

**Developing University English  
Instructors' Teaching  
Performance through Using  
the Inquiry Approach**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to develop university English instructors' teaching performance using the inquiry approach. As such, the study investigated the effect of a proposed program based on the inquiry approach on developing Al-Azhar University English instructors' teaching performance. The study utilized a list of the teaching performance components related to the inquiry-based approach, based on which an observation checklist was developed to assess participants' teaching performance. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted to substantiate the results of the quantitative analysis of the observation processes. Sixteen university English instructors at the Faculty of Education Al-Azhar university participated in the study and received the training program based on the inquiry approach with its 5Es model. The results of the study revealed the positive effects of the training program in developing the participants' teaching performance in terms of questioning skills, lesson presentation, engagement of students and assessment procedures. Qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews supported the quantitative results of the observation checklist that revealed that the use of the inquiry approach has developed university English instructors' teaching performance.

**Keywords:** University Staff, Teaching Assistants, Teaching Performance, Inquiry Approach, 5Es Model

### ملخص الدراسة:

هدفت الدراسة إلى تنمية الأداء التدريسي لمحاضري اللغة الإنجليزية الجامعيين باستخدام المدخل الاستقصائي، ومن ثم سعت الدراسة إلى بحث أثر برنامج تدريبي مقترح قائم على المدخل الاستقصائي في تنمية الأداء التدريسي لمحاضري اللغة الإنجليزية الجامعيين بجامعة الأزهر، وقد استخدمت الدراسة قائمة بمهارات الأداء التدريسي اللازمة لمحاضري اللغة الإنجليزية الجامعيين في ضوء المدخل الاستقصائي، والتي استخدمت في تصميم بطاقة ملاحظة لتقييم الأداء التدريسي لدى عينة الدراسة والتي تكونت من 16 عضو هيئة معونة بكلية التربية جامعة الأزهر، كما استخدمت الدراسة المقابلات شبه المقننة لتدعيم نتائج تطبيق بطاقة الملاحظة حول اثر المدخل الاستقصائي في تنمية المهارات التدريسية لدى عينة الدراسة، وقد صمم الباحث البرنامج التدريبي المقترح في ضوء النموذج الخماسي الاستقصائي، وقد أشارت نتائج التحليل الكمي والكيفي للبيانات الناتجة عن تطبيق أدوات الدراسة قبلياً وبعدياً إلى الأثر الإيجابي الدال احصائياً للبرنامج المقترح في تنمية الأداء التدريسي لعينة الدراسة في ضوء أربع محاور رئيسة، مهارات طرح الأسئلة، مهارات عرض الدرس، ادماج المتعلمين في الدرس، وإجراءات التقييم. وقد أوصت الدراسة بضرورة تدريب محاضري اللغة الإنجليزية من خريجي كليات الألسن والآداب واللغة الإنجليزية فضلاً عن خريجي كليات التربية على المدخل الاستقصائي لتنمية الأداء التدريسي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** أعضاء الهيئة المعاونة، أعضاء هيئة التدريس، محاضري اللغة الإنجليزية، الأداء التدريسي، المدخل الاستقصائي، النموذج الخماسي الاستقصائي

## Introduction

The need for developing English language instructors' teaching performance in the university stage is getting more important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to equip with new knowledge and performances. Teaching performance development is important as a professional educational activity for English language instructors to improve their efficiency, ability, knowledge, and motivation in their professional work. Developing teaching performance is also important to enhance the value of university education and contribute to the achievement of its goals.

Moreover, the success of university education is closely related to its members' effective teachers' performance. Kazmi, Pervez and Mumtaz (2011) referred that in-service training for university English instructors empowers them with systematic and plausible teaching performance. Ekpoh, Oswald and Victoria (2013) highlighted that teachers who attend in-service training perform effectively in their work concerning knowledge of the subject, classroom management, teaching method and evaluation of students. Jahangir, Saheen and Kazmi (2012) added that in-service training plays a major role to improve the instructors' performance. Furthermore, teaching performance training also provides English instructors with great opportunities to learn new

educational applications, methods and approaches through professional development.

The role of the educator is to facilitate this process of inquiry, for example by giving a group of trainees a research task or aim: "the tutor is there to guide rather than dictate" (Whowell, 2006, p. 5). Inquiry based instruction can also be performed individually, e.g., through dissertations or projects, where the student sets the limitations of their inquiry. In other words, the core inquiry-based instruction is based upon the idea of learning through discovery rather than instruction (Levy, 2009).

The inquiry approach has also apprised teaching through a variety of academic disciplines (Oliver, 2007), as well as its supporters have suggested that it proposes a means to greater integration between teaching and research (Brew, 2003; Justice, Rice, Warry, Inglis, Miller & Sammon, 2007).

Considering the role of the teacher/instructor, successful implementation of an inquiry-based instructional model is dependent on the ability of a teacher to facilitate learner exploration. A teacher must take on the role of facilitator, supporting learners by probing, questioning, and assisting in the process of combining pieces of learning cohesively.

Capps and Crawford (2013) identified 10 roles that were essential for the teacher to take on while utilizing an inquiry-based model, as follows:

- Motivator
- Diagnostician
- Guide
- Innovator
- Experimenter
- Researcher
- Modeler
- Mentor
- Collaborator
- Learner

These roles push beyond identifying the teacher as the guide in the classroom. I have found that the roles of motivator and modeler are most important in supporting learners as they learn about the inquiry framework. Playing the role of motivator, in my experience, requires a commitment to pushing learners to be perseverant in the face of the challenges and obstacles that often arise in the inquiry framework. Additionally, playing the role of modeler provides learners with the opportunity to see the processes and thoughts that are involved in questioning and

exploring content, as well as overcoming challenges. I believe it is the responsibility of the teacher in an inquiry-based lesson, and in all lessons, to effectively model overcoming challenges and share a belief in learners potential to do the same. This will help ensure that learners are better set up for success in future lessons, and support learners in developing the habits, skills, and mindsets of strong life-long learners (Tseng, Tuan, & Chin, 2012).

As a learner-centered model, inquiry creates a space where much of the power in the classroom belongs to learners (Estes, 2004). While this definition describes all learner-centered models, it adequately describes inquiry-based instruction, as learners must learn the skills of questioning and finding answers using evidence (Deskins, 2012). Thus, an inquiry model provides learners with more power, requiring each learner to claim ownership of his or her learning through the pursuit of knowledge. By watching a teacher model through lecture, learners are not able to generate a personal understanding of the content and, instead, mimic strategies and procedures (Johnson & Norris, 2006). Learners must work with their peers and hear how others comprehend content, as well as how other learners' problem solve in various scenarios. While learners may have mirrored

understandings or tendencies in problem solving, learners must also recognize that each understanding is personal and valid, as it is constructed in a way that complements the learner (Johnson & Norris, 2006).

When learners are confronted with something new, they rely on earlier experiences to begin to make sense of the new information. As learners hear their peers attempt to explain new experiences, modifications to the learners' original attempt at understanding occur. The learner is then responsible for generating and testing a prediction about the new information. This process of using experiences to generate and experiment with predictions is at the core of the learner's responsibility in inquiry-based instruction (Harlen, 2013).

Learners must be taught how to use the skills associated with inquiry-based instruction and must challenge themselves to implement inquiry-aligned strategies throughout the learning process. Armed with knowledge of what skills are available, learners can begin to decipher when it is appropriate and effective to use them (Deskins, 2012). Specific skills must be utilized in an inquiry-based model. Learners must pursue questions, ensuring that they do not know the answer to the question before they begin. They must make predictions rooted in their own ideas and

must take part in planning and executing the process for investigating the prediction. Learners must keep notes during their work and discuss their methods and findings in terms of their initial predictions. Finally, learners must draw conclusions and compare their findings to the conclusions of their peers (Harlen, 2013).

As a result of this growing need to use the inquiry approach, universities all over the world use the inquiry approach. One example of this is McMaster University, Canada. McMaster University has been immersed in teaching inquiry for over twenty years in elite programs and professional schools. Now, Inquiry is being offered to all first-year students with a growing number of follow-up courses offered in subsequent years. (McMaster University, 2015). This is not the only example. There are many other examples such as in "Hampshire University, Amherst, Massachusetts; there is a whole institution focus on active inquiry, while at Roskilde University, Denmark, 50 per cent of the curriculum is based around group projects" (Jenkins et al., 2003 :83-85).

Given that inquiry is an innovative award-winning teaching approach practiced at McMaster University, as

evidenced by The Alan Blizzard Award – a national level teaching award that was awarded to the original team of first year Social Sciences Inquiry instructors at McMaster (Justice et al., 2007), universities are in a serious need to train instructors to learn and apply inquiry-based learning in both teaching and learning in their classes.

Accordingly, there is a need for such current trend of training that may develop English instructors' teaching performance though using the inquiry approach, utilizing one of its major models that support discovery of learning and sharing the learned materials with colleagues in an in-service training program for English university instructors. Thus, the present study will focus on the effects of a proposed program based on the inquiry approach on developing English instructors' teaching performance at Al-Azhar University.

### **Context of the problem**

As for the personal experience of the researcher with many university English instructors, he found that most of them lack the adequate teaching performance, especially those who are teaching English for specific purposes at Al-Azhar University. Those instructors are graduated from the Faculty of Language and Translation and they did not receive any formal training on

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how to teach at the higher education level. Hence, the researcher sought to find a suitable approach to conduct a training program for those English instructors to develop their teaching performance. The inquiry approach-based training program was chosen for many reasons.

Firstly, according to Che (2014), many researchers stated that an effective training program for university instructors should be conducted at the university itself because instructors will be involved in the planning and implementation of the training from the beginning to the end. Besides, the effectiveness of the training program is very much related to the awareness of instructors for self-improvement and development. It is also a way of updating teaching skills and knowledge for improving teaching and learning which lead to better teaching performance. Teaching performance training is important for university English instructors to face new challenges and changes in the education world.

Secondly, this approach has been supported by an array of research and studies across literature. For example, Jenkins et al. (2007) provided a series of short cases and links to fuller reports in their Higher Education Academy paper "Linking Teaching and Research in Disciplines and Departments." The proceedings of a symposium at McMaster University (2004) on

“Experiences with Inquiry Learning”, edited by Christopher Knapp (2007), provides a very useful overview of the origins and scope of inquiry, as well as examples of implementation, evaluation and political and organizational issues. Also, the book edited by Virginia Lee (2004) “Teaching and Learning through Inquiry: A Guidebook for Institutions and Instructors” contains a range of cases including disciplines such as history, foreign languages, psychology, microbiology, chemistry, engineering and design. These cases are very accessible as they consist mainly of narrative accounts of teachers as they transform their usually traditionally taught (lecture format) classes to take an inquiry approach. Thus, they are grounded in practical advice that is of immense help to other teachers contemplating making such a shift. Another useful source is the Proceedings of the 2003 Conference “Learning Based on the Process of Inquiry” Kahn & O’Rourke, 2004). The conference papers span the disciplines to include cases from law, social sciences, history, languages, health sciences, zoology and engineering.

### **Pilot study**

To find out whether university English language instructors are in need for such training, a pilot study was conducted using

semi-structured interviews. This pilot study results revealed that most of English instructors:

- Lack the adequate knowledge and training that enables them to develop their teaching performance.
- Need to develop their classroom management strategies.
- Need to improve their assessment methods.
- Lack the adequate knowledge of inquiry techniques that can develop their teaching performance.
- Lack the adequate knowledge that is related to practical applications and examples related to using inquiry-based learning for teaching English.

As such, a training program for developing English instructors' teaching performance is to be built upon a highly recognized interactive approach. As a result, inquiry approach provides learning opportunities that allow trainees to inquire, participate, demonstrate, practice, and even design the knowledge and abilities they need to perform by themselves.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Most English instructors at the Faculty of Education, Al-Azhar University do not receive enough educational preparation, so they cannot develop their teaching performance in terms of inquiry design and assessment. Hence, the current study

proposes a program based on the inquiry approach for developing university English language instructors' teaching performance

### **Study Questions**

The current study sought to answer the following questions:

- 1– What are the teaching performance components needed for Al–Azhar University English language instructors?
- 2– What are the characteristics of a training program based on the inquiry approach to develop Al–Azhar University English instructors' teaching performance?
- 3– What is the effect of the proposed program based on the inquiry approach on developing Al–Azhar University English instructors' teaching performance?

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

To answer the study questions, the following hypotheses were tested:

- 1– There is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of pre–application of the observation checklist and the mean scores of post–application of the observation checklist concerned with inquiry–based instruction components among the study participants, favoring the post– application mean scores.

2- The study participants reported different comments on their use of the inquiry-based instruction components after they received the training program as noted in the semi-structured interviews before and after the treatment.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aimed to:

- 1- identifying the teaching performance skills needed for of Al-Azhar University English instructors.
- 2- delineate the characteristics of a training program based on the inquiry approach to develop Al-Azhar University instructors' teaching performance.
- 3- explore the effects of a proposed program based on the inquiry approach on developing Al-Azhar University English instructors' teaching performance.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study might be significant for the following:

- It would help university English instructors develop their teaching performance.
- It highlights the importance of training university English instructors in developing their teaching performance.

- It provides instructors and curriculum designers with a program that could help them to develop and design new curricula based on inquiry approach.
- It may help instructors to overcome the difficulties they face while teaching.
- The program developed for this study could be a guide for new teachers, instructors and even students to develop their teaching performance.
- The instruments of the study might be helpful in monitoring and evaluating the teaching performance of university staff based on the inquiry approach principles.

### **Delimitations**

This study is delimited to the following:

- University English instructors at the Faculty of Education, Al-Azhar University who teach English as a foreign language and appointed by the Faculty of Languages and Translation to teach this course.
- Teaching performance components are delimited to the list of inquiry-based components.
- The training program is based on the 5Es model of the inquiry approach.

**Definition of terms:*****Inquiry approach***

“Inquiry” is defined as a quest “for truth, information, or knowledge...seeking information by questioning” (Exline, 2004, p. 31). According to Smith (2012), inquiry is “an umbrella term, encompassing a range of teaching approaches which involve stimulating learning with a question or issue and thereby engaging learners in constructing new knowledge and understandings.” (p. 57)

Operationally, the inquiry approach is the exploration processes through which university English language instructors adopt while receiving the training program for developing their teaching performance skills.

***Teaching performance***

The School of Social Work (2015) defined teaching performance as “those activities done by the faculty member that directly contributes to student learning”. According to its agreement, teaching performance includes those activities by the faculty member that directly contribute to student learning.

Operationally, teaching performance is defined as the extent to which University English instructors perform the skills

included in the approved list of skills by the jury members that are assessed using an observation sheet.

## **Method**

### **Design of the Study**

This study employed a quasi-experimental design, Pretest-Posttest control group design. Participants were interviewed before and after the treatment, as well as they were observed using the observation checklist before and after receiving the training program based on the inquiry approach. Observation of their teaching performance was undertaken by a university lecturer who was able to get in touch with the study participants according to the regularities of the Faculty of Education. The treatment also was facilitated by him as it was officially difficult for the researcher to train them as declared by the administration of the Faculty of Education. However, the researcher was able to participate in some sessions and some observation sessions of the trainees to be involved in their teaching performance, to make sure that the main objectives of the study were accomplished. Data were collected and statistically analyzed to be discussed later.

### **Participants of the Study**

The participants of the study were 16 teaching assistants at the Faculty of Education, Al-Azhar University. They were chosen by means of criteria sampling which are a non-random purposeful sampling method. Among them, 13 teaching assistants were teaching English majors some courses in English including Microteaching, Instructional Aids and Computer for Education. The other three university English instructors were teaching English as a Foreign Language to other majors. All of them has declared that they use English as their medium of speech with their students while teaching them. The researcher tried to get other university English instructors involved from the Faculty of Language and Translation whose main major is teaching English as a Foreign Language for all Al-Azhar University students. However, they refused to participate for their limited time and number that make them work a lot of teaching hours per day. Therefore, the researcher administered the study on those 16 teaching assistants from the Faculty of Education.

### **Instruments of the Study**

- Semi-structured Interviews
- A list of the inquiry-based instruction components

- The observation checklist of university English instructors' teaching performance

### **The Training Program**

This training program is based on the 5Es model. It was designed to enhance university English language instructors' teaching performance through using the inquiry approach. This program is designed in two main delivery modes, namely, face-to-face training sessions (totaling 30 hours) and online assignments and research (10 hours) with a total of 40 hours. The 3-hour training session was designed based on the inquiry approach principles, and the assessment criteria are included in a rubric that is to be used to assess English language instructors' teaching performance before, during and after the training. The training manual contains the activities, worksheets, and the online assignments to be done during the training program. The manual is divided into 10 modules as follows:

1. The inquiry approach: an introduction
2. Integrating inquiry into the classroom.
3. Levels of questioning
4. Probing, prompting and redirecting techniques.
5. Questioning strategies.
6. Individual and group questioning techniques.

7. Students engagement through questions.
8. Inquiry-based assessment.
9. Inquiry-based activity design.
10. Web tools and apps that support inquiry-based learning.

## **Results**

To answer the main question of the study stating, "What is the effect of the proposed program based on the inquiry approach on developing Al-Azhar University English instructors' teaching performance?", two hypotheses were posed. Using the descriptive statistics in terms of means and standard deviations and the inferential statistics in terms of t-tests, the quantitative results of the study were discussed in addition to the qualitative data analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

The results of the first hypothesis and data analysis of the results of the observation checklist revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of pre-application of the observation checklist and the mean scores of post-application of the observation checklist concerned with inquiry-based instruction skills among the study participants, favoring the post-application mean scores". As such, the first hypothesis was accepted and the results of its data analysis revealed that the training program had developed university

English instructors' teaching performance with regard to the inquiry-based instruction skills as reported by the list and the observation checklist.

The results of the second hypothesis and data analysis of the results of the semi-structured interviews revealed that the study participants reported different comments on their use of the inquiry-based instruction skills after they received the training program as noted in the semi-structured interviews before and after the treatment. They showed that their teaching performance was positively affected by the training program and supported the results of the observation checklist.

As such, the study resulted in the following:

1. There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of pre-application of the observation checklist and the mean scores of post-application of the observation checklist concerned with inquiry-based instruction skills among the study participants, favoring the post-application mean scores.
2. The study participants reported positive comments on their use of the inquiry-based instruction skills after they received the training program as noted in the semi-structured interviews after the treatment.

3. The study participants' teaching performance was positively developed through their use of the inquiry approach while teaching in the actual classes as revealed by the observation processes and their comments in the semi-structured interviews.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the results reached, the following conclusions are drawn:

- The inquiry approach had a great effect on university English instructors' teaching performance in terms of questioning skills, lesson presentation, engagement of students and assessment procedures.
- Qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews supported the quantitative results of the observation checklist that revealed that the use of the inquiry approach has developed university English instructors' teaching performance.
- The participants in the group enjoyed the highest motivation in performing inquiry-based activities during the session period. Therefore, it may be concluded that involving instructors and students in such activities can still be introduced as one of the most popular recourses and

a useful teaching tool in the foreign language teaching and learning.

- Based on the results of the study, the design of activities based on the 5Es model help teachers and students to get more engagement in the course of English learning.
- Engaging participants in inquiry-based activities help to foster the intrinsic motivation that instructors need in the students. The more engaged the students became, the more time teachers had to observe them and to assess their learning.
- The results of the study also revealed that the more activities you engage your students in the more outcomes you will get from them.
- Online inquiry activities help instructors open new avenues in their teaching practices and helped them to construct activities based on such investigations.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results and conclusions of the current study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- It is highly necessary for university English instructors to be trained on how to use the inquiry approach to develop their teaching performance, especially those instructors of

English for specific purposes and did not receive educational training such as the graduates of the faculties of Al–Alsun, Arts and languages and translation.

- Continuous professional development of university English instructors is highly recommended for fostering their teaching performance and strategies, especially on skills needed for teaching online.
- Due to the delimitations of this study, it is recommended to replicate the study with university English instructors outside the faculty of education to find out if there are differences concerning the major variable.
- The training program designed in this study is recommended to be used in developing the teaching performance of English teachers at the pre–university stage with focusing on activities related to the context of their students.
- The tools developed in this study might be used by other researchers, instructors, and university administration to assess the teaching performance of the university staff related to the inquiry–based approach.

### **Suggestions for further research**

Based on the results and conclusions of the current study, the following suggestions are proposed:

- The effectiveness of the inquiry-based instruction on developing the teaching performance of EFL teachers and instructors of English for specific purposes.
- The effectiveness of a proposed program based on the inquiry 5Es model in developing EFL majors teaching skills.
- The relationship between university English instructors' major and the development of their teaching performance related to the inquiry approach.
- The role of the inquiry-based instruction adopted by university English instructors in developing their students' conversation skills.
- Developing dialogic teaching practices of the university English instructors through using the inquiry approach.

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