

An Inquiry-Based Learning and Reflective Thinking Program to Develop Al-Azhar Secondary Stage Model Institutes Students' EFL Creative Writing Skills and Self-Esteem

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of an Inquiry-Based Learning Approach and Reflective Thinking Program to develop Al-Azhar secondary model institutes students' EFL oral communication skills, creative writing skills, and self-esteem. The researcher adopted the quasi- experimental design. The participants were sixty first-year Azhar secondary stage model institutes students from Mohammed Naguib Al-Azhar Secondary Model Institute for Girls at 10th of Ramadan Al-Azhar Educational Administration, Sharkia Governorate, Egypt. Data were collected through an EFL oral communication checklist, an EFL oral communication test, an EFL oral communication rubric, an EFL creative writing checklist, an EFL creative writing test, an EFL creative writing rubric and an EFL self-esteem scale. These instruments were pre and post administered to both groups. The results indicated that: a) the experimental group outperformed the control group as a result of adopting the the study program, and b) the experimental group did better in the post results of the EFL oral communication test, the EFL creative writing, and the EFL self-esteem scale than in the pre results. Therefore, it can be concluded that using the study program has a positive effect in developing the participants' EFL Oral communication, creative writing and self-esteem skills.

Keywords: Inquiry- Based Learning, Reflective Thinking, EFL Oral Communication , EFL Creative Writing, EFL Self-Esteem, Egypt..

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, English has firmly been rooted as the global language of communication. Since most of the human innovations and additions in science, technology, research, literature, and all other fields are presented and documented in English. It has become the language of knowledge all over the world. This study suggested the Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) and Reflective Thinking (RT) to improve the Al-Azhar secondary model institutes students' creative writing as well as self-esteem.

Compared to speaking, listening, and reading, writing is a more difficult skill that takes longer to develop (Bayat, 2014; Demir, 2011; Karatay, 2011; Şahin, 2016; Temizkan & Yalçinkaya, 2013). Because writing is so complex and often accompanied by discouraging experiences, students frequently form negative attitudes and unproductive writing habits (Bruning & Horn, 2000), leaving them feeling reluctant, exhausted, and resistant toward the task (Akkaya, 2011; Bayat, 2014;). This difficulty is heavily influenced by how teachers approach writing instruction in the classroom (Göçen, 2018b). Overemphasizing strict rules, paper cleanliness, neat handwriting, grammar, or repetitive topics like explaining proverbs fails to build student interest or enthusiasm for writing (Oral, 2014; Susar Kırmızı, 2015; Tonyalı, 2010).

Hence, it is important to follow current trends in writing, utilize the latest innovations in the classroom, and develop a positive writing environment (Okur & Göçen, 2019; Göçen, 2019). There are many creative writing activities which help students participate actively in the writing processes while having fun in addition to offering them new opportunities to express their ideas freely, and producing authentic content (Göçen, 2018b).

Creative writing is an activity that offers several benefits (Gunawan and Aziz,2018). Moreover, students can find it useful in different ways. Writing reduces tension and stress by expressing the learners' emotions (Fitria, 2024).

Many researchers reported that the more success in creative writing tasks that students can achieve, the higher self-esteem they gain which means that when students improve their academic performance, their self-esteem increases (Pawliczak, 2015; Nageib, 2020). Aronson (2002) elaborated that self-esteem is the critical ingredient and the primary cause of academic achievement so that teachers' practices and academic strategies should be aimed at fostering students' self-esteem. Kimura (2007) pointed to self-esteem necessity in educational institutions. His study showed that students' self-esteem not only affects their academic achievement.

For Chaouacha & Elsherif (2021), Self-esteem is one of the determinant constructs of human behavior, in that a person's success and well-being depend largely on the degree of self-esteem they express. According to Zeng et al. (2020), learners with high self-esteem can show a passion for learning and take the initiative regardless of the pressures and obstacles that he may encounter.

For Ali & Ulker (2020), it is a type of learning discovery, in which educators do not directly reveal the information or answers but instead they encourage and guide learners to uncover and construct new knowledge by themselves.

Rooted in constructivist theory which states that learners build knowledge through personal experience IBL gives students more control over their learning. It prioritizes exploration over direct instruction (Wale & Bishaw, 2020). Teachers provide scaffolding to help learners question, investigate, and make sense of the world around them. As a component of Communicative Language Teaching; IBL drives language acquisition through active investigation and inquiry (Wale & Bogale, 2021). Through reflection and discussion, learners then communicate their discoveries in meaningful ways (Abdulkareem, 2025). Reflective thinking is a high-level thinking skill because it requires problem recognition, reflection on action in solving a problem and analyzing what has been done well or wrong for further improvements (Van der Schaaf et al., 2013).

According to Yilmaz (2020), Students who have reflective thinking skills are cognizant of their learning experiences and apply them to different problem situations to deal with these situations. Creative writing is connected directly to students' imagination and therefore, is useful in allowing exploration of interests and ideas in a spontaneous way (Helmy, 2020). Creative writing is more than transferring knowledge and communication (Brooks and Marshal, 2004). Abu Hussein et al. (2020) stated an important form of communication that allows students to present their ideas, thoughts, and feelings freely by using their imagination without any restrictions on paper. Moreover, Abu Ghiasi & Ali (2022) asserted that could be a way to discover the talents that can be cultivated and developed.

Farid & Akhtar (2013) reported that high self-esteem students can improve their persistence when they face failure. They choose their own strategies and become responsive to situational cues. Being confident, high self-esteem students are mostly expected to perform better than people with low self-esteem in groups. High self-esteem adds to the happiness and low self-esteem is linked to depression.

Moreover, Bailey (2003) referred to the main characteristics that self-esteem is basically concerned with as follows who one is (i.e. one's philosophy of life and character); and to whom or what one is attached (e.g. God, a concept, a "special" person or group, money, possessions, or power). Zahra et al. (2019) elaborated that self-esteem has been found to play a greatly important part in students' talking and writing capacity.

Chaouacha & Elsherif (2021) informed that Positive self-esteem gives learners the strength to move forward, to make their own way in life, and face with confidence the difficulties encountered, without the fear of failure or being rejected. Caswell & LaBrie (2017) referred to IBL as an instructional practice where students are at the center of the learning experience and take ownership of their own learning by posing, investigating, and answering questions. Bell et al., (2005) and Maxwell et al., (2015) stated that IBL is an active learning process in which to students are expected to answer some research questions using data analysis and information exchange.

For Abdi (2014), the 5E learning cycle instruction model by Bybee et al., (2006) was used to teach a specific concept, fact or skill and leads the way to open inquiry where students formulate their own problem to investigate and interpret the new findings.

Thao & Quang (2024) revealed that IBL in writing classes not only provides a structured framework for effective instruction. Puspitasari et al. (2016) yielded significant findings regarding the effectiveness of IBL Model in supporting students' creativity in English language learning. Ulucinar Sagir et al. (2016) showed that reflective thinking enables students to perform better by comprehending, organizing, transferring and evaluating knowledge rather than just applying memorized knowledge when facing problems. Fischer and Pruyne (2003) revealed that reflective thinking is a complex form of cognition exclusively associated with adult development.

According to Harsono et al. (2026) the importance of reflective thinking could be summarized in the following points: The reflective thinking helps learners on developing strategies to implement new knowledge in daily exercises. Abunemer et al. (2017) revealed a several techniques to implement reflective thinking in such as writing Learning Texts; Reflective Diaries; and Preparing portfolio.

Statement of the problem

As an EFL teacher, the researcher found that Al- Azhar secondary model institutes students had low scores in the majority of EFL creative writing skills, and self-esteem. By surveying the previous studies in these areas, it became clear that students suffer many challenges while being engaged in EFL creative writing activities and they had low levels of self-esteem. To

document the problem, a group of 20 first-year secondary model institute students took a pilot creative writing skills test. The findings revealed that students were unable to generate a comprehensible, coherent or accurate text by themselves. They were neither able to support their claims by evidence, follow logical sequence of events or ideas, nor provide unique solutions for the problems discussed in their curriculum.

Additionally, they sufficient ability to express their ideas fluently. They were not confident and showed reluctance to participate, discuss or suggest any solutions. They could not imagine different or alternative endings to stories or critical situations related to the topics they study. The researcher noticed that one of the major problems for the students is that they basically rely on memorizing certain written formats instead of developing their own skills in creative writing.

In the light of reviewing the previous discussion, the pilot study and the researcher's experience in EFL teaching, it can be stated that the students of Al-Azhar model institutes meet a lot of difficulties in EFL creative writing skills and they have low self-esteem. The researcher proposed a new program to overcome such difficulties. It is built on integrating inquiry-based learning and reflective thinking strategies that may develop the participants' EFL creative writing and self-esteem skills of. This led to the following questions: What are the EFL creative writing skills targeted for the 1st secondary stage students in Al-Azhar? ; What are the actual EFL creative writing skills of 1st secondary stage students?; How can an inquiry-based learning and reflective thinking program be designed to help develop EFL creative writing skills of Al-Azhar secondary model institutes?; What are the EFL self-esteem skills targeted for the 1st secondary stage students? ; What are the actual EFL self-esteem skills of 1st secondary stage students?; How can an inquiry-based learning and reflective thinking program be designed to help develop the EFL self-esteem skills of Al-Azhar secondary model institutes?.

2. METHODS

The Study Design

The participants were split into two groups for the current study's quasi-experimental design, which served as a primary source of data (control and experimental). The control group received standard education, while the experimental group was exposed to the inquiry-based learning and reflective thinking program.

The study participants

Sixty first-year secondary students from Mohammed Naguib Al-Azhar Secondary Model Institute, 10th of Ramadan Al-Azhar Administration, Sharkia Governorate. They were enrolled in the first semester of the academic year (2025–2026). They were split up into a control group of thirty students and an experimental group of thirty students. Since the participants were purposefully chosen, it was considered that they made up a homogeneous group. Therefore, it was assumed that they would be similar in many ways and that their ages and experience levels would not differ significantly.

Instruments

The instruments listed below were created, verified, and put into use as follows: An EFL creative writing checklist was designed to determine the appropriate subskills for Al-Azhar first -year secondary stage students, An EFL pre-post creative writing test was designed to determine the participants' levels both before and after the intervention.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

The study's hypotheses were tested using a t-test to see if there were any differences between the treatment group's mean scores on the EFL creative writing skills test and self-esteem skills scale before and after administration. This was done in order to ascertain the impact of the inquiry-based learning and reflective thinking program on the development of EFL creative writing and self-esteem skills.

4. RESULTS & VERIFYING THE STUDY HYPOTHESES

The First Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in post administrations of the creative writing skills test results, in favour of the experimental group ones. Table (1) indicates the means of scores of the treatment group were higher in the post test results than those of the pre-ones in the EFL creative writing skills test results and its sub-skills, where t-values were 29.9 for overall EFL creative writing skills, 9.36 elaboration, 23.8 originality, 18.5 flexibility, 14.0 fluency; all were significant at 0, 01 level. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed.

The Second Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-posttest results of overall EFL creative writing test and its sub-skills, in favour of the post-test results.

Table (2) indicates that the means of scores of the treatment group were higher in the post test than those of the pre-scores in the EFL creative writing skills ones and sub-skills, where t-values were, (22.87) for overall EFL creative writing skills, (12.0) for elaboration, (8.38) for originality, (14.8) for flexibility, (11.53) for fluency; all were significant at 0, 01 level. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed.

The Third Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in post administrations of the self-esteem scale results, in favour of the experimental group ones. Table (3) indicates that the means of scores of the treatment group were higher in the post test results than those of the pre-ones in the self-esteem scale, where t-values were, (14.3) for overall self-esteem scale, (7.75) for language ability, (8.25) for in-class relationship, (13.1) for attitude towards behavior in the EFL class; all were significant at 0, 01 level. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed.

The Fourth Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-posttest results of overall self-esteem scale and its sub-dimensions, in favour of the post-scale results. Table (4) indicates the means of scores of the treatment group were higher in the post test than those of the pre-scores in the self-esteem scale and its sub-dimensions, where t-values were, (14.4) for overall self-esteem scale, (8.44) for language ability, (8.34) for in-class relationship, (13.2) for attitude towards behavior in the EFL class ; all were significant at 0, 01 level. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed.

The Fifth Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that the inquiry-based learning and reflective thinking Program has a large positive effect on the experimental group EFL creative writing skills. Table (5) indicates that the effect sizes of the treatment group in the post creative writing skills test results were higher than those of the pre-ones in the EFL overall creative writing skills test, where the effect sizes were (.90) for overall creative writing skills, (.74) for elaboration, (.55) for originality, (.82) for flexibility, (.78) for fluency, all these values were significant at 0,01 level. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed.

Table (1): Both Groups Post EFL Creative Writing Skills Test Results

Creative dimensions writing	Group	M	S.D	t-value	Sig
Elaboration	Control	4.47	1.43		
	Experimental	7.70	1.25	9.36	.001
Originality	Control	2.30	1.02		
	Experimental	8.43	.97	23.8	.001
Flexibility	Control	4.23	1.14		
	Experimental	8.73	.69	18.5	.001
Fluency	Control	4.33	1.09		
	Experimental	8.17	1.02	14.0	.001
Total	Control	15.3	2.46		
	Experimental	33.0	2.09	29.9	.001

Significant at (0. 01)

Table (2): The Pre-Post Creative Writing Skills Test Results of the Experimental group

Creative writing dimensions	Group	M	S.D	t-value	Sig
Elaboration	Pre test	3.50	1.45		
	Post test	7.70	1.24	12.0	.001
Originality	Pre test	2.37	1.45		
	Post test	5.17	1.12	8.38	.001
Flexibility	Pre test	2.60	1.48		
	Post test	7.60	1.10	14.8	.001
Fluency	Pre test	3.23	1.50		
	Post test	7.33	1.24	11.53	.001
Total	Pre test	11.7	2.87		
	Post test	27.8	2.59	22.87	.001

Significant at (0. 01)

Table (3): The EFL Self-Esteem Post-Scale Results for Both Groups

Self-esteem dimensions	Group	M	S.D	t-value	Sig
Language ability	Control	10.20	1.78	7.75	.001
	Experimental	16.56	4.12		
In-class relationship	Control	10.43	1.92	8.25	.001
	Experimental	16.90	3.83		
Attitude towards behavior in the EFL clas	Control	9.60	1.37	13.1	.001
	Experimental	17.87	3.17		
Total	Control	30.23	2.40	14.3	.001
	Experimental	51.33	7.71		

Significant at (0. 01)

Table (4): The EFL Self-Esteem Pre-Post Scale Results for the Experimental Group

Self-esteem dimensions	Group	M	S.D	t-value	Sig
Language ability	Pre	9.63	1.79	8.44	.001
	Post	16.5	4.12		
In-class relationship	Pre	10.3	1.97	8.34	.001
	Post	16.9	3.83		
Attitudes towards behavior in the EFL class	Pre	9.06	1.77	13.2	.001
	Post	17.8	3.17		
Total	Pre	29.0	3.52	14.4	.001
	Post	51.3	7.71		

Significant at (0. 01)

Table (5):The EFL Creative Writing Skills Effect Sizes of The Experimental Group as a Whole in The Pre-Posttest Results

Creative writing dimensions	Group	M	S.D	Eta-square	Effect Size
Elaboration	Pre test	3.50	1.45	0.845	Large
	Post test	7.70	1.24		.74
Originality	Pre test	2.37	1.45	0.740	Medium
	Post test	5.17	1.12		.55
Flexibility	Pre test	2.60	1.48	0.890	Large
	Post test	7.60	1.10		.82
Fluency	Pre test	3.23	1.50	0.834	Large
	Post test	7.33	1.24		.78
Total	Pre test	11.7	2.87	0.949	Large
	Post test	27.8	2.59		.90

Significant at (0. 01)

According to the total value of the effect size for all the four main skills, it was clear that .90 of the total variance in overall creative writing skills can be attributed to the experimental treatment (the inquiry-based learning and reflective thinking Program). The effect size of the treatment exceeds the minimum percentage level. This indicates a large level of effect size of the experimental training upon the overall creative writing sub-skills.

The Sixth Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that the inquiry-based learning and reflective thinking program has a large positive effect on the experimental group self-esteem scale.

Table (6) indicates that the effect sizes of the treatment group in the post self-esteem scale results were higher than those of the pre-ones in the EFL overall self-esteem scale, where the effect sizes were (.8) for overall self-esteem scale, (.62) for language ability, (.61) for in-class relationship (.75) for attitude towards behavior in the EFL class, all these values were significant at 0,01 level. Therefore, this hypothesis was confirmed.

Table (6): The EFL Self-Esteem Scale Effect Sizes of the Experimental Group as a Whole in the Pre-Posttest Results

Self-esteem dimensions	Group	M	S.D	Eta-square	Effect Size
Language ability	Pre	9.63	1.79	0.74	Medium .62
	Post	16.5	4.12		
In- Class Relationship	Pre	10.3	1.97	0.74	Medium 0.61
	Post	16.9	3.83		
Attitude towards behavior in the EFL class	Pre	9.06	1.77	0.87	Large 0.75
	Post	17.8	3.17		
Total	Pre	29.0	3.52	0.88	Large 0.8
	Post	51.3	7.71		

Significant at (0.01)

5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The following outcomes could arise from reporting the statistical tables:

The experimental group did better than the control group on the EFL creative writing skills test after administering the program. According to the findings of the EFL creative writing skills test, the post-administration performed better than the pre-administration.

The inquiry-based learning and reflective thinking program had a large effect size on the experimental participants' overall main skills of EFL creative writing skills test results.

The experimental group did better than the control group on the EFL self-esteem skills scale after administering the program. According to the findings of the EFL self-esteem skills scale, the post-administration performed better than the pre-administration.

The inquiry-based learning and reflective thinking program had a large effect size on the experimental participants' overall main skills of EFL self-esteem skills scale results.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study made the following recommendations based on its findings and findings:

To teach EFL creative writing, EFL secondary teachers must be trained in appropriate activities and procedures. More time in English language teaching should be spent to strengthen the learners' EFL creative writing skills. Secondary EFL teachers should be encouraged by their supervisors to focus on their students' EFL creative writing skills and boost their self-esteem abilities.

By implementing inquiry-based learning and reflective thinking methodologies, teachers can shift their roles from being the sole information provider to that of a facilitator, guide, monitor, and consultant. It is advisable for the students to learn to be assertive and set a challenge for them in order to enhance their ability to overcome any difficulties they may encounter in their EFL learning journey.

The students might need to try not to compare themselves to others too much because it may demotivate them and do more practice in in EFL creative writing. Up whenever they have the chance to do so.

Students should be grouped in EFL classes according to several criteria, such as: pairs, small groups, or the micro classes. The EFL secondary instructors should receive a sufficient training on a variety of assessment techniques, including participation, group activities, speeches, presentations, and self-evaluation.

Teachers are preferable to encourage their high-school students to put the new vocabulary in more meaningful contexts such as narrating, or acting some situations using these new vocabularies.

Teachers are preferred to expose their students to a variety of writing genres such as poetry, novels, comics, and short stories to excel in the craft of creative writing which require a set of skills that can be acquired through practicing some activities related to these genres of writing. Teachers are advisable to train their high school students on standing confidently in front of an audience and show them their authentic and novel pieces of writing.

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