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KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Education, Health & Human Services

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION DEFENSE

of

Kevin J. Spence

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Higher Education Administration

UNCOVERING THE COMPLEXITIES OF TEACHING  
ENGLISH IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN A POST-CASTRO CUBA:  
AN INTERPRETIVE, QUALITATIVE STUDY

August 1, 2022

10 a.m.

Room 317 Moulton Hall

Kevin J. Spence

Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language  
University of Delaware, 2012

Master of Science in Journalism  
Columbia University, 2001

Bachelor of Arts in International Studies  
University of South Florida, 1992

Kevin J. Spence is an Academic Success & Global Engagement Specialist who has implemented inventive teacher-training workshops and international student academic programs. He has more than 15 years of ESL/EFL English teaching experience in general, intensive, academic and ESP programs. Since 2018, he has been the director of a student success center and an international student academic writing instructor at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in southwest Indiana. Spence served in 2013/2014 as an English Language Fellow in Kyrgyzstan where he led professional development workshops throughout Central Asia.

Spence has taught intensive academic English at Al Akhawayn University in Morocco, La Universidad del Atlantico in Colombia, the University of Delaware, and the University of Montana in the United States. His current lines of inquiry include comparative and international education, language planning and policy, assessment and evaluation, teacher training and development, English for Specific Purposes, and Intercultural Communication. Spence is former Chair of the Latin America Special Interest Group of the Comparative & International Education Society (CIES) and former NAFSA Indiana State Representative.

Spence, an Intercultural Development Inventory Qualified Administrator, is also a current member of CIES, NAFSA, Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, TESOL, U.S. State Department English Language Fellow Specialist, International Studies Association, College Reading & Learning Association, Cleveland Council on World Affairs and World Affairs Council of Kentucky and Southern Indiana.

## Uncovering the Complexities of Teaching English in Higher Education in a Post-Castro Cuba: An Interpretive, Qualitative Study

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of Cuban higher education English instructors as they navigate a 2015- introduced policy that requires students to be proficient in English as a university-exit requirement. Using Interpretive Qualitative Research, I explained how these instructors defined themselves, and the study includes the consequences of educational borrowing and challenges of conducting research in an illiberal regime.

Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with 12 current or former Cuban university English instructors to determine how they defined their motivation, self-identity, and self-agency. Data were input into qualitative data analysis software and analyzed using qualitative, descriptive codes.

According to my findings, respondents had more positive teaching experiences than negative ones, however, women were more likely than men to report negative experiences. The respondents attributed enjoyable work experiences with being able to communicate with speakers of languages other than Spanish, which lead to an increased cultural awareness. They also saw value in their teaching careers as their students were able to increase their English-language proficiency. Some English faculty, however, found students' ambivalence toward learning English tiresome. They also reported frustration related to outmoded teaching materials, intermittent technological access, and other infrastructural complications.

My study is significant and contributes to a small body of knowledge because of limited Western researchers' access to Cuban education. To advance English language teaching in Cuba, I recommend increasing English instructor exchanges and research collaborations to fill knowledge voids about higher education teaching strategies and classroom procedures.