



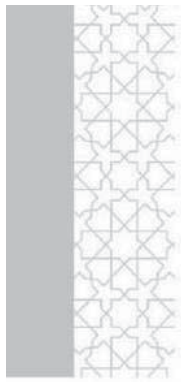
**An in-service training program for developing the
teaching performance of EFL teachers and its effect
on their students' learning at Al-Imam Muhammad
Ibn Saud Islamic University**


Dr. Muhammad Bin Ibrahim Al-Ahaydib

Dean of College of Languages & Translation, Al-Imam
Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University

Dr. Rafik Ahmed AbdelMoati Mohamed

Assistant professor, College of Languages & Translation, Al-Imam
Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University





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Abstract:

Teacher development is best supported through optimal participation by teachers and the relevance of program concerns. Action research is now widely used in in-service teacher training programs as a means to integrate curriculum development and teacher development. In the current in-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher training program, action research is adopted to develop the teaching performance of EFL teachers and to explore its effect on their students' learning at Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU). It addresses the essential principles for building an in-service training program to provide EFL teachers with the teaching skills required to teach reading and writing effectively. Results indicate significant improvement in the teachers' performance during and after the treatment. Similarly, the proposed teaching strategies and techniques for teaching reading and writing had a large effect on the experimental group students' learning on the post-test as compared to that of the control group students receiving regular instruction. It is concluded that action research enabled an evolutionary development in teachers' thinking and encouraged their personal syntheses of theory and practice. Teachers are recommended to adopt interactive, communicative strategies and techniques for teaching reading and writing. And students should be offered enough opportunities to practice reading and writing on a daily basis for authentic purposes in EFL classes.

Keywords: in-service teacher training, action research, teaching performance



فعالية برنامج تدريبي لتنمية الأداء التدريسي لمعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية وأثره على تعلم الطلاب بجامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية

د. محمد بن إبراهيم الأحيدب

عميد كلية اللغات والترجمة- جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية

د. رفیق أحمد عبد المعطي محمد

أستاذ مساعد بكلية اللغات والترجمة- جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية

الملخص:

تحقق التنمية المهنية للمعلم بأفضل صورة من خلال مشاركة المعلمين المثلى ومدى ملائمة البرنامج التدريبي لاهتماماتهم. ويستخدم البحث الإجرائي الآن على نطاق واسع في برامج تدريب المعلمين أثناء الخدمة، كوسيلة لتحقيق التكامل بين تطوير المناهج والتنمية المهنية للمعلمين، حيث أستخدم البحث الإجرائي في البرنامج التدريبي الحالي لتنمية الأداء التدريسي لمعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ وذلك للكشف عن أثر هذا البرنامج على تعلم طلابهم في جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية. وتتناول الدراسة المبادئ الأساسية لبناء برنامج تدريبي أثناء الخدمة لتزويد المعلمين بالمهارات المطلوبة لتدريس القراءة والكتابة بفاعلية. وتشير النتائج إلى حدوث تحسن كبير في مستوى أداء المعلمين أثناء وبعد البرنامج التدريبي، كما أحدثت استراتيجيات وأساليب التدريس المستخدمة في تدريس القراءة والكتابة تحسناً كبيراً في أداء طلاب المجموعة التجريبية في الاختبار البعدي مقارنةً بأداء طلاب المجموعة الضابطة الذين درسوا بالطريقة التقليدية. وخُصت الدراسة إلى أن البحث الإجرائي أحدث تطوراً هائلاً في تفكير المعلمين، ودفعهم إلى إجراء عمليات التحليل والربط بين النظرية والتطبيق. وتوصي الدراسة المعلمين بتبني الاستراتيجيات والأساليب التدريسية التفاعلية لتدريس القراءة والكتابة، كما يجب توفير فرصاً كافية للطلاب لممارسة القراءة والكتابة يومياً لأغراض أصيلة وذلك في فصول تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.


الكلمات المفتاحية: تدريب المعلمين أثناء الخدمة، البحث الإجرائي، الأداء التدريسي.

Introduction

Teaching is a very public job: it affects the life chances of children and adults; it is powerfully affected by the norms and expectations of society at large; it is a legitimate concern of a whole community of learners, parents, employers, administrators, and many others. To be successful in their career, EFL teachers develop special knowledge of language systems. They learn to present information and to convey new concepts. They know how to manage learning activities and can draw on classroom experience to give demonstrations and discuss practical issues. They develop skills in monitoring learners and fine-tuning instruction.

Teacher development is best supported through optimal participation by teachers and the relevance of program concerns. In-service teacher training is a process not an event – a process of role change which involves new knowledge, new skills, new behavior, new theories or conceptions and new attitudes (Roberts, 1998). This view goes in accordance with the social constructivist view which indicates the need to supplement conventional knowledge bases with that of self and learners: “since every teacher and learner is different, teaching is most effective when it is based on two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the students and knowledge of oneself” (Pennington, 1990: 135).

This view is also a key feature of reflective teacher education (Pennington, 1990; Richards and Lockhart, 1994). In addition, each teacher’s practice and beliefs develop in complex interaction with experiences in the classroom. Zeichner, Tabachnick, & Densmore (1987) describe this exchange between the person and the group in terms of new teachers who use



active and creative responses to the constraints, opportunities and dilemmas posed by the immediate contexts of the classroom, noting that it is through the culture of the classroom that the wider structure of society and the state have their impact (p. 28).

In the case of in-service EFL teachers' professional development, their perceptions and beliefs are progressively reinforced by teaching experience and the ability to assimilate training inputs to conform to their existing classroom routines. This tendency to assimilate inputs indicates the need to uncover teachers' implicit theories and beliefs in order to make them available for conscious review: "While tacit beliefs may be characteristic of many things that teachers do, our obligation as teacher educators must be to make the tacit explicit" (Shulman, 1988:33).

McDonough (2006) states that the dominant approach to second language (L2) teacher education emphasizes reflection as a tool for helping teachers develop context-specific, personal theories of L2 teaching. Accordingly, educators can facilitate reflection by involving teachers in action research that can stimulate language teachers' reflection on their beliefs, tacit knowledge, and teaching practice; enhance their English-language skills and knowledge of methodology; and develop their personal theories of teaching and learning by exploiting individual and collective experience (Roberts, 1998).

Action research is now widely used in in-service teacher training programs as a means to integrate curriculum development and teacher development. In the current in-service EFL teacher training program, action research is adopted to develop the teaching performance of EFL teachers and to explore its effect on their students' learning at IMSIU. It addresses the essential principles for


building an in-service training program to provide EFL teachers with the teaching skills required to teach reading and writing effectively.

This study portrays an in-service EFL teacher training program in response to a perceived gap in teachers' performance in teaching reading and writing. Accordingly, action research is employed to empower each teacher to reconstruct his awareness of himself and his own beliefs, and personalizes program inputs. The social dimension of personal change lies in awareness of the relationship between practice and context; critical dialogue and supportive relationships; and activities which integrate the private and social dimensions of learning. It also suggests a denotation of reflection, which would include the dimensions of self-awareness and awareness of one's social landscape.

Literature review

Professional development is the cornerstone of teacher professionalism and quality. There is a longstanding recognition in the field of language education that teachers must continually reshape their knowledge of teaching and learning. This knowledge is developed initially in teacher education programs, then becomes part of teachers' education throughout their careers through reflective practice (Farrell, 2008) that occurs when teachers consciously take on the role of reflective practitioner, subject their own beliefs about teaching and learning to critical analysis, take responsibility for their actions in the classroom, and continue to improve their teaching practice.

One of the effective solutions that teacher educators can employ to help teachers bridge the gap between research and their teaching is by introducing them to action research. As summarized by Rainey (2000), action research was inspired by Dewey's (1929,




cited in Hodgkinson 1957:138) ideas about progressive education, but the term originated in the 1940s with Lewin (1946), who considered it an alternative to positivistic research. The teachers learn from action research by means of concrete evidence as to the effect of their actions. As Kernmis (1982) put it:

If we cannot judge whether an action has led forward or backward, if we have no criteria for evaluating the relation between effort and achievement, there is nothing to prevent us from coming to the wrong conclusions and encouraging the wrong work habits. Realistic fact-finding and evaluation is a prerequisite for any learning. (p. 40)

To Lewin (1946), systematic collection of classroom data is a key feature of curriculum inquiry. The initial conception of action research emphasized its potential to empower and emancipate participants through cycles of reform based on reflection and action. However, more recent approaches to action research have emphasized its contribution to an individual teacher's professional self-development rather than its potential to initiate large-scale reform (Burns, 1998; Rainey, 2000). Although definitions of action research vary, there are some typical features associated with it, which were summarized by Burns (1998) as follows:

1. Action research is contextual, small-scale and localized – it identifies and investigates problems within a specific situation.
2. It is evaluative and reflective as it aims to bring about change and improvement in practice.
3. It is participatory as it provides for collaborative investigation by teams of colleagues, practitioners and researchers.
4. Changes in practice are based on the collection of information or data which provides the impetus for change (p. 30).




Action research is generally conducted by groups of practicing teachers, who are valuable sources of knowledge regarding their own classroom situations. Change can be implemented readily because the participating teachers will find the results of their research credible and valid for their needs. Bailey (2001) describes action research among language teachers as “an approach to collecting and interpreting data which involves a clear, repeated cycle of procedures” (p.490). Farrell (2007, p.67) suggests the following cycle that teachers can use for action research projects:

1. identify an issue;
2. review the literature on the issue and ask questions to narrow the focus;
3. choose data to be collected and a method of data collection;
4. collect, analyze, and interpret the data selected; and
5. develop, implement, and monitor an action plan.

Action research typically focuses on questions that emerge from a teacher's immediate classroom situation (Crookes, 1993). It is often teacher defined and directed (Auerbach, 1994). Therefore, action research has been regarded favorably because it can help teachers develop in-depth perspectives about the process of teaching and learning (Lacorte & Krastel, 2002).


Action research is an approach for EFL teachers to incorporate reflective practice into their teaching. It involves investigation of the values held and the practices engaged in while carrying out an activity – in this case, teaching (McFee, 1993; Quigley & Kuhne, 1997). As McFee points out, “It is research into a particular kind of practice ... in which there is a craft-knowledge ... based on a particular model of knowledge and research with action as an outcome ... This knowledge is practical knowledge” (p. 178). Although educators may engage in action research independently,



it can also be a collaborative process in which teams of teachers from homogenous or heterogeneous backgrounds exchange ideas and findings to improve instruction among themselves. An example is the Pennsylvania Action Research Network (Kuhne & Weirauch, 2001), which promotes action research on both the individual and team levels. Wallace (1991) maintains that action research can have a “specific and immediate outcome which can be directly related to practice in the teacher’s own context” and is “an extension of the normal reflective practice of many teachers, but it is slightly more rigorous and might conceivably lead to more effective outcomes” (pp. 56-57).


L2 teacher educators recognize the benefits teachers may gain by doing action research. Several studies have examined the effect of doing action research on the professional development of L2 student teachers during a required post coursework teaching year, or in-service L2 teachers working in schools and colleges (Cormany, Maynor, & Kalnin, 2005; Moreira, Vieira, & Marques, 1999; Smith, 2005).

Some studies examined the effectiveness of integrating an action research component into the graduate degree programs in L2 and foreign language (FL) departments. For example, Thorne and Qiang (1996) described the integration of an action research component into a master's program in English for EFL teachers at Beijing Normal University. The action research training program ran parallel to the methods course and teaching practice components of the curriculum, which were offered throughout the second year of the program. During the first semester, the teachers were introduced to action research, data collection, and analysis techniques through compulsory workshops, seminars, discussions, and hands-on data analysis activities. The first semester concluded




with a planning stage during which the teachers, working in pairs, planned an action research project by identifying a problem, designing and piloting data collection instruments, formulating possible solutions to the problem, and deciding how to collect data that could assess the effectiveness of the solutions. The teachers were not required to carry out the projects in the following semester, but most of them voluntarily implemented their research plans. The researchers reported that the teachers who implemented their projects demonstrated greater willingness to try new activities and techniques, improved research skills, heightened sensitivity to classroom dynamics, and more varied use of classroom materials than did teachers who did not carry out their projects.

Crookes and Chandler (2001) described the introduction of an action research component into an existing L2 teaching methods course for graduate students enrolled in a master's program in European Languages and Literature (N = 13) at the University of Hawai'i. Most of the graduate students were teaching assistants (TAs) assigned to first-year Spanish or German classes, but 2 students without teaching appointments practiced teaching in a Spanish class taught by one of the researchers. Reading materials and lectures about action research were added to the course syllabus, and the students carried out collaborative research projects that investigated topics relevant to their L2 teaching assignments. The graduate students collected data through student journals, peer observations, questionnaires, and interviews, and submitted oral and written reports about their findings. The researchers elicited the graduate students' perceptions about the course and their action research projects through journals and final evaluations. The graduate students reported that the action research program overall was beneficial and that using student journals



helped them communicate with their students more effectively. The researchers pointed out that the more successful graduate students had previous experience with journaling and field research techniques, whereas the less successful students had difficulty adjusting to the cyclical and reflective nature of action research. The researchers conducted follow-up interviews with 6 TAs who held teaching positions in the subsequent semester in order to determine if they were using any of the action research techniques or concepts they had learned. They reported that the TAs did not carry out formal action research projects or participate in peer collaboration activities, such as peer observations, in the subsequent semester. However, the TAs expressed interest in carrying out future action research projects if their departments could formally allocate time and resources for their projects. The researchers concluded that further curricular innovation may be necessary to identify effective ways of implementing action research so that graduate students sustain their interest and involvement in research.

Mcdonough (2006) conducted a small-scale study to investigate whether carrying out action research as part of a graduate seminar affected the professional development of graduate TAs who were teaching in foreign and second language departments. Insights into the TAs' professional development were gained through a qualitative analysis of their professional journals, reflective essays, action research reports, and oral and written feedback. The findings indicated that the TAs gained a broader understanding of research, developed an appreciation for peer collaboration, and adopted new L2 teaching practices. Suggestions for L2 teacher educators with an interest in incorporating action research into their graduate degree programs are offered.



As such, teachers who engage in reflective practice through action research can develop a deeper understanding of their teaching, assess their professional growth, develop informed decision-making skills, and become proactive and confident in their teaching. Professional development through reflective practice can be seen as an opportunity to enter a process of “mental growth spurred from within” (Feiman-Namser & Floden, 1986, p. 523), where teachers are supported in seeking their own growth.


Aim & objectives

This study attempts to investigate the effectiveness of an in-service training program for developing the teaching performance of EFL teachers and its effect on their students' learning at IMSIU. It addresses the essential principles for building an in-service training program to provide EFL teachers with skills of teaching reading and writing. The current training program – based on action research – aims to:

1. develop EFL teachers' knowledge of methodology related to skills of teaching reading and writing;
2. develop their personal theories of teaching and learning by exploiting individual and collective experience
3. encourage their personal syntheses of theory and practice;
4. enable reflection, discussion and evaluation;
5. encourage EFL teachers to apply program training experiences to their own teaching practice; and to
6. develop teachers' ability to make informed and principled professional decisions related to skills of teaching reading and writing.

Research problem & questions

Based on the researchers' experience as EFL instructors at IMSIU, some observations were made. Firstly, in-service training



programs for developing the teaching skills of university EFL teachers in general and teaching reading and writing in particular are lacking. Secondly, there is a wide gap between theory and practice, i.e. between the curriculum orientations on one hand and the learning materials used and the actual day-to-day classroom teaching practices on the other. Specifically, teaching reading and writing to university students aims at developing their ability to communicate in English. In reality, teachers still adopt the traditional, product- oriented approaches to teaching reading and writing. In addition, teachers depend on mechanical, uncontextualized drills and activities. Moreover, students are required to apply memorized words and sentences in contexts void of communication and interaction. Through the researchers' observation of some university EFL classrooms, it was found students remained passive all the time and were not required to participate except in answering teachers' previously prepared exercises.

To provide a solution to this problem, the current study aims at training a sample of EFL teachers at IMSIU in the light of interactive and communicative teaching strategies and techniques and the action research pedagogy to language teacher education. This was crystallized in enabling the teachers to teach reading and writing in meaningful and communicative contexts. As such, this study aims at answering the following main question: "What is the effectiveness of an in-service training program for developing the teaching performance of EFL teachers and its effect on their students' learning at IMSIU?"

Three sub-questions were derived from this question:

1. What are the principles of an in-service training program – designed in the light of action research pedagogy to teacher training

– to develop the teaching performance of EFL university teachers and to measure its effect on their students' learning at IMSIU?

2. How far would a training program – based on action research – be effective in developing the teachers' skills of teaching reading and writing?

3. How far would training the teachers be effective in improving their students' learning?

Method

Design of the study:


As the present study attempted to develop the teaching skills of EFL university teachers and to investigate its effect on improving their students' learning, two designs were adopted, one for each group of subjects.

The teachers' group:

A pre-post test design with a non-equivalent control group was employed. A pre-post observation checklist (Appendix A) was designed and used to measure the teachers' teaching performance before and after implementing the training program.

The students' group:

The quasi-experimental design called the non-equivalent group design was employed. This design is identical to the pre-post test control group/experimental group design in all aspects except that intact groups rather than randomly assigned ones are used, creating a control problem in terms of selection bias. This makes the use of a pre-test necessary for this particular design. Four intact classes were randomly selected; two classes (51 students) taught through the proposed teaching strategies and techniques for teaching reading and writing to represent the experimental group and two classes (49 students) receiving regular instruction to represent the



control group. A pre-post test was given to the two groups before and after the treatment.

The design adopted the view that training objectives and working relationships should be consistent. Therefore, the teachers were given a voice from the earliest feasible point in order to develop the self-esteem to cope with their new responsibilities and to begin to uncover their personal theories (Griffiths and Tann, 1992; Parrott, 1993; Pennington, 1990).

Procedure:

The current study follows the action research framework. The researchers and teachers explored the problem of students' low performance in reading and writing at IMSIU. Then, they reflected on their teaching practices by investigating which teaching techniques and activities were used in the classroom, and the types of interaction and language use they generated. Next, they chose appropriate procedures for collecting data through readings, lecturing, discussion, and reflection, evaluation, and other training activities. The researchers and teachers then gathered the data and analyzed the information to identify patterns and interpret the findings. After implementing the action plan, the researchers explored the impact of the treatment on the students' performance. Through these processes that included planning, observing, analyzing, acting, and reviewing, the teachers learned a great deal about the nature of classroom teaching and learning and also acquired useful classroom investigation skills.

Subjects:

The Teachers' Group:

Subjects in the current research were 18 EFL university teachers at IMSIU during the second semester of the university academic

year 1430-1431. Their teaching experience ranged from 6 to 19 years.

The Students' Group:

Subjects in the research were level one students of College of Languages and Translation at IMSIU. Students in the experimental group (51 students) were the students taught by one the trained teachers. On the other hand, students in the control group (49 students) received regular instruction.

* * *



Content of the training sessions

Each module (i.e. reading, writing, and language drills) covered two training sessions, with a total of six training sessions. In all these three modules, the teachers worked on the review of their own pedagogy. Conventional activities were used to convey principles, demonstrate language teaching/learning strategies, and encourage teachers' reactions (e.g. demonstrations, short lectures, directed reading, and workshops). Diary-keeping was an important element. The teachers were asked to keep a diary to record personal reactions to course activities. Notes taken from diaries were brought to sessions for comparison and discussion. Diaries were also kept during individual action research data collection in the three modules to help discussion.

This action research design aimed to help each teacher to develop a personal realization in terms of his own classroom. It served to uncover and develop personal theories, and helped the teachers to interpret public theory (explanatory theories or theories implicit in materials and curricular guidelines) in the topics of the three modules. In this way, the teachers were able to draw on the reading they did in the training program.


Tools of the study

The researchers employed the following three tools:

- an observation checklist including a number of teaching skills (Appendix A);
- a pre-post test to measure the students' performance before and after the treatment (Appendix B); and
- a training program for the teachers' group (Appendix C).

A- The Observation Checklist:

Purpose of the observation checklist:



The checklist aimed at: (a) determining the most important teaching skills relevant for EFL university teachers; (b) training a sample of these teachers in the light of these skills; and (c) measuring the improvement in the teachers' teaching performance due to the training they received.

Content of the observation checklist:


The observation checklist was composed of 6 columns. The first column included the teaching skills that are rated according to a rating scale containing five alternatives (representing the other five columns of the checklist): exceeds expectations, meets expectations, needs improvement, unacceptable, not observed. Each level was given an estimated value to be scored by the researchers. The first level (i.e., exceeds expectations) takes (5); the second level (i.e., meets expectations) takes (4); the third level (i.e., needs improvement) takes (3); the fourth level (i.e., unacceptable) takes (2); and the fifth level (i.e., not observed) takes (1).

Validity of the observation checklist:

The observation checklist was submitted to a panel of jury (5 persons) specialized in the field of EFL curricula and methods of teaching English to determine the degree of importance of each teaching skill. After analyzing the jury responses, it was found out that all the proposed teaching skills were agreed upon by almost all the jury members; 80 % or more of the jury members agreed on each of the teaching skills and the observation checklist as a whole. In addition, the jury indicated that the checklist was valid and the teaching skills included were clear and adequate. Therefore, no modifications were made to the items of the original checklist.

Administration of the observation checklist:

Conditions for the pre- and post- administration of the observation checklist:



Observation of the teachers' pre-training teaching performance was conducted during the second semester of the university academic year 1430-1431. During this period, three raters observed the teachers' teaching skills according to the observation checklist. Therefore, these raters attended the lessons and observed each teacher's performance on the teaching skills of the observation checklist. However, they did not write their observations directly in the classroom. Rather, they wrote their observations immediately after getting out of the classrooms. These procedures were followed on purpose in order to provide conditions for a natural classroom atmosphere. In other words, the researchers did not want either the teachers or their students to feel as if they were being tested which might have affected their performance. Similarly, observation of the teachers' post-training teaching performance was conducted during the second semester of the university academic year 1430-1431 using the same observation checklist. During this period, the raters observed the teachers' teaching skills according to the same criteria.

Scoring the Observation Checklist:

To ensure reliability of the scoring, observation of teachers was conducted by three raters during the second semester of the university academic year 1430-1431. The raters completed ratings blind i.e. unable to see one another's ratings until they were all completed (Rowntree and Lockwood, 1994).

B- The Pre-post Test:

Purpose of the test:

The pre-test was administered to the students of both the experimental and control groups to make sure they were at the same level of performance before starting the experiment; and hence the progress achieved by the experimental group students

could be attributed to the teaching they received. The pre-test was also used as a post-test to investigate the effectiveness of teaching in developing the experimental group students' learning.

Description of the test:

The pre-post test was constructed in the light of the following sources:

- Reviewing previous studies concerned with language tests, especially those tackling the topic of teaching and testing reading and writing.
- Identifying the items to be measured; these were the course items included in the students' textbooks of reading and writing during the second semester of the university academic year 1430-1431.

Validity of the test:

To measure the test content validity, the first version of the test was given to a panel of jury (4 persons) specialized in the field of EFL curricula and methods of teaching English to evaluate appropriateness of each item. Moreover, they were asked to evaluate the test as a whole in terms of: (a) correctness, (b) number of items and (c) suitability of the test items to Saudi EFL level one students' linguistic level.

The test proved to be mostly valid as the jury approved most of the questions and suggested the following:

1. Modifying some distractors of multiple choice questions to be more comprehensible to the students; and
2. Modifying some of the questions in terms of words selected to be easier for the students to understand.

Piloting the test:

The pilot study of the test aimed at (a) determining the suitable time to be allotted for the test and (b) obtaining item analysis

results, including item difficulty and item discrimination. Therefore, 25 students were selected for the pilot study. These students were randomly selected from level one students of College of Languages and Translation, IMSIU. Students of the pilot study belonged neither to the experimental group nor to the control group. They were excluded from the whole treatment.

Results of the pilot study:

Test time:

It was estimated that two classroom periods (100 minutes) would provide ample time for the students to read the test questions and write their answers. No one needed an extension of time to complete the test. This time was estimated in the following way:

The time taken by the fastest student + the time taken by the slowest student

$$\frac{50 + 110}{2} = 80 \text{ minutes}$$

Item Difficulty:

The following formula was used to determine item difficulty for multiple-choice questions; each item took either 1 or 0:

$$IF = \frac{\text{Number of students answering correctly}}{\text{Number of students taking the test}} \quad (\text{Nitko: 2001, p. 323})$$

As for open-ended questions (each item took either 1 or 0), item difficulty was calculated according to the following formula:

$$P = \frac{\text{Average score for an item}}{\text{Possible item score range}} \quad (\text{Nitko: 2001, p. 323})$$

Through utilizing the previous two formulas, it was found that item difficulty ranged from 0.38 to 0.57 for multiple-choice

questions and were above 0.50 for open-ended questions. Such results were satisfactory enough to accept all the test items in terms of item difficulty since they were neither too easy nor unreasonably difficult. This is due to the fact that item difficulty that ranges from 0.30 to 0.70 is usually considered acceptable for multiple-choice items (Brown: 1996, p.70) and item difficulty of 0.50 or more is considered suitable for open-ended items (Rust and Golombok, 1989, p. 237).

Item Discrimination:

The following formula was utilized to determine item discrimination for multiple-choice questions; each item took either 1 or 0:

$$\text{Discrimination} = \frac{10 \text{ correct high} - 10 \text{ correct low}}{\text{Number of students}} \quad (\text{Nitko: 2001, p.321})$$

As for open-ended questions, item discrimination was calculated according to the following formula:


$$P = \frac{\text{Average score of the upper group on the item} - \text{average score of the lower group on the item}}{\text{Range of possible item score}}$$

(Nitko: 2001, p.321)

According to the previous two formulas, questions showing negative or low discrimination below 0.30 should be discarded from the test. In addition, item discrimination that is 0.40 or more indicates very good discrimination ability. Therefore, all the test questions were accepted as their discrimination level ranged from 0.48 to 0.76.

Reliability of the test:

In order to establish the reliability of the test, it was administered to a randomly selected group of 25 students. Those



students were neither included in the experimental group nor in the control group. Then, the test was administered one more time after two weeks to the same 25 students. Then, the Pearson correlation coefficient between the test/re-test results was calculated. Hence, the reliability coefficient was estimated using the following formula:

$$RAA = \frac{2R}{1 + R}$$

Where: RAA = the reliability coefficient

R = The correlation coefficient between the test/re-test results

The reliability coefficient was 0.91, which is relatively high. Therefore, the test could be considered a reliable one for the purpose of the current study.

Time and instructions of test administration:

Test time:

After estimating the suitable time for taking the reading and writing test based on results of the pilot study, the pre-test was administered to the experimental and control groups in the normal classroom situation so that students' performance would be normal. It was administered at the start of the second semester of the university academic year 1430-1431. Time allotted for the test was 100 minutes. The post-test was administered at the end of the second semester of the university academic year 1430-1431. Post-test conditions were relatively the same as those of the pre-test in terms of place and time.

Scoring the test:

The students' answers on the pre-post test were hand-scored by the researchers. The test did not require raters because both

multiple-choice and open-ended questions included in the test were closed.

Test instructions:

Test instructions were clearly stated, sometimes in Arabic, to make sure that the students understood what was required in each item. In addition, the students were given the following instructions:

- Do not ask questions while you are taking the test.
- Answer all questions in your answer sheet. For multiple-choice questions, mark or underline the letter that corresponds to the correct answer 'a', 'b', 'c' or 'd'; for open-ended questions, write down the correct form in the empty space.
- Do not waste time thinking about the answers you do not know, but leave them to the end of the test.

C- The Training Program:

Aim of the training program:

The current in-service training program aimed at training a sample of EFL teachers at IMSIU in the light of the proposed strategies and techniques of teaching reading and writing and the action research pedagogy to language teacher training. This was crystallized in enabling the teachers to teach reading and writing in meaningful and communicative contexts.

Principles and activities of the training program:

The model of action research applied to the current teacher training program derives from Lewin's original formulation (e.g. McNiff, 1988; Nunan, 1989; Elliott, 1991). Accordingly, the following elements constitute the current in-service training program:

- a problem of real meaning to all the teachers;
- their commitment to its resolution;

- involvement of the teachers at each stage as a prerequisite for change;
- the teachers taking responsibility for change and for the monitoring of the change;
- an emphasis on group processes and group decision-making at each stage in order to clarify problems and to commit the teachers to action; and
- a role for the researchers as group facilitators and as theorists, working in dialogue with the teachers.

The following principles are proposed for the current in-service teacher training program (Burns, 1998; Farrell, 2007; McNiff, 1988; Rainey, 2000; Roberts, 1998)

- Teaching requires the orchestration of different types of knowledge.
 - Teachers' needs and personal theories vary.
 - Teachers need a sense of autonomy and control in changing their practice.
 - Teachers need support during change.
 - Self-awareness (uncovering personal theories) is a prerequisite to change in established patterns of perception and behavior.
 - The development of trusting and collaborative relations with others supports change.
 - Teachers introduce change on a trial-and-error basis.
 - Teachers need opportunities for private reflection needed, on new ideas, on personal experiences, and on their links to, one's beliefs and past.
 - Dialogue is an essential part of change.

The following activities were followed in applying the current in-service EFL teacher training program:

- provision of inputs on theory and classroom management;
- experiential learning opportunities;
- opportunities for peer discussion;
- opportunities for teachers to take stock of their current practice and to reflect on the differences between current and new practices over an extended period;
 - provision of enabling skills (e.g. self monitoring skills) as well as behavioral skills (classroom techniques);
 - the preparation from the outset and throughout the training program for the culminating action research project, which required the translation of course inputs into the context of each teacher's classroom; and
 - a framework of support for the personalized implementation of training; and
 - teachers' control over implementation attempts.

Results & discussion

This study aimed mainly at: (1) developing EFL teachers' skills of teaching reading and writing and (2) improving their students' learning. Therefore, the results are presented in two interrelated sections; one section is devoted to the effectiveness of the training program in developing the teachers' skills of teaching reading and writing, and the other to the effect of the teachers' training on their students' learning.

A- Statistical analysis related to the effectiveness of the training program in developing the teachers' skills of teaching reading and writing

To determine the relative extent of development in the teachers' teaching performance due to implementation of the proposed in-service training program, the nonparametric Wilcoxon Matched-

Pairs Signed-Ranks Test was used. This was to compare their teaching performance before and after the training they received.


Table 1

Results of Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test comparing the teaching performance of the teachers on the pre-observation and the post-observation

Ranks		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Sig.
post-training teaching performance –pre-training teaching performance	Positive Ranks	18 a	10.33	221.00	2.94	.000
	Negative Ranks	0 b	.00	.00		
	Ties	0 c				
	Total	18				
A total post-observation > total pre-observation						
B total post-observation < total pre-observation						
C total pre-observation = total post-observation						

The above table shows that all ranks were positive, which means that the teachers' teaching performance on the post-observation was significantly better than their performance on the pre-observation. To assign specifically the teachers' registered progress, it was found that Z value = 2.94, which is statistically significant at 0.01 (Z value is the nonparametric equivalent of the paired samples t value). This indicates that there are statistically significant differences between the teachers' performance on the pre-observation and their performance on the post-observation in favor of the post-observation.

The training program findings are rich and multilevel ill nature. Results clearly indicate significant improvement in the teachers' performance during and after the period of the treatment. Access to new information is provided by short readings, personalization,



interpretation and linkage to the teacher's own context of work is promoted by activities. Behavior change is supported by observation, role-play and structured classroom experiment. The element of dialogue is provided in the discussion of readings, and in planning for and then debriefing the classroom. The results suggest the following outcomes: a high level of impact upon the teachers' classroom practice (including the use of a wider range of EFL techniques and less dependence on course books); changed attitudes towards students (a more active role of students in language learning and a greater awareness of their feelings); and an increase in curricular knowledge and terminology.


Some teachers expressed greater confidence in putting forward their own ideas. There are also indications among some of the teachers of a more open and reflective disposition towards their teaching. One of the teachers commented:

It was a very good opportunity for reflecting on my own teaching. I have started thinking about how I do things and I realized I had a lot to learn. Now I think I'm more open to any new teaching ideas from other teachers.

The following categories of training activities proved successful in enhancing the teachers' performance in teaching reading and writing.

Discussion and collaborative work

The teachers attributed their development to the discussions and exchanges of experiences they had with fellow teachers. This result receives support from Halden (1995). The teachers worked in partnership with one another to help organize their own thinking and to develop their own theories and practices, dynamically and progressively over the program training activities.




Program implementation was collaborative in nature, with researchers discussing and revising drafts produced by the participating teachers. Thus, the principle of ownership and responsibility sharing was replicated in program implementation processes. This result receives support from Roberts (1998) that it is desirable for working relationships between providers to be consistent with the anticipated relationships between them and participating teachers.

The teachers prized discussion with their peers for a number of reasons. First, fellow teachers speak the same practical language, framed by the realities of the classroom. Then, experience sharing brings support, the sense that “I thought I was the only one, but I feel a bit better knowing other” have been there too”. The formulation and crystallization of personal theories is promoted by exposure to colleagues’ perceptions and interpretations, offered without an attempt to impose change on the part of researchers. This is supported by Fullan's view that social support is an essential element in enabling teachers to implement innovations observing that:

training approaches ... are effective when they combine concrete, teacher-specific training activities, ongoing continuous assistance and support during the process of implementation and regular meetings with peers and others. Research on implementation has demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt that these processes of sustained interaction and staff development are crucial regardless of what the change is concerned with (Fullan, 1982: 67).

Opportunities for reflection and taking stock

Dialogue and reflection were central activities in the current training program. Awareness raising and reflection in this program




was gradual, drew on a variety of activity types and was introduced early and sustained throughout the training program. A further point is that reflection activities were used continuously. Reflection was demanding, and it was addressed in most training activities of the program. Therefore, reflection and stock-taking seemed to be the most effective. Learning through reflection was not seen as a one-off or short-term process: the researchers tried to initiate reflection early in the course, and then worked consistently to support individual developments in thinking throughout.

A key feature of the design was its intention to support the individual development of each participating teacher, by means of such activities as reflection and discussion, self-directed reading and action research. Action research helped teachers meet their new responsibilities: to interpret general curricular goals in terms that would be meaningful and effective in their own classrooms. Thus, the action research experience was intended to develop the thinking of each teacher; to encourage their personal syntheses of theory and practice; and to make explicit connections between global goals in official curriculum documents and their own practice.

Development in the teachers' personal theories was partly triggered by the experience of dissonance (a discrepancy or mismatch of some kind between what was and what teacher expected). The discrepancy was between the teachers' interpretation of an incident or activity and that of another person. Roberts (1993) states that it is unusual for such enquiry not to reveal discrepancies between expectation and reality.

Taking stock of current practice was promoted indirectly in phase 1 (training sessions) of the program by the teachers exchanging experiences and views with each other; and through recording their responses to the course by reflective writing. It was



encouraged directly by means of discussion and reflection tasks. Then in phase 2 it was done directly by conducting structured classroom observation.


The role of theory

Explanatory theories (of teaching, methodology, and so on) generate a descriptive lexicon, offer explanations of personal experience, and can propose departures from routinized practice. As such, they contribute to rethinking and personal change (Ur, 1996). Explanatory theory can contribute to personal theory development. In this training program, it was realized through readings and lectures, the adoption of a specialist terminology, and classroom observation. There was great variation between the teachers in the degree of electiveness and conceptual change thinking they show. This is explained by personal differences and the different career points at which individuals might be when attending the course (Huberman, 1989).

Providing support during change

Teacher change is typically evolutionary and heuristic in nature. It seems that most teachers introduce new practices by a step-by-step trial-and-error approach (Olson and Eaton, 1987). During these trials they need support because they are sure to run into unpredictable problems, dilemmas and blocks, with attendant self-doubt and confusion (Fullan, 1982; Eraut, 1994). This is because implementing innovation involves entirely new practical problems and demands new ways of thinking, not just new ways of acting.

In the first phase of the training program, support was provided through providing input (e.g. lecturing and readings). This was accompanied by some processing tasks (e.g., reflective writing) to help the teachers personalize new information and construct their representations of it. In performing the role of a process leader, the



researchers negotiated an agreed structure to the training sessions, introduced the teachers to new techniques and strategies and provided feedback. The researchers also maintained processes of teachers' collaborative work and inquiry. Likewise, the researchers offered individual discussion and support. In this process, the researchers supported discussion and self-questioning and provided means of self-assessment. In all these training processes, the researchers listened properly while the other person was speaking. For this reason, it was helpful for the researchers and the teachers occasionally to 'reflect back', that is to summaries what the other person just said.

The second phase of the training program was designed to provide the support needed during the teachers' experimental attempts at implementation. Throughout phase 2, support was available to teachers in the form of discussion and classroom visits. The researchers used structured observation and evaluation instruments to help focus their data collection (Wajnryb, 1993; Weir and Roberts, 1994). This goes in accordance with Lewin's view on the need for evidence (Lewin, 1946; Kemmis, 1982).

This support enabled discussion in concrete and individual terms of the difficulties and successes the teachers met, and also provided much-needed encouragement during the difficult phase of going it alone. In giving feedback on observed teaching behaviors, the researchers provided information to teachers about their progress in mastering new teaching skills. In this regard, feedback assisted recall, analysis and interpretation of observed teaching behaviors and sequences. This entailed allotting specific time for discussing and reflecting on activities and tasks with the teachers. It also entailed systematic collection and use of information to indicate strengths and diagnose weaknesses.



Overall remarks on the current in-service teacher training program

The adoption of action research indicated the researchers' purpose to identify practical classroom issues; and to affirm and value the role of teachers in curriculum development. The above results suggest that the training program contributed to development in the teachers' thinking. However, the nature and degree of change varied according to the different starting points and concerns of individuals. The benefits of action research lay in process (in the form of developing social interactions and relationships) as well as product (in the form of identifiable changes). As one teacher observed:

We all feel comfortable with the each other. The fact that we worked so closely as a team and learnt to be more specific and careful in our teaching was a growing experience.

These insights confirm the adoption of action research framework in the current in-service teacher training program design, emphasizing social process in teacher learning.

B- Statistical analysis related to the effect of the teachers' training on the students' learning.

To control variables prior to implementing the treatment on the experimental group students, results of the pre-test were subjected to statistical treatment to find whether there were statistically significant differences between the experimental group the and control group in terms of their performance in reading and writing. Therefore, a t-test for independent groups was used to compare the mean scores of the two groups. This is indicated in the following table.

Table 2

t-test results of the pre-test for the learning of the experimental and control groups

Group	N	M	S.D.	t value	Significance level
Experimental	51	52.54	6.754	.467	Not significant at 0.05 level
Control	49	50.89	6.411		

According to the above table, t-test value = .467, which is not statistically significant at 0.01 level of confidence. This indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups in their performance in reading and writing. This means that the two groups were approximately at the same level at the beginning of the experiment.

In addition, the t-test for independent samples was used to find if there were statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the control group on the post-test in their performance in reading and writing, see table (3).

Table 3

t-test results of the post-test for the experimental and control groups' learning

Group	N	M	S.D.	t value	Significance level	Effect Size
Experimental	51	78.35	6.091	9.14	.000	1.64
Control	49	62.77	6.660		significant at 0.01 level	Large

According to the above table, t-test value = 9.14. This indicates that there are statistically significant differences at 0.01 between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in favor of the experimental group on the post-test in their performance in reading and writing. Moreover, in order to make

sure that the results obtained from the t- test were reliable and to measure the effectiveness of the proposed strategies and techniques, its effect size on the students' performance was calculated according to the following formula suggested by Dunlap (1994). The referential framework for identifying the effect size of t- values is as follows: (a) the effect size is small when its value ranges from 0.2 to 0.5; (b) the effect size is medium when its value ranges from 0.5 to 0.8; and (c) the effect size is large when its value is 0.8 or more.


As shown in table (3), the calculated effect size value of the proposed teaching strategies and techniques on the experimental group students' performance in reading and writing was (1.64). Therefore, it can be said that the proposed teaching strategies and techniques had a large effect on the experimental group students' performance in reading and writing on the post-test as compared to that of the control group students receiving regular instruction.

To determine the relative extent of change fostered by the implementation of the teaching strategies and techniques on the experimental group students, a t- test for paired samples was used. This t- test aimed at comparing the reading and writing performance of the experimental group on the pre-test and the post-test, see table (4).

Table 4

t-test results comparing the pre-test vs. the post-test in the mean scores of the experimental group


Test	N	M	S.D.	t value	Significance level	Effect Size
Post-test	51	78.35	6.091	72.44	.000 significant at 0.01 level	11.26 Large
Pre-test		52.54	6.754			



According to table (4), $t = 72.44$. This indicates that there are statistically significant differences at 0.01 between the mean scores of the experimental group on the pre-test and the post-test in favor of the post-test scores. In addition, the estimated effect size value (11.26) shown in table (4) indicated that the treatment had a large effect on the experimental group students' performance in reading and writing on the post-test as compared to their performance on the pre-test.

The above results revealed that the proposed techniques and strategies adopted by the trained teachers were effective in developing the experimental group students' performance in reading and writing. This progress might be attributed to several factors. One of the prominent factors lies in the teaching techniques and strategies adopted throughout the implementation of the program. These teaching techniques and strategies gave students the opportunity to depend on themselves as far as possible and to share responsibility in their learning. Moreover, they entailed a necessary change in the teacher's role from an authority figure to a discussion organizer, a guide and a facilitator, who does not impose his viewpoints on the students and who was ready to offer help when necessary. This enabled students a lot to share their viewpoints, benefit from each other, become active participants in their learning and become more independent. These results are consistent with the results of other studies such as the studies of Weiss (1992), Hamilton (1992), Galleco (1993), Singh & De Sarkar (1994), Mattar (1998) and Khater (2002).

For example, reading activities and tasks were very motivating and effective and offered the students a good opportunity to see how a main idea was developed throughout a passage and how vocabulary items meant in the context of the reading passage.




Furthermore, they offered students a range of vocabulary to be used later on in their writing. Besides, the students were able to collect necessary ideas and information for writing through reading the passages.

In addition, reading and writing skills were taught and practiced indirectly in the context of the writing process in which language skills were integrated in a natural and supportive way. Thus, the students practiced reading before writing as a pre-writing activity, during writing in the revising and editing stages, and after writing in the publishing stage. Moreover, the students talked about their writing and listened to others' writing throughout the writing process. Furthermore, students' writing skills were stressed and emphasized equally throughout the writing process. Hence, students focused on the clarity of content and organization of ideas in the initial stages of writing i.e. (drafting and revising). Then, in the later stage of editing, they focused on matters of form of their writing (i.e., grammar and mechanics).

There is evidence that providing supportive feedback throughout the writing process is highly effective. For example, focusing on reading and writing as means of communicating one's ideas, information, viewpoints and feelings – rather than language tasks through which students received marks and grades – increased students' involvement and motivation. As a result, the students' ability to use vocabulary items and write coherent, well-developed pieces increased. In addition, offering the students enough guiding points after each reading and writing task enabled them to form clear outlines of the reading and writing topics and develop better, well-developed content of each written piece.


Through this constructive feedback, the students' strengths in writing were highlighted and appreciated and their weaknesses



were discussed. In addition, possible suggestions for improvement were offered throughout the writing process. In addition, making students aware of the criteria according to which their reading and writing were evaluated right from the very beginning of the treatment enabled them to identify their weaknesses and strengths, and as a result work hard to meet these criteria. Finally, ensuring a friendly, risk-free, supportive language learning environment in which students' errors in writing were considered as a natural part of learning process helped students feel relaxed and become motivated and involved in the writing tasks. All these factors were reflected in the gradual improvement of students' performance in reading and writing during the implementation of the program and in their significant improvement at the end of the program.

Implications

1. In-service teachers' personal theories (about themselves as teachers and about the nature of classrooms) develop in a complex, evolutionary manner in response to incidents and experiences in working life.
2. Effective in-service teacher training programs require the systematic and concerted integration of activities which focus on all dimensions of teacher learning.
3. It is possible to meet both training and development needs by providing input on classroom strategies while offering teachers self-direction, choice and opportunities for reflection.
4. In-service teachers' personal theories change as they are either confirmed or challenged by the reactions of others. There cannot be a separation between teachers' experiences in their own learning, and their approach to their students' learning. In this case, the experience of communication and collaboration between teachers enhances their appreciation of the value of communication



between students, both in language and in more general terms. As Linder (1991: 68) puts it: “collaborative undertakings of such a group can enhance (teachers') insights and understandings, acceptance and appreciation of differences (which contribute) toward enriching the group experience”.

5. This in-service training program highlights the benefit for personal development of self-directed work in a social context of critical dialogue and personal support. This goes in accordance with (Newell, 1996) who asserts the impossibility of abstracting a teacher's development from his/her context.

6. Teachers are recommended to adopt interactive, communicative strategies and techniques for teaching reading and writing. Students should also be offered enough opportunities to practice reading and writing on a daily basis for authentic purposes (i.e., to describe, narrate, apologize, invite, congratulate, and so on) in our EFL classes, paying attention to the fact that reading and writing are developmental skills that improve gradually the more students read and write and as their linguistic proficiency level develops as a whole.

7. Students should be aware of the criteria according to which their reading and writing are evaluated in order to work hard to meet these criteria.

8. Students should become the centre of the learning process and should share more responsibilities in their learning. As such, they can become more independent and more involved in processes of reading and writing. This entails a necessary change in the teacher's role from an authority figure to a facilitator, discussion organizer, helper and language adviser.

9. Students' common errors in reading and writing should be surveyed, discussed and remedied through different exercises that

aim at helping them overcome their difficulties and consequently, improve their overall performance in reading and writing.

10. Supportive feedback should be offered throughout processes of reading and writing, not only to help students identify their weaknesses and ways of overcoming them but also to capitalize on their strengths and consequently increase their motivation and involvement in reading and writing lessons.

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