

Quality and Auditing in TESOL: A Comparative Case Study

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Abstract

The researcher was influenced by best English language teaching standards in England to find TESOL best practices. The study was carried out in three reputable elementary schools where English as a second language was taught. The research was conducted at three prominent primary schools in Birmingham, England, where the majority of the kids were from ethnic minorities. The fieldwork resulted in the refining and validation of an audit that was initially based on literature. Following that, fieldwork was conducted in a developing nation using the same methodology as in the United Kingdom. This step entails conducting a TESOL audit in order to determine the strengths and limitations of TESOL services in Malaysian and international TESOL institutions. This article describes the technique and methods used to build and validate the audit tool, which is particularly useful for codifying and identifying TESOL best practices. The method begins with a brief description of quality and the two types of quality measurements that are employed, benchmarking and auditing. The grounded, iterative approach to the creation and implementation of research instruments was then discussed.

Keywords: *TESOL, Quality and Auditing, Quality Characteristics, TESOL Good Practices.*

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Introduction

This study began with the researcher's belief that the TESOL offering in Malaysia was inadequate, and that the learning environment for TESOL students was typically inadequate. This viewpoint is shared

by many scholars, who are concerned about the lack of focus on creative solutions. As a result, the research purpose was changed to developing a TESOL curriculum model for primary school pupils in Birmingham, England, based on a literature analysis

and comparative case studies in Malaysia. The goal of the study was to create an instrument that codified and conceptualised TESOL "best practices" in Birmingham primary level schools and then to use that instrument (now known as the TESOL Quality Audit) to:

1. study the real condition in Malaysia and England.
2. research the differences in practice, highlighting possible gaps (now called 'quality deficiencies') in Malaysia and, as a result, to develop
3. formulate an action plan and suggestions for the development of TESOL.

About the Study

The study was conducted at three English primary schools where English as a second language was taught. The fieldwork lasted ten months, and it resulted in the refinement and validation of an audit based on the literature. Following that, fieldwork was conducted at three English-medium elementary schools in Malaysia. The audit was not developed primarily via the use of literature or fieldwork. Rather, the approach was iterative inherently. Quality characteristics and standards were identified by close interaction of literature review and intensive fieldwork. This interactive process helped in collecting maximum TESOL

good practices in the form of quality characteristics and standards.

Observations were described thickly as suggested by Geertz (1973, p.5-6). Data were also collected to validate the good practices. The researcher also studied e.g., home-school liaison policy, language policy, development plans, assessment schemes, schemes of work, and many related documents. The process of triangulation-cross-checking and confirming other data was aided by this content analysis. As a result, the TESOL Quality Audit was developed, which may be utilized as an analytical framework, as well as for management, monitoring, and assessment of TESOL.

Aspects of Quality in the Research

The Quality

The concept of quality was derived from the defence, commercial, and industrial sectors (Parsons, 1994, p.1). During the 1990s, quality had an impact on HEIs. Finally, it made its way down to school levels, where it became a significant contextual and operational component (Pascal and Bertram, 1995) and OFSTED (The Education Inspection Agency).

Quality can be defined in a variety of ways (e. g. Crosby, 1984, p.60; Juran, 1988, p.11; Harvey et al., 1993, p.9-25; Korath, 1993, p.4; Pike and Barnes, 1994, p.34; Dhalgaard et al., 1994, p.4). Juran's (1988) basic definition of 'fitness for purpose'

(p.11) was used in this analysis. As a result, it is referred to as 'best practice'.

In non-educational organisations, evidence of quality management and its influence is considerable and good, but just a few occurrences in educational contexts have been clearly recorded. It is high time for the educational sector to adopt quality management practices from the commercial world... (Watson, Modgil, and Modgil, 1997, p.18).

Quality is the main consideration in schools (Rose et al., 1994), with several clearly different focuses, which include assessment (Parsons, 1994); the learning classroom approach (Ribbins and Burridge, 1994); school and classroom efficiency (Hopkins et al., 1994); and the whole school approach (Ribbins and Burridge, 1994), (Hopkins et al., 1994). and (Aspin et al., 1994). Quality has been approached in the United Kingdom through a number of ways, including the ISO 9000 quality design and assurance standards (formerly known as BS 5750). The assessment and assurance for TESOL was based on ISO 9000, which is merely one of the major global quality system standards accessible. It was picked because of its focus on audits and process and standard compliance (systematic ways of working).

Benchmarking and Improvement Process

The benchmarking approach provided specific standards for TESOL in this study. Many authors e.g., Bendell, Boulter, and Kelly (1993), Codling (1994), Sallis (1996) and Watson, Modgil and Modgil (1997) have defined benchmarking. In this study benchmarking is defined as:

“A process of comparing TESOL performance of good TESOL practices derived from literature and research codified in quality characteristics and quality standards”.

The steps adopted in this research were as follows:

- a. Initial interaction of literature, observations, interviews, and content analysis helped in codification.
- b. Formulation of an initial TESOL framework.
- c. The data collection method can be described as a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) method. Birmingham's three "good" schools were chosen by the Local Education Authority.
- d. Further confirmation of the framework utilized the data from interviews and documents.

The Quality Characteristics

According to Jawaid, A (1998) Quality Characteristic is a component, section or aspect of provision

necessary for the achievement of overall quality acceptable to the stakeholders.

Quality Characteristic contains many aspects as mentioned above.

To develop initial TESOL framework help from Meighan (1986) was taken.

For example, in the explanation and throughout the study, Meighan's categories 'A Theory of Teaching and the Teacher's Role' and 'A Theory of Learning and the Learner's Role' were indistinguishable, therefore a combined category, 'Managing Teaching and Learning,' was employed. Within these quality

criteria, the first definition of quality standards took place. In the end, the original eight quality parameters were decreased to six.

The Quality Characteristics finally used in the research followed Jawaid (1998) as follows:

- a. Planning of TESOL provision.
- b. Managing Teaching and Learning.
- c. Use of learner-centered approaches.
- d. Utilization of diverse resources.
- e. Assessment of learning.
- f. Monitoring and evaluation.

These Quality Characteristics (QCs) are provided in Figure 1.

TESOL Quality Framework.

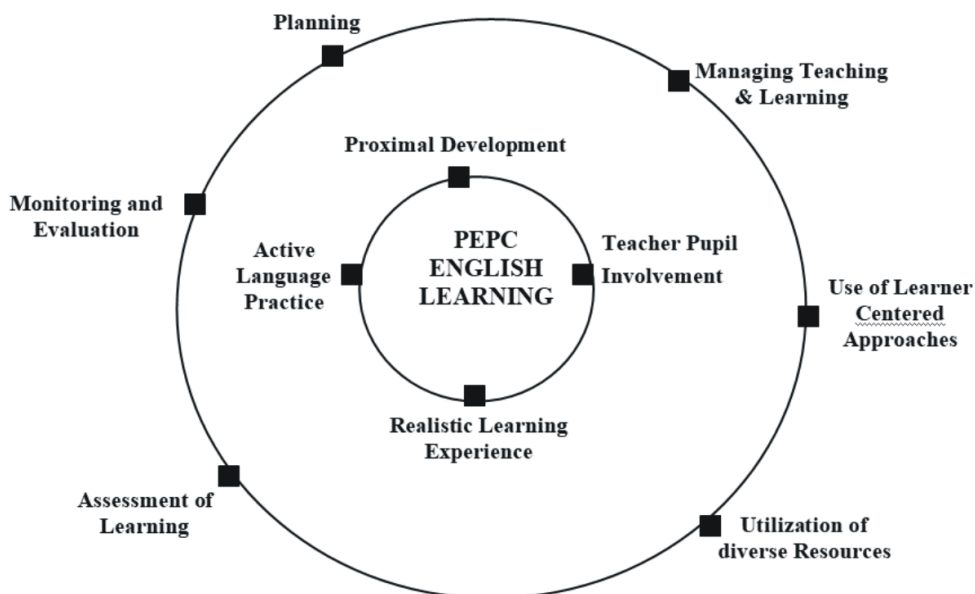


Figure-1 Source: Jawaid, A (1998)

The Quality Standard

Many researchers i.e. Dale and Cooper (1992, p.193); Moreland and Horsburgh (1992, p.38); Korath (1993, p.15) and Grainger (1994, p.4) suggest that a Quality Standard is: 'Level or extent of provision that can be achieved in any Quality Characteristic'.

Thus, in this study, each of the six quality characteristics (e.g., planning of TESOL) has many standards that show the extent in planning i.e. a daily plan to a strategic plan.

Auditing

It was believed that learning and teaching techniques carried out by schools designated as "excellent TESOL schools" by LEA inspectors would give examples of "best practice." A TESOL 'good practice' activity is one that is worthy of being used by others. Such a strategy is inextricably linked to the principles of educational effectiveness and improvement (Reynolds and Cuttance, 1992). Good TESOL practice is defined as those practices that are both prevalent and frequent in all the schools. This was especially true when the activities aligned with or mirrored principles of excellent practice found in the literature. Before going into detail about the development of the TESOL Quality Audit, which was

based on a grounded methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) that linked observation with literature (see below), it is necessary to offer a basic overview of the notion of the audit.

The Audit

Many authors have referred: Pratt (1983, p.6-8); Turley and Cooper (1991, p.14); Moreland and Horsburgh (1992, p.33); Rose et al. (1994, p.39-47) and British Standards Institute (BSI 4778). The BSI 4778 defines an audit as follows: 'An audit is the outcome of a systematic and impartial assessment that assesses if quality activities and associated results are in accordance with the intended activities.'

This implies the development of an instrument or document that comprehensively codifies standards of planning, implementation, and performance of a product or service (e.g. the provision of TESOL in primary schools) that subsequently can be used to systematically and thoroughly review existing provisions to check the suitability and completeness of provision to see if it is sufficient to achieve the intended outcomes and expected levels of customer satisfaction.

The TESOL Quality Audit research predominantly followed the audit approach adopted by Jawaid (1998). It is an educational audit, a

tool for improvement that is defined as follows:

‘An audit is a tool for enhancement of TESOL provision through identification and codification of, “TESOL good practice” designed to meet the needs of TESOL stakeholders’.

The Auditing

Because auditing entails the acquisition and examination of data and evidence, it is a research process (Korath, 1993). In order to determine if the item or service under investigation complies (or does not) with pre-determined quality criteria, the phrase 'assertions' in the preceding definition has been considered to represent specified TESOL good practice for the sake of this study, while 'economic action and events' refers to the real standards of a certain school's TESOL operations.

For the purpose of this research auditing is defined as follows: “Auditing is a process of applying an audit instrument (TESOL good practice criteria) either partially or wholly to a TESOL situation to identify strengths and weaknesses (conformances and non-conformances) in order to inform the stakeholders and possible improvement strategies”.

The Comparative Case Studies in Malaysia

The study's second part examined TESOL best practices in Birmingham and Malaysia, as documented by a TESOL audit tool. This worldwide comparison was conducted in order to assess the present state of TESOL in Malaysia and give recommendations for its development. As a result, it was intended that this study will enlighten stakeholders (not just in Malaysia, but also in England and other countries) on what constitutes effective TESOL practice and how it may be adapted/adopted in underserved settings like those seen in under developed countries.

Comparative Methods and Issues

Concerns and challenges of cross-national (Raivola, 1985; Oyen, 1990; and Ganderton, (1997) were addressed in this study. "One of the issues in comparative education is the lack of shared theoretical frameworks," Ganderton, (1997). (p.254). While this issue should not be overlooked, comparative research technique should not be differentiated from other research procedures. The act of comparing is a common and universal occurrence. This is stated more forcefully by Hantrais and Mangen (1996).

Comparative Study

The goal of this study was to find examples of exemplary TESOL practice wherever they may be found. To achieve this goal, the researcher chose England for the initial investigation since it is a well-known centre for TESOL best practices (Philips, 1992, p.201).

As a result, the periphery (Malaysia) seeks expert advice from the centre (England). This shows that the formation of English variations can aid in the reduction of linguistic and cultural issues in cross-cultural settings (Raivola, 1985 and Oyen, 1990). As a result, linguistic equivalence allows for comparisons to be made, at least to some extent (Raivola, 1985, p.366).

Correspondence also highlights globalisation trends (Ganderton, 1997, p.246), in which one nation adopts the educational paradigm of another. Raivola (1985) coined the phrase "functional equivalence" to describe the educational counterpart of colonialism (p.367). One of the most essential strategies to decrease variability when comparing nations is to use equivalence (Oyen, 1990, p.53).

The Availability of, and Access to, Data for Comparison

Differences in the amount of information and details were minimised by using the same study tools for data collecting at both sites.

This factor contributes to the concept of 'correlative equivalency' (Raivola, 1985, p.368).

Conceptual Links, Research Parameters, and Typologies

A common structure of formal education formed the most crucial conceptual relationship between the two countries. Furthermore, since the age range of the students being researched, as well as the mother tongues and cultures, there was a significant conceptual relationship between the students at the two sites. Malaysian schools use English as a language of instruction. As a result, multilingualism was required of the students. The previous description established conceptual linkages between the institutions and students of the two sites.

Because of the worldwide significance of English and the globalisation process, the socio-economic disparity in MEPC has been minimised by selecting premier schools in Malaysia. In general, the teachers in both Birmingham and Malaysia were unable to show exact generic equivalence (Raivola, 1985, p.368). The teachers in the study were monolingual in the United Kingdom and bilingual in Malaysia.

Data Collection and Analysis in Malaysia

In Malaysia, three schools were chosen once more for study. All of the schools were English-medium elementary schools with students starting at the age of five. The Preparatory, Class I, and Class II classes were watched and examined in this way. With the exception of open coding, the identical data gathering and analysis techniques as those utilised in Birmingham were applied in Malaysia. The idea was to utilise the TESOL Quality Audit to analyse and identify each stage against a readily available quality standard once the extensive explanations had been transcribed. It was regarded as a fault if no quality standard could be found.

Application of the TESOL Audit and Findings

The audit was applied to find out the real TESOL situation in both the countries that is England and Malaysia and to research the differences in practice. The findings based upon the administration of TESOL audit (Managing Teaching and Learning: QC2) in English Language Schools in Malaysia (ELSM) and Birmingham Base TESOL Schools (BBTS) are presented below.

The Managing Teaching and Learning good practices in BBTS was carried out through number of

teaching and learning strategies in a supportive, safe, secure, and process oriented environment. Great commitment to the learners through many tasks and activities was demonstrated in all the sessions observed. The Managing Teaching and Learning, however, in ELSM was carried out using a limited variety of learning strategies. The environment generally was supportive, safe, secure due to the use of overt coercion and formal polite language as well as judgemental language.

The classroom at BBTS was spacious and inviting, while the kids at ELSM were dissatisfied since they had to sit in cramped sitting chairs for the whole school day. The pupils spent the most of their time doing reading and writing assignments. The kids' desire to leave school as soon as possible was a result of these monotonous activities, which made the learning environment boring and tiresome.

The teachers, however, showed great commitment to the classwork and homework which gave rise to a typical product oriented learning management. Clearly, the management of the ELSM learning environment lacked experiential learning opportunities and active language practice.

The facts plainly show that ELSM was lagging behind in almost every category. The key distinctions are in how little teachers altered their

positions, coordinated and offered a process-oriented, safe and secure learning environment, employed a range of tasks and activities, questions, polite language, real-life functions, feedback, and a diversity of learning methodologies for PEPCs (Potential English Proficient Children). The instructors' efforts to widen the kids' comprehension varied greatly.

Differentiation in Malaysian schools was notably lacking, as seen by the large disparity in the use of different groups, adult assistance, and different learning places and resources. In terms of personalised instructions and assessment, however, ELSM looked to be ahead of BBTS. The reason for this was that following formal instructions, the teachers spent a significant amount of time marking. Teachers in ELSM used a different TESOL philosophy, which resulted in a lower level of Qs. In these institutions, the primary focus of instruction was on knowledge transmission rather than differentiation and active learning.

To summarise, in BBTS a whole and holistic approach to curriculum planning and management were in place. This promoted active, contextualised, and experiential learning. On the other hand, ELSM followed an isolated, autonomous, decontextualised, passive, and rote learning approach. Active language

practice was facilitated through a variety of resources including textbooks that were interactive, creative and multicultural. In BBTS assessment of learning was integral part of learning whereas in ELSM assessment was primarily summative.

BBTS had provision for continuous improvement of TESOL through comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of teachers' work but ELSM education system facilitated a framework for prescribed syllabus classroom teaching, led by authoritarian and autocratic leaderships (headships). To summarise these outcomes, the BBTS and ELSM were examples of progressive and traditional teaching styles (Bennett, 1976), respectively.

Conclusions

The results of the audit of Birmingham and Malaysian schools suggest that the audit approach is very useful to carry out the comparative study due to the following reasons:

- a. The study helped to formulate a comprehensive framework of TESOL good practices.
- b. The interaction of TESOL literature with field notes, observations content analysis, and interviews with teachers and head teachers made the data reliable and standardised.

- c. The TESOL audit framework provides a plathora of good practices.
- d. A TESOL situation can be monitored by the application of the audit. Thick Description methodologies can be used in other educational researches. Educationalists, linguists, teachers, and many related stakeholders may utilize it.
- e. The systematic approach provides a realistic way to investigate an actual state of affairs.

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