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**Faculty of Education**

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**A Program Based on the Inquiry Approach to Develop the EFL  
Majors' Language Performance at Al-Azhar University in Palestine**

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**Abstract**

The current research aims at developing EFL Majors' language performance in general, and writing in particular at Al- Azhar University in Palestine in the light of the inquiry approach. To achieve this, a group of 3<sup>rd</sup> year, English department students (n=30) participated in the study. The researcher designed a writing performance test of 6 components; identifying main ideas, posing questions, paraphrasing, narrating, problem-solving and argumentation. The pretest revealed that most of the participants' writing performance was not up to the required level. Therefore, the researcher engaged them in a program based on the inquiry approach which took place in the academic year 2017-2018. This study employed the one group experimental design along with mixed research approach incorporating quantitative and qualitative analyses. After treatment, the post-test showed that there was a significant development in students' writing performance. Furthermore, the participants showed positive reflections towards the program. The study findings indicated the effect of the program in developing the participant's writing performance. In light of these findings, the researcher stated some pedagogical implications, limitations and recommendations

**Keywords:** *inquiry approach, language performance, writing performance*



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# Chapter One

## Background and Problem

### Introduction

It has become clear that education reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should focus on students' performance in all aspects of learning. This elicits the students' self-direction and independence. The need to teach students to perform and act well in foreign language is essential for successful learning.

The concept of performance grounded in Hymes (1972), quoted by Newby (2011) refers to the actual use of language. It includes students' responses either in an oral or a written form (Abbott & Wren, 2016). The importance of integration of oral and writing areas is emphasized by Rivard and Straw (2000) who indicated that many studies in the fields of oral and written performance get benefits of both of them. The role of language performance is evident in creating a real-life situation for learner to practice language performance. According to the study of both Nation and Newton (2009), learners should write and speak about issues that they are familiar with and use communication strategies so as to convey messages to someone else.

Language performance integrates both oral and written areas. However, it might be beneficial to deal with the written aspects in order to make it easier for assessment. At the same time the target functions imply the integration of both oral and written activities such as arguments, questioning, group dynamic activities through the students' preparation of providing evidences, comparing cases, discovering contradictions, criticizing, and asking questions (Harpaz, 2013).

It is worth mentioning that writing comes out naturally with oral activities. Also, it could be helpful for some inspiration after oral activities. However, oral performance may follow writing which makes the discussion more evidence-based. This finding provides empirical evidence verifying several scholars' hypothesis about

the value of the use of talk and writing in sequence (Berland & McNeill, 2010; Jimenez & Erduran, 2008).

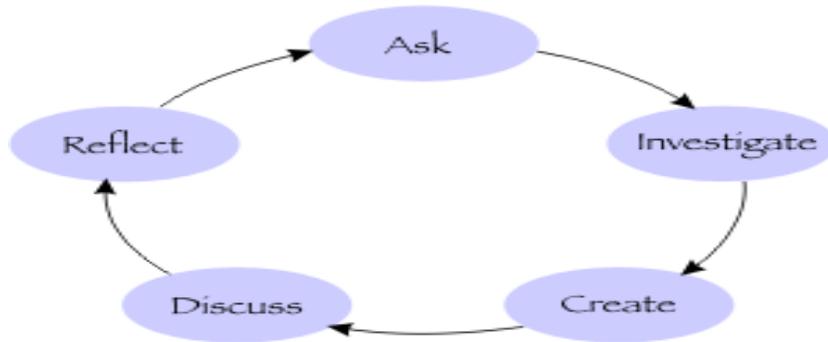
The significance of using writing performance to assist students in the construction of knowledge is emphasized by Torrance, Galbraith and Waes (2007) who stated that writing is not just a speech written down. But it also includes understanding the processes involved in producing and evaluating thoughts rather than the processes involved in translating thoughts into the language.

Due to the importance of writing performance, students should be given the opportunities that would develop their writing performance. Therefore, it is important to shed light on some strategies and techniques that may enhance the students' writing performance. The following areas may be included in the inquiry approach:

- Developing student-centered approach (Renau, 2016).
- Improving critical thinking (Duran & Dokme, 2016).
- Increasing higher order thinking (Lin & Kharrufa, 2014).
- Presenting authentic communication (Hart & Lee, 2003).
- Offering hands-on activities (Hart & Lee, 2003).
- Generating students' questions (Hart & Lee, 2003).
- Giving priority to evidence, explanation, and justification (NRC, 2000).
- Engaging students in analyzing concrete data for writing tasks (Graham & Perin, 2007).
- Providing activities that guide learners to generate meaningful questions (Ismail, 2006).

Inquiry-based engages students in learning activities which are based on constructivism theory. The focus shifted from teacher-led to student-centered learning (Ozmon & Craver, 2008). In the opening phases of the inquiry approach, educators

may support learners' success by activating or building their background knowledge. So, the teacher's role is to present puzzling events, question, or problem whereas the students formulate hypotheses, collect data, test the hypotheses, draw conclusions, and reflect on the original problem (Banchi & Bell, 2008; Lasley et al. 2002; Woolfolk, 2013).



*Figure 1.* Inquiry Based Learning Cycle (Dewey, 1910).

As far as is shown above by inquiry cycle diagram, it is noticed that it comes up with five stages where asking comes at the first in whichh students try to prepare their tasks and formulate meaningful questions about a problem or topic they have to discuss. Next, investigating, in which students get together in sub-groups and narrow the topic, is called information-gathering step. Then comes creating; in which students are to make connections. After that comes discussing, in which such new discoveries are shared with other members of their sub-group. At this phase, students meet the purpose of their research and start comparing notes and discussing conclusions with members. The final stage is reflecting, in which students get together once again in order to analyze once more the whole research process and the conclusions made, including the information received by online collaborators. They also prepare for the final written reports and oral group presentations. It is indicated that inquiry cycle moves through different phases; asking, investigating, creating, discussion and reflecting (Dewey, 1910 & Pedaste et al., 2015).