

## The Impact of Overseas Learning Experience on EFL Teachers' Performance in Oral English Course

Li Qin<sup>1\*</sup>, Lubna Ali Mohammed<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1&2</sup> Faculty of Creative Arts and Design Lincoln College University of Malaysia

\*Corresponding author's e-mail: [675397275@qq.com](mailto:675397275@qq.com)

### ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of overseas learning experience on oral English teaching in China, focusing on the cognitive learning theory's application. Despite varying oral English teaching abilities among teachers, the research investigates whether overseas experiences enhance teaching effectiveness. The cognitive-code approach, emphasizing meaningful practice over rote memorization, is central to this study. This approach encourages learners to actively use language for self-expression and meaning making rather than merely focusing on grammar and vocabulary. The research, conducted in application-type universities in Henan province, involves 20 oral English teachers and includes a self-administered questionnaire for students. This questionnaire collects demographic data, evaluates teaching performance, and gauges reactions to teaching approaches. Observations of teaching practices also contribute to the data. The study aims to compare teaching performances of teachers with and without overseas experience and to assess the effectiveness of the cognitive approach in these settings. Results suggest that teachers with overseas experience generally perform better, effectively implementing the cognitive approach. Data analysis, performed using SPSS, includes frequency, mean, and crosstab analyses to evaluate teaching performance and the relationship between students' English levels and their evaluations of their teachers. The study concludes that overseas learning experience positively impacts the ability to teach oral English using cognitive methods, promoting better self-expression and practical language use among learners.

**Keywords:** *Cognitive Approach; English-Speaking; Oral English Teaching; Overseas Learning Experience*

### Background

China has the largest English-speaking population in the world by year 2016 (Fu & Matoush, 2012). The

large number of English speakers and English learners does not change the fact that the English teaching in China leads to “deaf English” and “dumb English” (Lin,2002). (Zhang,2007) The vocabulary of some Chinese English learners might be larger than that of some native speakers. However, they do not know how to express themselves in English. Due to many reasons, people might not learn English well in middle school or in colleges. Even the Chinese Ministry of Education has published College English Curriculum Requirements (2007) to state that the students’ ability to use English should be in an all-round way in the college level (Fang, 2010). However, the oral English level of English learners in China might not be improved quickly. There are certain requirements for teachers' teaching ability, therefore, whether the oral English teacher have overseas learned experience has a great influence for the students’ class performance.

This research aims to find out the influence of overseas learning experience on teaching performance. The research would compare teachers with the overseas learning experience and teachers without overseas learning experience. The comparison can be located at the pronunciation of the teachers, the cultural background knowledge and the most important is the cognitive teaching approach in the classes (Condon, 2008). As discussed before, cultural background knowledge and cognitive teaching approach are important elements which will influence on students’ performance in English learning. Therefore, these two elements will be considered. Besides, oral English teachers are expected to have a better pronunciation to help students to speak English correctly. Thus, this element would be considered. Language should be considered as the communicative tool. For achieving this purpose, researchers have made different studies to find out how to teach English effectively and make learners to use English as the communicative tool smoothly. Cognitive approach is one of the research results so far. This paper would try to find out whether the overseas learning experience can help teachers to perform better with cognitive approach. In China, the product approach and process approach might be used. In the school, the testing and examination would be used for measuring the learners’ achievement in English learning (Cheng, 2008) Cognitive teaching approach might change this situation. Thus, the research is interested in how teachers with and without overseas learning experiences use cognitive teaching approach in private learning institutions.

In this part, the author will focus on the theoretical discussion of the cognitive approach, the teaching approaches using in oral English teaching in China and the overseas learning experience. As mentioned, one of the major problems in English teaching in China at present is the dumb English and deaf English. In this part, the author would try to discuss the theories and previous studies about the teaching approaches in China. Through this way, the author would try to find out how the cognitive approach has been implemented in the oral English courses and what kind of elements would influence on the implementation of cognitive approach. Overseas learning experience is one of the elements the author assumes to have the influence on the using of cognitive approach in the oral English courses. Borg and Alshumaimeri (2012) have pointed out that the Grammar-Translation method is not enough for fulfilling the demand of social communication. It can be the worst outcome that English learners need to translate what they want to say from Chinese to English and then correct the grammar mistakes in the translation. Cognitive approach is a relatively young teaching approach in the English learning and teaching field. According to Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012), there has room for cognitive approach to improve as the new grammar-translation method.

According to Moussu & Llurda, (2008), most of the English teachers worldwide are non-native English speakers. However, the research about the teaching performance of these teachers has not been carried out until 1990s. These non-native English speakers might not live in the native English-speaking environment. Thus, their English-speaking ability might be learnt from textbooks only. However, when the non-native English speakers enter the native English-speaking environment, they would find that

their own knowledge about English and their experiences are undervalued. They need to face to the cultural challenges and local linguistic challenges (Ryan & Viète, 2009). Besides, some English sayings might be tracked back with cultural elements. Without knowing the cultural elements and without living in certain cultural environment, English teachers themselves might not use these phrases or sayings fluently. The overseas learning might give the intercultural learning experience to these overseas students. According to Gill (2007), there are three steps in the intercultural learning process of Chinese postgraduate students in Kindling stress, adaption and growth. With the overseas learning experience, overseas students can improve their knowledge, awareness of the other and refresh their worldview. According to the research made by Zhang, (2014), teachers with overseas learning experience can interact better with their students. The interview with students in the research shows that these students enjoy the classes of the teacher with overseas learning experience. Students would also feel free to express themselves in the class of the teacher with overseas learning experience.

As mentioned above, the English learning in China has a large market. The large population of English learners would also bring out a lot of market opportunities in China (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). In schools, students might need to learn listening, reading, writing and speaking of English. In universities, the English major students might have the oral English courses. However, in the market, there are lots of different oral English products which have turned the oral English learning into commodities, such as the BBC English and Wall Street English. These products might promote the native speakers as the best providers of the best language products (Mahboob & Lin, 2016). It might promote the outcome of the course of making learners to speak native English in a short time. As mentioned above, the English learning outcome in China is deaf English and dumb English. It shows that the oral English teaching in China is weak that learners cannot speak English well. They might recite the conversation in the textbooks, but they cannot have the real time conversation with others. In this circumstance, oral English teaching becomes a weak part in English teaching in China. According to Zhang (2014), most school students cannot pronounce words correctly or speak English fluently. Besides, their listening ability is poor. This kind of students might recite the conversation in the textbook, but they cannot communicate with English fluently. Besides, Zhang (2014) has also pointed out that some students might have the difficulty to speak English in the public. As a communicative tool, learners are expected to speak English fluently with others and in the public. However, in practice, some students might become hesitating in speaking in public although they might speak English fluently in the group activities.

Cognitive-code learning was developed in the 1960s. It was developed for alternating behaviorism. According to the theory of cognitive-code learning, both deductive and inductive learning are important as meaningful practice (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p26). In 1970s, the cognitive-code approach also called cognitive approach has been used in the language learning which has involved active mental processes into the learning process. Different from the grammar-translation method which would focus on the grammatical structure, cognitive-code approach focuses more on the importance of meaningful practice. It is said that cognitive-code approach is the approach for learning English for self-expression and meaning-making. With this approach, the communication would be meaningful and for learners' real purpose. Besides the cognitive-code approach includes free writing, writing extended narratives, writing poetry and publishing student writing. The publication of student writing is important because it would give the real reason to the writers and purpose of language use. With cognitive approach, learning English can have the real meaning. It does not mean how many words the learners can spell or how many grammars points the learners can recite. It is about how the learners can express their idea through English. Learning English is to acquire the vehicle of language for expressing their mind.

## Methods

In this research, the observation and questionnaire would be used for primary data collection. In this research, it has the self-administered questionnaire among the target respondents. The self-administered questionnaire can give the comprehensive view of the attitudes, beliefs and values of respondents. The respondents would choose the answers according to their experiences without worrying about to be known by others. The author would give the questionnaire after the oral English courses. The respondents would finish their questionnaires alone. The teachers and other learners would not know their view about the teaching performance of the teachers. However, the questionnaire might show the attitude of the respondents only. It might not be so objective enough because the satisfaction of the learners would be different. The satisfaction of customers might influence on their attitude towards the teacher and the judgement of the teachers' performance.

There are different types of observations, including structured-unstructured, disguised-undisguised and direct-indirect observation, etc. (Beri, Kaushik & Rahman 2020). In this research, the author would have the structured disguised observation. The structure observation means that the author would have a certain table to check the performance of the teachers. In the table, the author would list some variables, such as the pronunciation, the using of phrases and the teaching approach using. The way the teachers for helping the learners to practice would also be judged by the author. The disguised observation means that the subjects will not know they are observed. In this circumstance, the teachers and learners would perform as usual. If the author attended the courses, both teachers and learners might have the sense of participation. And they might perform more positively than usual. Therefore, the author will not notice them about the observation but will tell them that they are invited to take part in a questionnaire. For seeing, the author will place a cell phone on the back of the classroom. With the live-time conversation function of WeChat, the author can monitor the whole class and view the real-time teaching performance of the teachers.

The author will observe the teaching performance based on the following table. With this table, the author will give the score to the performance of the teacher in each variable. The variables are designed based on the basic requirement of English teaching ability, such as pronunciation, and the eight principle of cognitive teaching approach concluded by Zhu & Shu (2017). The observation result can be considered as the feeling of the author about the teaching performance. The author does not know these teachers; thus, the author would not have the perceived image about the teacher and the teaching performance. It can be considered more objective than the evaluation made by the learners. The observation and questionnaire would support each other. Observation is how the author felt about the performance of teachers in class. However, it is possible that the teacher might not perform well that day. Thus, the observation of the author might have certain errors. In this circumstance, the observation might not represent the true ability of the teachers. Thus, the questionnaire would be needed. Students can make the statement about the teacher's performance. The results from questionnaire would show the performance of teachers in a certain period. Students would make the statement based on teachers' performance in classes instead of one class. Therefore, the statement can show the average performance of teachers. As a result, without either observation or questionnaire might make the whole research to be less objective.

**Table 1: Teaching Performance**

Variables	Score (1 as minimum, 10 as maximum)	Remarks
Pronunciation		
Using of phrases		
Professional Knowledge		
Interaction with learners		

Design of the conversation		
Guidance for the practice		
Way to indicate the grammar rule		
Way to introduce the new language points		
Way to correct errors		
Way to conclude		
Overall performance		

There are different variables for measuring and evaluating teachers' performance in classes. According to Hanushek, Piopiunik & Wiederhold, (2014), the cognitive skills of teachers can have the positive influence on student's performance. The variable of cognitive teaching approach might not be identified clearly in previous research. Previous research might focus on how teachers would guide students to find out the non-routine problem solutions and to form the systems thinking. The key for the cognitive teaching approach is to help students to have the ability for further self-study and to find out the solution by themselves under the guidance of teachers (Greenstein,2012). For different fields of teaching, the cognitive teaching approach variables might be similar but also different in details. In this research, the author would make the variables as shown in Table 1 based on the basic requirement of cognitive teaching approach and practice details in oral English teaching and learning.

In the questionnaire part, there will be about three parts in the questionnaire, including the demographic information, the evaluation about the teaching performance and the reaction of the teaching approach. The eight principles of cognitive teaching approach concluded by Shu (2014) are also used for designing the questions in the reaction of the teaching approach. In the demographic part, the author will ask the respondents about their age, their career, their English level and their purpose of learning English in the course. In the teaching performance evaluation, the author will ask the respondents about the performance of the teachers in the pronunciation, the using of phrases, the knowledge about western countries and the interaction with the learners. The performance of teachers will be marked by the learners. In this part, one is the lowest score while ten is the highest score. In the third part, the author will ask the questions which are about the points in the cognitive approach. The respondents only need to answer yes or no to the question. Through this way, the author will know how the cognitive approach is used by different teachers.

The data collected in this research is the data of the observation and the data of questionnaire. The questionnaire data is analyzed through SPSS. The author will combine the observation result and the questionnaire result for analyzing the impact of overseas learning experience on the teaching performance and teaching approach using.

## Results and Discussion

For the results, the author analyses the data from questionnaires through SPSS. The data is analyzed through frequency, mean and crosstab. The author analyzed the data from different classes separately and then the overall situation is also analyzed. In the frequency part, the author analyses the overall situation of the learners in this research. Also, the author analyses the judgement of the learners made about the using of cognitive approach of teachers in the course. In the mean part, the author calculates the average mean of all the learners given to their teachers and the average score of the teachers in each class. In crosstab part, the author analyses the relationship between learners' English levels with their overall satisfaction with the course.

**Table 2: Frequency of All Learners**

Item	Frequency	Percent age
Grade		
Grade One	9	22.5%
Grade Two	18	45%
Grade Three	7	17.5%
Grade Four	6	15%
Major		
Liberal Arts and Sciences	10	25%
General Studies	8	20%
Humanities	9	22.5%
Engineering Programs	7	17.5%
Science specialty	6	15%
English Level		
Middle School Level/ Preliminary	20	50%
CET-4/ First for School	9	22.5%
IELTS/Advanced	6	15%
Proficiency	5	12.5%

From table 2, it can find that most of the students (67%) in grades one and two are mainly focus on learning English, the students who are learning liberal arts and sciences, humanities are likely to learn English (47.5%), the English level of the students are mainly about middle school level.

According to this research, the author has found that the teachers with overseas learning experience might perform better in the overall field. They can use cognitive approach better than the other two teachers without overseas learning experience. However, their performance in pronunciation and the using of phrases might not have much difference. Besides, the pronunciation might not be an important issue in the oral English learning as mentioned in the literature review part. Learning how to express the idea and to speak correctly can be more important than pronouncing the words correctly. According to this research, the author has found that all the teachers would implement the cognitive approach. However, due to the teaching experience and the personal habit, they might implement the cognitive approach differently. The teachers with overseas learning experiences would also have rich teaching experience before went aboard. Therefore, they might form the teaching style and use the cognitive approach fluently in the courses.

## Conclusions

Different experience and different certificate of these teachers might lead to the different performance in using cognitive approach. All the teachers can implement the cognitive approach in certain level. The teachers with overseas learning experience implement the cognitive approach better than the other two teachers. The two teachers with overseas learning experience would also have rich teaching experience in university.

The research indicates minimal differences in the use of cognitive approaches between teachers with and without overseas learning experience. Teachers with overseas experience excel in identifying knowledge points, guiding practice, and helping learners identify errors, whereas teachers without such experience may struggle in these areas, often focusing on introducing knowledge points and correcting errors immediately. Both groups perform well in basic English skills like pronunciation. Additionally, teachers with overseas experience create a more active class atmosphere. The study concludes that teaching experience and personal style influence the use of cognitive approaches, with overseas experience having a notable impact. However, the research is limited by a small sample size, particularly the

number of participating teachers, making it difficult to group them based on variables like educational background, overseas experience, and teaching experience. More substantial comparisons within these groups are necessary for persuasive conclusions about the impact of overseas learning on cognitive approach usage.

Secondly, the reflections of the teachers are mainly by different groups of learners. The learners in one class might not know the performance of teachers in other classes. In this circumstance, the learners might not have the reference for making the evaluation and scoring. In the further research, it should arrange the same group of learners to evaluate different teachers' performance. Learners can have the comparison of different teachers' performance. In the further research, more teachers and learners should be involved to provide a more persuasive conclusion.

## Declarations

**Ethics Approval & Consent to Participate:** Not applicable.

**Conflict of Interest:** Not applicable.

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