language teaching?

Table 1: Mean scores of workshop participants on the special attributes of the TKT Essentials Approach

S/No	Items	Mean	STD
1.	Teacher guides learners towards self discovery.	3.71	0.85
2.	Teacher believes in eliciting information.	3.56	0.70
3.	Learners engage more in brainstorming & interaction.	3.90	0.98
4.	Task-based learning is upheld.	3.66	0.82
5.	Teachers Talking Time (TTT) is reduced.	3.70	0.84
6.	Students Talking Time (STT) is emphasized.	3.83	0.94
7.	TKT Essentials is learner centered.	3.86	0.96
8.	All language skills are practiced vigorously.	3.62	0.79
9.	All learning styles are accommodated.	3.55	0.74
10.	Motivation is high with a variety of activities.	3.34	0.59
11.	Pair-work/small groups are encouraged.	3.65	0.81
12.	Exciting warmers and lead-ins used to reduce boredom.	3.75	0.83

Table 1 shows mean responses on the items concerning the special attribute of the TKT Essentials Approach. The attributes were highly rated as no item had a mean of less than 2.50 as shown in the table. Participants rated learners brainstorming and interaction pattern highest (X,3.90), followed by TKT emphasis on Students Talking Time (STT) which has a mean of 3.86. The respondents generally agreed that TKT Essential is learner centered (X, 3.86).

Research Question 2: What are the weaknesses of the TKT Essentials Approach to English Language teaching?

Table 2: Mean Scores of workshop participants on the weaknesses of the TKT Essentials Approach to Teaching English Language.

S/No	Items	Mean	SD
13.	TKT Essential pays little attention to rudiments	2.80	0.21
14.	TKT is time consuming.	2.75	0.17
15.	Previous knowledge is assumed.	3.64	0.80
16.	Some activities are complicated.	2.60	0.19
17.	More suitable for only well trained teachers.	1.5	0.70
18.	Not suitable for large classes.	2.0	0.35

19.	Suitable only if teachers are motivated.	1.6	0.63
20.	Not adaptable to Nigerian schools.	0.82	1.18

Table 2 above shows that participants consider item 15 as its greatest weakness. It states that previous knowledge is assumed (X,3.64). This is followed by item 13 which states that TKT Essential does not pay attention to rudiments. Participants do not consider suitability for large classes, well trained teachers and well-motivated teachers (X,2.0; X,1.50; X1.60 respectively) as being weaknesses for the TKT Essentials approach.

Discussion of Findings:

The results of this study show that the participants perceive TKT Essential approach as a very effective method of teaching English as a second language. Responses show that participants accept that TKT Essential lessons are interactive(3.90,) task-based (3.66) and learner centered (3.82). As shown in the table, participants indicate that students perform better when the Teacher Talking Time(TTT) is reduced and Student Talking Time(STT) is enhanced. Igbo (2007), is of the same opinion when she stated that students do not learn better when lecturers (teachers) monopolize the lessons. In addition, she said little learning takes place if the learners are passive, that is they are meant to be seen and not to be heard and when teachers do not give them enough opportunities to express their idea. This is where the TKT Essential approach plays a very important role. Teachers' talking time (TTT) is minimized while students' talking time (STT) is highlighted. This strategy ensures that students practice consistently by interacting in the target language.

Pairs and groups of different sizes are used in addition, to individual and whole class activities. This practice ensures that all the learners are actively engaged with one or two or more language skills at all times listening, speaking, reading or writing. TKT Essentials approach allows students ample time to brainstorm. This agrees with the view of Mbagwu (2006) that language learning is better done with interactive activities. English is the language of instruction in schools from middle basic classes upwards. It is important that students are taught English language using best practices so as to equip them for learning other subjects. In a good language lesson, learners should be given increased opportunity, through active participation to talk, brainstorming, argue, order, arrange, rank, collate or express themselves freely. This is learner centered education hence the focus is on the learners' active participation.

On the whole, responses from participants show that the TKT Essentials has special attributes which make the learning of the language very easy and exciting. Above all, TKT Essentials approach uses pair-work/small groups to ensure that learners who feel shy start to loosen up through interaction with members of smaller groups. In addition, every child is engaged in active practice of one language skill or another. Through brainstorming every child exhumes his/her previous knowledge. In this way, learners feel free to assess their own progress, reflect on their progress, and develop confidence by developing cognitively. All these agree with the ideas of Samrock (2004), Vygotsky (1987), and Gauvain (2001) who observed that the principles of this technique help teachers to direct learners to actively construct their understanding, set goals and plans, and to think deeply and creatively. Learners develop a feel for the language and get fully involved. (Items, 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9.)

As can be seen, TKT Essentials lays a lot of emphasis on proper planning of the lesson so as to integrate worksheets and other instructional materials. This agrees with the view of Mkpa (2009) who said that teaching method involves the procedures, orderliness in planning and execution of the teaching proper with the appropriate integration of instructional materials to achieve the objectives at the classroom level and even beyond the classroom level. This is particularly applicable to language learning, specially a second language.

THE TEACHING, KNOWLEDGE TESTING (TKT) ESSENTIALS WORKSHOP FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS AT THE BASIC LEVEL: QUALITY ASSURANCE IMPLICATIONS

For English language desirable changes occur when the learner is able to communicate effectively in the target language. We have seen that many of our school leavers are lacking in their ability to communicate intelligibly in English language, whether orally or written. It is embarrassing that even university graduates feel highly inadequate when it comes to expressing themselves fluently in the language which is used for most official purposes.

According to table 1, teacher talking time (TTT) not being emphasized (item 5) has very high score. If teacher talking time is high, it means that it is a teacher-centred method whereby the teacher dominates the activities in the classroom. According to Mkpa 2009, the teacher does most of the talking, demonstrates his lessons, writes on the board, performs the experiments/activities and also explains. She further states, this is not taken as a good method of teaching or imparting knowledge, because the learners do little, learn little and have low self-esteem. From the table it is obvious that the TKT Essentials is a learner-centred approach which makes the learner the point of focus (Items 7). According to Mkpa 2009, the learner-centred method leads to the following

It encourages active participation of learners in the teaching and learning situation.

It encourages active participation and interaction among the learners, the teacher and other components of the teaching – learning process.

It encourages and promotes the development of skills.

It encourages the learners to develop and use their own initiative.

It discourages rote learning and passivity in the classroom on the part of the learner.

Implications of the findings for quality assurance:

These findings have implications for quality assurance and for the achievement of the goals of language education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (FRN 2004). Teachers of English ought to undergo capacity building workshops to be able to keep abreast of developments in the areas of specialty. In addition, learning from British Council trainers is learning from the masters. Teaching English using the TKT Essentials approach is one way of displaying professional competence.

The TKT Essentials approach uses the principle of Constructivism, which involves learner autonomy. This principle maintains that learners actively construct new knowledge as they interact with their environment. (Adesanya 2009).... Knowledge is strengthened if it can be used successfully in one's wider environment. This is very applicable in a language learning situation, where learners of a second language must be able to use the new language successfully in situations outside the classroom environment. If the TKT Essentials approach can do this then, quality assurance is guaranteed.

Conclusion:

The conclusion therefore is that well structured workshops have the capacity of producing teachers who are ready to stimulate learning. This has the ability to improve quality in the products who can communicate effectively and are able to interact intelligibly in English Language. This will also enable them to communicate meaningfully to the society.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

1. All practicing teachers of English should be re-trained to use the TKT Essentials Course. The Federal government through the Ministries of Education should see to the planning of the workshop to ensure that it goes round all our schools.
 2. Non English specialists ought to receive the TKT Essentials training so as to be able to impart the knowledge well or with greater efficiency.
 3. Supervisors of the schools are also expected to receive similar training so that they too can supervise the teachers to ensure compliance.
 4. TKT Essentials should be built into the pre service teachers' curriculum to enrich it.
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Web Resources: <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/teach/tkt/index.htm>
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