

The British Council and Al-Azhar English Training Centre in the Teaching of English: Is it a Developing Partnership?

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Abstract:

This study aims to investigate the relationship between the British Council Egypt and Al-Azhar English Training Centre through examining the impact of English language teaching on Egyptian English language teachers and students. This study used the questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. In addition, this study used mixed method approach for the analysis of closed and open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The sample of this study include English language teachers and students from Al-Azhar English Training Centre. After the analysis of the gathered data from questionnaire, the major findings of this study reveal that there is a developing and continuous relationship between the British Council and the Centre through the positive attitudes of English language teachers and learners towards this partnership and their desire towards the teaching and learning of English language in Egypt.

Keywords: Al-Azhar English Training Centre; British Council; English Language

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1. Introduction:

The British Council Egypt is considered as one of the oldest operations and the first office to be established in North Africa and the Middle East. It was established in 1938 for the purpose of spreading English language, culture and values worldwide. The British Council Egypt sought to create partnerships with the Egyptian universities as a part of its cultural policy mainly in the teaching of English language for the Egyptian students. One of the most important partnerships is Al-Azhar and the British Council Partnership that was initiated in 2007. The main focus of this partnership is boosting English language teaching education through the continuous support of Al-Azhar English Training Centre (AAETC) that works on the professional development of English language teaching and learning for both teachers and students and offering UK- Al-Azhar scholarships for Al-Azhar PhD students and Masters in collaboration with the British Embassy (British Council Egypt, 2020).

1. Research Problem

In the last decade, The British Council Egypt succeeded in entrenching its cultural policy in English language teaching in Higher education systems. However, its continuous presence and impact is prone to question chiefly in its partnerships with the Egyptian universities especially with the existence of other educational programs for the teaching of English such as the U.S programs that became popular in Egypt.

3. Research Questions

1. Does the British Council still have an effect on the Teaching of English language in Egypt?
2. Is the British Council and Al-Azhar English Training Centre in a continuous relationship?

3. How do the Egyptian teachers and students perceive the British Council and Al-Azhar English Training Centre Partnership?

4. Research Objectives

1. To examine the effect of the British Council in the teaching of English in Egypt.
2. To investigate the relationship between the British Council and Al-Azhar English Training Centre.
3. To examine the attitudes of the Egyptian teachers and students towards the British Council and Al-Azhar English Training Centre in the teaching of English.

5. The Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will hopefully redound to the benefit of the existing literature on the spread of British language and culture and their influence on their former colonies and protectorates in the presence of other educational programs for the teaching of English language.

6. A Historical Background:

6.1. The British Council and Al-Azhar University Partnership

This partnership between the two started in 2007, this initiative was proposed by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and the president of the university to promote for the teaching of English language at the English Language Training Centre. One of the pillars of the British Council for introducing such programme was and still the teaching of English language and helping learners in engaging in an intercultural dialogue with other cultures. Al-Azhar English Training Centre (AAETC) states that more than 1200 are studying at the Centre and more than 700 have graduated. In addition, over 600 students are studying at the Centre and 73% of students have an average level in learning English and graduated at B1 and above. The British Council



also worked on the training of teachers in which all of them have passed the test of knowledge through Al-Azhar Institutes- Schools Training Programme where teacher receive training through Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in enhancing their methods in teaching English (British Council Egypt, 2019).

6.2. Al-Azhar English Training Centre

The Al-azhar English Training Centre (AAETC) is an English language teaching Centre at Al-Azhar University, it was a result of a partnership between British Council Egypt and Al-Azhar University for teaching English and improving students skills. The Centre was established in 2008 supervised by the British Council. The purpose of the Centre was to provide the students the opportunity explain Islam abroad, especially to non-Muslims, as well as training Egyptian teachers in teaching methods and skills. Through the Centre and English language teaching/ learning both teachers and students will improve their skills and knowledge in English language and this will provide them with the opportunity with a better understanding of their culture and religion and other cultures. The Centre includes 580 enrolled students, 450 graduates, their total is 980 students. The center selects top students in their departments and enables them to speak about their culture and their religion by teaching them English and sending them to study abroad in Oxford, Durham, etc (AAETC, Al-Azhar University, 2017).

6.3. Al-Azhar University:

The Al-azhar English Training Centre (AAETC) is an English language teaching Centre at Al-Azhar University, it was a result of a partnership between British Council Egypt and Al-Azhar University for teaching English and improving students skills. The Centre was established in 2008 supervised by the British Council. The purpose of

the Centre was to provide the students the opportunity explain Islam abroad, especially to non-Muslims, as well as training Egyptian teachers in teaching methods and skills. Through the Centre and English language teaching/ learning both teachers and students will improve their skills and knowledge in English language and this will provide them with the opportunity with a better understanding of their culture and religion and other cultures. The Centre includes 580 enrolled students, 450 graduates, their total is 980 students. The center selects top students in their departments and enables them to speak about their culture and their religion by teaching them English and sending them to study abroad in Oxford, Durham, etc (AAETC, Al-Under the rule of the president Gamal Abdel Nasser, Al-Azhar was approved as a university with the establishment of many faculties such as economics, science, pharmacy and medicine, ...etc (Al-Azhar University, 2020).

Al-Azhar was known as the oldest Islamic Centre established first by the Shia Fatimids in the tenth century and later it was a Sunni establishment under the Ayyubids. This versatility made it an intellectual Center by excellence and this led students from Africa and Asia pursue their studies there for gaining knowledge. Later on, Al-Azhar developed its educational system by adding more secular subjects, making it an important institution in the Arab and Islamic world (Hamed A.Ead, 2019). Azhar University, 2017).

6.4. British Council Egypt: A Historical Overview

Since its establishment in 1938 as of the first Council offices, the British Council works in the “arts, English and education”. The British Council overall aim is “teaching English and delivering UK qualifications in Egypt are a key part of what we do” (British Council, 2019).

The annual report of 2011-2012 estimated that their work “reached 93,308 people face-to-face including: 17,173 learners in our two teaching centres in Agouza and Heliopolis, 41,221 unique examination candidates taking UK qualifications with us, 34,914 people engaged in our other programmes in arts, English, education and society” (British Council Annual Report, 2011-2012, p. 3). The British Council continues in its development throughout the years in which the British Council’s learners increased from 198 million in 2016–17 to 222 million in 2017–18 including Egypt (British Council Annual Report, 2017-2018, p.2).

7. Research Methodolgy and Design

7.1. Method

In this section, the participants, instruments, and data collection procedures used in this study are presented. The method used is descriptive-analytical method descriptive analysis was needed first to clarify our basic understanding of the key aspects of the phenomenon of this study (Loeb, et.al, 2017, p.2).That is, this dissertation used descriptive analytical method to answer the research questions about who, what, where, when, and to what extent” (p.1).

7.2. Mixed Methods Approach

Tashakori and Teddlie (1998) and Akker et al. (2007), state that it is crucial to use the two approaches and mixed methods in order to cover the research problem and to have a better and thorough understanding of data analysis. Furthermore, the methodology used is a mixture of qualitative, quantitative, and descriptive studies in which quantitative method is used to strengthen the qualitative data because research show that quantitative data reinforces qualitative data (Creswell, 2011, 279).

7.3. The Research Instrument

This study used the questionnaire for data collection Kumar also defines “a **questionnaire** is a written list of questions, the answers to which are recorded by respondents. In a questionnaire respondents read the questions, interpret what is expected and then write down the answers” (2011,p. 138).

7.4. Participants

Teachers and mainly students were chosen from higher education because most of them prefer or already study in the British Council or U.S educational programs and Al-Azhar English Training Centre that already is in a partnership with the British Council for teaching English. Concerning the level, all levels of students were included starting from Bachelor degree to PhD degree. The sample included 208 participants who answered the closed questions and 90 participants who answered the open-ended questions.

First, the researcher chose the population of Al-Azhar university students and teachers of English and the sample from Al-Azhar English Training Centre (AATC) in addition to other Egyptian universities. The choice of the research settings was random, for example, teachers and students were chosen from higher education because most of them prefer or already study in the British Council and Al-Azhar English Training Centre that already is in a partnership with the British Council for teaching English.

In the first section, the participants have to mention their gender, institution or university and their academic level. In the second section, there were questions about the historical background about Al-Azhar English Training Centre, starting with:

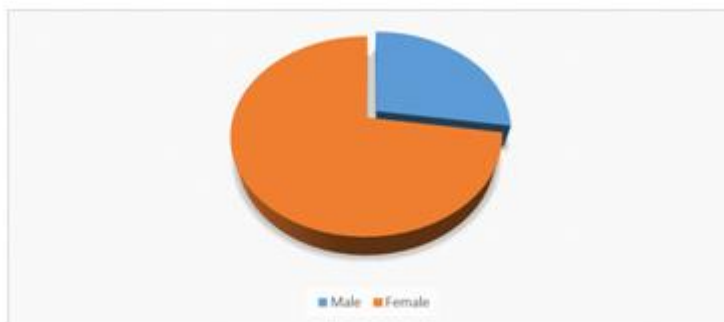
1. What was the central aim of Al-Azhar English Training Centre at the time it was founded?

2. What is the relationship between the British Council and Al-Azhar English Training Centre?
3. As a teacher of AAETC, what do you think were the most important aspects of your experience there?
4. As a student of AAETC, what do you think were the most important aspects of your experience there?

Table No. (01): Distribution of the sample by Gender

Country	Egypt		
	Fr ¹	%	Fr
Male	57	27.4	94
Female	151	72.6	86
Total	208	100	86

Figure No. (01): The distribution of the sample according to gender for Egyptian teachers and students



Source: Based on the outputs of the program (SPSS.V26).

The Egyptian students under study are distributed to 27.4% males and 72.6% females. And given that most of the items in the sample are Egyptians, most of the components of the sample are in favor of females with a percentage of 61.09%, compared to only 38.91% for the male category.

Table No (01): Descriptive Analysis of the Data of Egyptian Students and Teachers

Axes	Strongly disagree → Strongly agree					M ²	S ³	T ⁴
	%							
	1	2	3	4	5			
English Language Teaching (ELT) is very popular among Egyptian schools and universities.	1.9	2.4	5.3	32.2	58.2	4.42	0.85	<u>5</u>
Egyptian students are willing to learn English	2.9	1.0	14.9	50.0	31.2	4.05	0.57	<u>4</u>

Learning English is important for future jobs.	1.9	0	0	14.4	83.7	4.77	0.63	<u>5</u>
Total General	2.3	1.23	6.7	32.2	57.6	4.41	0.59	<u>5</u>
The British Council is the most popular institution in teaching English in Egypt.	1.0	5.8	11.5	47.1	34.6	4.08	0.88	<u>4</u>
The British Council is very useful for learning English and it helps in studying abroad.	1.0	1.9	9.6	43.3	44.2	4.27	0.79	<u>5</u>
The British Council is still having an influence in ELT since its establishment in 1938.	1.0	3.3	13.5	53.4	28.8	4.05	0.80	<u>4</u>

Source: Based on the outputs of the program (SPSS.V26).

The general trend towards learning English

The arithmetic mean values for this axis ranged between two values (4.05 and 4.77), including scores: 4: Agree (one paragraph), 5:

Strongly agree (two paragraphs), and this confirms that most of the answers focused on these two degrees, as:

- The percentage of answers that focused at a degree of agreement represented 32.2% of the total trends.
- The percentage of answers that were concentrated in a strongly agreeable degree represented 57.6% of the total trends.
- The remaining percentage (10.2%) was distributed among the rest of the degrees.

The value of the general arithmetic mean for the axis as a whole was 4.41 at a degree of strong agreement with standard deviations that ranged between 0.57 and 0.85 for the paragraphs and 0.59 for the total degree of the axis, which means that there is homogeneity and agreement that shows a general trend governing the answers of the sample items regarding this axis at the degree of agreement strongly.

The General Trend Towards the British Council:

The arithmetic mean values for this axis were limited between two values (3.11 and 4.27), including the degrees 3: neutral (one paragraph), 4: agree (four paragraphs), 5: strongly agree (one paragraph), with most of the answers focused on agreeing and strongly agreeing as :

- The percentage of answers that were concentrated at a degree of agreement represented 42.5% of the total trends.
- The percentage of responses that were concentrated in a strongly agreeable degree represented 24.7% of the total trends.

The remaining percentage (32.8%) was distributed among the rest of the scores.

The general arithmetic mean value of the axis as a whole was 3.77 at the degree of agreement with standard deviations that ranged between 0.72 and 0.90 for the paragraphs and 0.58 for the total degree of the axis, which means that there is homogeneity and agreement that shows a general trend governing the answers of the sample items regarding this axis at the degree of agreement.

The Second Part: The Open-ended questions:

The questionnaire included open-ended questions for the participants about the history of the relationship between the British Council Egypt and Al-Azhar English Training Centre. This section provides the questions and the major answers of the participants.

Question 01: What was the central aim of Al-Azhar English Training Centre at the time it was founded?

1. Enhancement of its students and employees' English language
2. Preparing Alazhar students to do their post graduate studies abroad
3. Improving english
4. Learn More about the language
5. Preparing a generation of Alazhar graduates who can travel abroad to do post graduate studies and show the real image of Islam.
6. Helping us to improve our skills
7. To educate English Language
8. Making students be ready to debate on the Islamic studies with another non-Muslim
9. Preparing a generation of Alazhar graduates who can travel abroad to do post graduate studies and show the real image of Islam.
10. Teaching Al-Azhar students languages such as the English language and especially the faculties of sharia , Law and the

Origins of Religion and Arabic languages so that they can teach foreigners Islam. Al-Azhar can also publish all languages, including French and computer training courses

11. its aim was to make the student of the centre to be able to discuss and explain Islamic matters.
 12. The main aim is to teach English language for the student and to develop their skills.
2. What is the relationship between the British Council and Al-Azhar English Training Centre?
1. cooperation
 2. Training these students in it
 3. To upskill staff of the AAETC, and more widely English teachers at Azhari institutions, to allow them to teach English more effectively, with particular attention to English for Interfaith Dialogue
 4. Providing the Centre with its needs of high quality training for the Centre teachers.
 5. A partnership
 6. Partnership
 7. There is a contract between them, the centre teaches us and the British Council support the center with teachers then when we end all levels it gives us the certificate.
 8. Al Azhar English Training Centre was founded with the support of the British Council.
 9. At the past before I enrolled in it, There was a huge relationship between both of them that you can say the AAETC is only a branch of the British Council. It has provided all the materials, instructors and management. Now, it's definitely different. The only relationship between them that British Council provides only the materials and provides exams for students.
 10. It is like a cooperation in educating



11. complementary relationship
 12. Cooperation
 13. It's a protocol of cooperation and transferring experiences.
 14. A coordination between Alazhar and BC to raise the level of teachers
-
3. As a teacher of AAETC, what do you think were the most important aspects of your experience there?
 1. As a trainer, the privilege of understanding a lot more about Islam and Egypt, and the kindness of all the students and staff.
 2. I have become more organized having plan B for every thing.
 3. Interaction
 4. Teaching English for communication not only for exam purposes
 5. listening
 6. Developing my language skills.
 7. Gained more contact & confidence that helps me with teaching
 8. I am a researcher everyday
 9. I can express my opinions that may be benefited from the researcher
 10. Training
 4. As a student of AAETC, what do you think were the most important aspects of your experience there?
 1. The advanced E courses and soft skills
 2. Improve my skills
 3. And I see that in my studies there, the center has a lot of things like professors of language, but I would have liked to have a more intensive curriculum, especially in listening and reading, and it would have been nice to have chat rooms for students

4. we learn a second language beside our native one which is good for us in the future with work and our studies, also it focuses on discussing and explaining Islamic matters especially to non-muslims.
 5. The most amazing experience that i had that I worked on my own to develop my public speaking and the Centre provide me the time to present that and also my instructor showed me my wrong to work on it.
 6. Improve my level
 7. listening
 8. Motivation for learning English.
 9. To try to know more
 - 10.Receiving new skills
5. Are you satisfied with the partnership between British Council and Al-Azhar English Language Training Centre in ELT? Why?

Discussion of the Results:

The Students` Attitudes Towards the Learning of English:

The respondents' attitudes towards learning English language were positive in which 83.7% of respondents choose the expression “ As a student, learning English is important for my future, thus they welcome the idea of teaching English in the Egyptian Educational system and in studying in private institutions in which 58.2% of the participants agreed strongly on the idea that “ English language Teaching (ELT) is very popular among Egyptian schools and universities”, this proves that 31.2% agreed on “ Egyptian students are willing to learn English”.

Students and Teachers Attitudes towards the British Council:



The results obtained demonstrate that most of students and teachers in Egypt (42%) agreed on the fact that “the British Council is the most popular institution in English language Teaching in Egypt and 34.6% strongly agreed and choose the British Council for learning English as well. In which 43.3% agree and 44.2 strongly agree on studying abroad is what motivates them in learning English at the British Council Egypt. This may prove the that “ the British Council is still having an influence in Egypt since its establishment in 1938” according to 53.4% of respondents who agree with that and 28.8 who strongly agree with the influence of the British Council in Egypt.

The Discussion of the Open-ended Questions:

The aim of these questions was to know the students’ own impression and assessment of the British Council Egypt and if they are satisfied with it or not. The researchers choose few responses that represent the majority of the participants, hence, most of them expressed their satisfaction with the British Council Egypt.

The first question was related to the historical background of the British Council and Al-Azhar English Training Centre (AAETC), in which most respondents answered on the central aim of the partnership and the Centre, that is teaching English language for the Egyptian students and training teachers, thus most of them are aware of the aim of the establishment of the Centre. The second question that was a succession of the first question in terms of the relationship between the British Council and the Centre, most of the respondents agree on the cooperative relationship between the two, thus prove their desire to learn English at the British Council Egypt. As for the third question, the teachers answered and provided their experiences there in which they developed their skills and their methods in English language teaching through attending the training courses at the Centre. The last question that was concerned with the students` experiences



there that stated that the centre was an important step for them in which they learned and improved their language mainly in relation to the religious subjects and this has been one of the core objectives of the British Council and AAETC since its establishment in 2007.

The results mentioned above answer the research questions in which the British Council still has an effect in the teaching of English in which the majority of the respondents have the desire to learn English mainly through the British Council Egypt because most of them still consider the British Council as the most popular institution in Egypt since its establishment in 1938. Henceforth, this proves the continuous and developing relationship of the British Council and AAETC in the teaching of English in which most of them agree and state that the two are in cooperation in the teaching of English, thus their attitudes towards this partnership is positive and they support it. That is, their experiences in the Centre were constructive and positive in the teaching/learning process of English language.

Conclusion:

The purpose of the current study was to examine the nature of the relationship between the British Council Egypt and the AAETC through examining the impact of English language teaching in Egypt. This study used a questionnaire to answer the research questions. The results revealed that the British Council and Al-Azhar English Training Centre are in a developing relationship in the teaching of English in which its cultural policy is still prevalent in Egypt. That is, the results demonstrated that the Egyptian students have the desire in learning English and the British Council Egypt is their first choice, this proves that the British Council is the most popular institution for teaching English in Egypt and its maintenance is achieved through its partnerships mainly with Al-Azhar English Training Centre.



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