

ELTED AROUND THE WORLD

SHARING EXAMPLES OF EXISTING SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE IN ELT ASSOCIATIONS IN EAST AFRICA

Fredrick Odhiambo and Daniel Oloo Nganyi

The idea of setting up English Language Teachers' associations (ELTAS) was initiated by the local British Council offices in East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) in the 1990s. In Kenya, in particular, this was the work of English Language Officers at the British Council such as Umuro Adman and Tom Mogeni.

The aim of the Teachers' association project was to encourage English Language teachers to form groups in which they might identify, analyse and draw experiences from one another in confronting and solving their own professional problems. The British Council identified key teachers within each of the three countries, and invited them to attend workshops at specific venues, with support from the local Ministry of Education offices. The teachers who attended such meetings shared their experiences with their colleagues who set up similar ELT groupings. However this did not yield much fruit. Instead, the group formation followed a bottom up approach: that is to say, the teachers themselves initiated and decided when and where to meet, what to discuss and how to go about meetings. Up to a point, many ELTAS mushroomed in various districts, especially in Kenya. This was short-lived, due to the fact that the members could not sustain their various associations financially. Many groups either fizzled out or became inactive, but some (BETA-SIAYA and BODETA) survived the challenges.

We discuss here some of details of ELTAS' internal organization, the academic progress of their respective ELT teachers, and their impact on various districts, provinces and countries.

Challenges ELTAS experience in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania

ELTAS in East Africa have survived many trials and tribulations since 'BETA-SIAYA', was formed thirteen years ago. These are as follows:

Financial Constraints

Financial constraints are brought about by delay in submission of the annual subscription by some of the member schools. Secondly, the amount charged (ksh 1700 approximately £13) per annum is quite low. Thus, the above impedes the smooth and efficient running of annual programmes. Ironically, some relatively youthful schools complain that this figure, modest as it is, is still too high for them to afford.

Deadlines

Most members fail to honour the agreed deadlines for submission of results after joint examinations. Scripts are exchanged and marking of students' scripts is undertaken by members in their respective schools. The results are either processed late, or not submitted at all, as has occurred on one or two occasions. Sometimes, this failure is due to problems within respective member schools

IT Problems

Most members of the group have little knowledge of computer technology. This has adversely hampered networking through the internet.

Membership

ELTAS begin with membership of any size ranging from two to four, to a hundred or more participants. Convincing individual teachers to join and be part of ELT groups has been a significant challenge. Initially, the most important reason for teachers' unwillingness to join was suspicion and mistrust. Some teachers believed that those who came up with the idea of starting such ELT groups were driven by selfishness and personal gains. Many of them were worried about the short and long term gains of joining such an association, so they asked questions such as:

- 1 Who is behind the formation of the group?
- 2 Are they trustworthy?
- 3 What are their main intentions?

- 4 Who will fund the continuance of the association?
- 5 Will the project really have any serious academic impact on KCSE examinations?

Individual teacher membership

The problem with individual teacher membership is that a participant may not be permitted by the school to attend, since the institution has no direct role in such a move. Despite the fact that schools have the express authority to allow teachers to join associations under the umbrella of their respective schools, certain problems still persist. For example, BETA-SIAYA was begun in 1994 by half a dozen teachers of English from Siaya district, but it took close to a year to convince more teachers to join. Some of the problems arising from individual schools include the following:

- 1 Teachers' frequent absenteeism from school affects the implementation of the curriculum;
- 2 Subscription fees of one thousand, seven hundred Kenya shillings are too high for relatively youthful schools to afford;
- 3 Some schools have limited numbers of teachers of English, so releasing them would affect the teaching and learning of the subject, which must be taught daily;
- 4 Some teachers suffer from attitudinal problem. They are sceptical about the academic impact of ELT activities on learners and performance in English language.
- 5 Finally, some secondary school head teachers were not sufficiently cooperative initially. This therefore hampered the speed of growth of ELT Groups in Kenya, particularly the Nyanza province in Western Kenya, the only region in the country with a serious ELT network. However, this difficulty has been overcome by the continuous work of founder members such as Daniel Oloo and Fredrick Odhiambo, both of whom have won the prestigious Hornby Scholarship Award so as to complete their MA studies successfully in various UK universities.

Individual school membership

This type of membership has developed well, since most head teachers have been supportive,

notwithstanding some of the obstacles below:

- 1 Member schools whose candidates performed poorly in English at National Level are challenged by their head teachers to explain why, or pull out of the Associations;
- 2 Some schools pay their subscription fees too late, thereby slackening the pace of ELTAS activities such as setting, moderating, processing and conducting evaluation examinations at a district level;
- 3 Frequent delays with evaluation results raise questions of credibility regarding ELTAS.
- 4 Some members actually pull out due to there being too much pressure from other colleagues and the school administration

Leadership

We offer an example of this from the BETA-SIAYA ELT Group. The first and most simple structure involved the chairperson, secretary and treasurer. These individuals were subjected to much criticism, which discouraged them and slowed down progress. Members felt that this might be solved by creating a more elaborate secretariat (executive committee) comprising:

- 1 a Chairperson, who presides over all meetings;
- 2 a Deputy Chairperson, who takes charge in the absence of the chairperson;
- 3 a Secretary, who is the executive officer who coordinates the activities of the ELTA and prepares the annual calendar;
- 4 a Treasurer, who keeps money and financial records;
- 5 the people's representative, who assumes the role of an Ombudsman

The work of the Ombudsman was intended to ensure that the activities of the association's management were scrutinised, that the funds were spent correctly, and that any wrong was reported back to the remaining members.

"Closed" former Hornby Scholars

One of the main drawbacks to the progress of ELTAS has been the failure of some of the former Hornby Scholarship beneficiaries to be at the forefront in encouraging ELT teachers in their respective countries to strengthen their activities. In both Kenya and Uganda, the British Council

has undertaken a significant amount of work in sponsoring teachers to pursue further studies in the UK.

Sharing examples of existing successful practice in Kenya.

BETA- SIAYA ELT GROUP

Introduction

BETA-Siaya began in 1994 as a small, close-knit group. It was formed by nine English Language teachers, and christened the 'Boro English Teachers Association' (BETA), under the chairmanship of Mr Martin Odhiambo Ragen. The group's main aim was to formulate and implement ways and means of enhancing the performance and teaching of English Language and Literature in English, especially in Secondary Schools.

The group had the following objectives:

- 1 to administer joint tests for students in secondary schools in the Division, which were to be centrally marked;
- 2 to prepare joint schemes of work;
- 3 to organise symposia for students to discuss literature set books, oral literature and poetry;
- 4 to encourage closer co-operation between teachers, involving procedures such as exchanging teaching sessions by mutual agreement;
- 5 to organise in-service training/workshops for teachers;
- 6 to network with other groups, both locally and internationally.

The group, under the leadership of successors of Martin Odhiambo Ragen, such as Daniel Oloo Nganyi, Fredrick Odhiambo and Anne Auma Ingutia, has grown from its stature and has attracted a total of approximately 100 members, who form a representative sample of 44 schools in the Siaya District, and others outside the district, thereby acquiring the current name.

Joint Examinations

The BETA-SIAYA ELT Group has successfully run and administered joint exams since its inception, for Forms Three and Four students. This has had the effect of uplifting the performance and standards of English Language in the district. Indeed, most member schools have achieved a marked improvement in examination performance.

Workshops/Seminars

The internal workshops on the teaching and assessment of English have been an annual event, held in the month of May each year. In addition, BETA – SIAYA in collaboration with ELTeCS (British Council), has successfully run three regional workshops for teachers of English in East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania). Incidentally, the ELTeCS funded workshop in 2005, based on the 'Teaching of Writing and Curriculum Review in East Africa' won a prestigious British Council ELT Innovation Award. This award was received by the then Chairman Fredrick Odhiambo (Kenya) and Robert Bundala (Tanzania) on behalf of other team members such as Daniel Oloo (Kenya) Anne Auma Ingutia (Kenya) and George William Omona (Uganda), during a colourful ceremony held in London.

Sponsorships/Scholarships

Fredrick Odhiambo (Secretary: 1995 – 2001) attended a one week National workshop for co-ordinators of Teacher Development Groups at Hotel Kunste- Nakuru in Kenya on 'Materials Evaluation and Design (adaptation)' in January 2000 under the auspices of the British Council Kenya. Immediately following this, Mrs Judith Odhiambo (Treasurer: 1995 – 2001) attended a one week 'Training Trainers Course' at Plymouth College, UK in April 2000 under the auspices of the British Council.

Mr Daniel Oloo Nganyi (chairman: 1998 – 2002) was awarded the revered A.S. Hornby Scholarship to undertake Master of Arts Course (TESOL) at Sterling University in Scotland, UK in the academic year 2002/2003. Meanwhile, Mr Fredrick Odhiambo (chairman: 2002 – 2005) organised three workshops funded by English Language Teaching and Contacts Scheme (ELTeCS) for English Language teachers in East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) on the following topics:

- 1 Material Design, analysis and adaptation;
- 2 Teaching of Literature in the classroom and Establishing ELTA; and
- 3 Teaching of Writing and Curriculum review.

This led to the formation of the Dar es Salaam English Language Teachers Association (DELTA) in Tanzania and the Gombe – Mpigi Teachers Association in Uganda.

In the same manner, Fredrick Odhiambo worked in a Hornby School on 'Developing and

Sustaining Teacher Associations in Africa' in Kano, Nigeria, as a tutor, between January and March 2005.

Soon after, Mr Fredrick Odhiambo (Chairman: 2002 – 2005) gained the prestigious A.S. Hornby Award to undertake a Master of Arts Course in the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages at the University of Leeds in England, UK, during the academic year 2005/2006.

Daniel Oloo Nganyi and Fredrick Odhiambo (now both A.S. Hornby Alumni) have successfully organised various workshops funded by the British Council London on their return.

Officials

The current BETA-SIAYA executive office includes the following:

- 1 a Chairperson, who presides over all meetings;
- 2 a Vice Chairperson, who takes charge in the absence of the chairperson;
- 3 a Secretary, who is the executive officer who coordinates the activities of the ELTA and prepares the annual calendar, as well as taking minutes of meetings
- 4 an Assistant Secretary who helps the secretary during meetings and official functions;
- 5 a Treasurer, who keeps money and financial records;
- 6 a Coordinator, who serves as a link between the British Council and the ELTA;
- 7 a Patron, who represents ELTA in Secondary Schools Heads Teachers Association meeting.

All the above, apart from the Coordinator and Patron, are elected to the office every two years and can serve in any office for a maximum of two terms. The coordinator's and patron's posts are non elective.

Bondo English Language Teachers' Association (BODETA)

Introduction

BODETA is an off-shoot of BETA- SIAYA. BODETA was formed in 1997 by three teachers. All Bondo district teachers agreed to work together to improve the declining standards of English language. Part of their mission was to ensure that many teachers of English in the district

received good news. Inspired by BETA-SIAYA's success in the neighbouring Siaya District, teachers in the Bondo District fully embraced the idea. Bondo is a relatively smaller district (in population and surface area) than Siaya Today, there are 82 teachers of English in the district, and all are BODETA members.

The current executive office comprises the following members:

- 1 a Chairperson, who presides over all meetings;
- 2 a Vice Chair, who takes charge in the absence of the chairperson
- 3 a Secretary, who is the executive officer who coordinates the activities of the ELTA and prepares the annual calendar, as well as taking down minutes during the meetings
- 4 a Treasurer, who keeps money and financial records
- 5 a Coordinator, who serves as a link between the British Council and the ELTA;
- 6 a Patron, who represents ELTA in Secondary Schools Heads Teachers Association meetings.

Similarly, all the above, apart from the coordinator and patron, are elected to office after every two years, and can serve in any office for a maximum of two terms.

Objectives

The chief reasons for forming BODETA were to:

- 1 bring teachers of English in the district together;
- 2 organize refresher courses for teachers so as to enable them to keep abreast of standard practices in the teaching of the language;
- 3 organize joint, annual literature symposia;
- 4 induct newly employed teachers of English on acceptable professional classroom practice;
- 5 network with other ELT groups, notably BETA-SIAYA;
- 6 establish sound working atmosphere with head teachers across the district.

Achievements of the association to date

Examinations

BODETA conducts two elaborate examinations for member schools every year. These include: English papers 101/1 (functional essays and oral skills), 101/2 (language, poetry and comprehension passages based on compulsory literature texts, as well as from undisclosed sources) and 101/3 (imaginative composition and two others based on set literature texts). The elaborate examinations are meant for Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education candidates and Form Three students. The evaluation is conducted in June and September every year. However, Form 1 and 2 students are tested only once in the third term as part of their end of year examinations.

The most inspiring thing about BODETA is that it has brought on board all secondary schools under its umbrella with full approval of the District Education Officer and head teachers. It is viewed as a source of unity of purpose and resourcefulness among teachers of English in the district.

Performance in English in KCSE examinations

As a result of rigorous examination exercises every year, performance in English Language has gradually been improving in most secondary schools in the district.

Workshops/seminars

The Association organizes one workshop annually in March or June. This is due to the financial constraints mentioned. However, when Daniel Oloo was posted to the district in 2004 after attaining his MA in the UK, his first move was to broaden the scope of workshops through Hornby funding under the auspices of the British Council. For example, in March 2005, he coordinated a workshop on L2 Reading Inadequacies in East African secondary schools. This was a great success, so the British Council once again sponsored a follow up seminar in September 2005. As a result, Oloo was sponsored by the BC to share his experiences with the ELT fraternity at the Harrogate IATEFL Conference in April 2006, in North England. Finally, Oloo got a further opportunity from the British Council to conduct another workshop in September 2006. This was a strong and timely morale boosting gesture to BODETA and educational stakeholders in the district. Uganda and Tanzania both sent their representatives each time.

Members' professional growth

In evaluating the association's work, it may be seen that it has achieved the following for teachers' and learners' academic welfare:

- 1 it has set up a panel to set, moderate and conduct examinations for the whole district;
- 2 the panel coordinates the production of joint schemes of work to be used by members in all schools;
- 3 BODETA organizes seminars and workshops to refresh teachers' professional skills;
- 4 it has also set up an Awards Scheme to reward and motivate hard working students;
- 5 finally, they have drafted a constitution to guide and direct the activities of all members.

Formation of new ELTAS

It was during the successive workshops in the Bondo district that the formation of new ELT groups in other districts were influenced through the teachers who attended and participated in the events. Examples of such ELTAS are:

- 1 **HOMBETA**- Homabay English Language Teachers Association in the Homabay district, in the Southern part of Nyanza Province. It currently has 20 members.
- 2 **MELTA**- Migori English Language Teachers Association, situated in Southern Nyanza. Its membership currently stands at 25 members.
- 3 **RELTA**- Rachuonyo English Language Teachers Association, based in the same region. It has 30 members.
- 4 Additionally, Fredrick Odhiambo also influenced the formation of the following groups: **LDELTA** (the Lugari District English Language Teachers Association) and **KDELTA** (the Kuria District English Language Teachers Association).

The ELTAS above are still relatively youthful, and will take some time to level up with BODETA and BETA-SIAYA in terms of organization, activities and overall membership.

Scholarships/further professional trainings

Thus far, none of the BODETA members has won a scholarship from the British Council. This

is a question of time, and we believe BODETA may be considered for such a scholarship in the near future.

Conclusion

The ELT movement in Kenya, and BETA-SIAYA and BODETA in particular, have experienced many challenges, but have also achieved a considerable amount. The challenges have included: many perennial financial drawbacks; insufficient cooperation from some members and school administrations; mistrust and apathy from others; lack of IT knowledge and insufficient teaching/learning resources; regular curriculum review undertaken without adequate consultation with all stakeholders (especially teachers). However, many valuable achievements by ELTAS have taken place. For example, there is a rare unity of purpose in ELT across East Africa. Many teachers from Kenya and Uganda have benefited from the prestigious A.S. Hornby

Scholarship Awards to study English in the UK. ELTAS member schools hold regular English symposia yearly to share professional ideas. There has been a steady improvement in students' performance in English Language in national examinations; and most of all, there has been a heightened sense of awareness of what happens elsewhere in the world among teachers of English in the region, through a more effective networking process.

References

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