



Exploring the Impact of the 'Grown Ups' English Program at the Languages Center of Universidad de Córdoba

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Resumen

To explore former students' perceptions about the impact of the "Grown-Ups" English Learning Program on their career goals, life project expectations, and their learning experience at a Language Center of a public university in Colombia is the purpose of a research that arises from various critical considerations that motivated the researchers to answer: how do former students perceive the impact of the "Grown-Ups" English Learning Program on their career goals, life project expectations, and their learning experience at a Language Center of a public university in Colombia?. The findings of this qualitative case study will contribute to the evaluation of the program as a continuous process and the improvement of the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language.

Palabras clave: Perceptions, Impact, Grown Ups English Program, Carrier Goals, Life Project Expectations, Learning Experience.

Justificación

The Languages Center, an outreach institution affiliated with the Research and Outreach Vice-Principal at Universidad de Córdoba, is dedicated to fostering communicative competence in English, French, and Portuguese among individuals spanning children, adolescents, and adults within Monteria and its environs. Comprising approximately 14 locations across various municipalities in the surrounding area, this Center emerged from the university's dedication to instigating societal changes in neighboring communities, particularly in enhancing foreign language acquisition, specifically English skills. Established in 1996 under the aegis of the Faculty of Education, it has steadily expanded, affording myriad individuals the opportunity to engage in foreign language learning.



Aligned with the Colombia Bilingualism program initiated by the National Ministry of Education, this institution has significantly contributed to the advancement of English language proficiency among its participants. The demographic makeup of the Languages Center in Monteria primarily consists of individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, encompassing students enrolled in both private and public educational institutions, alongside professionals and non-professionals.

To gauge the impact of the Grown Ups English Language Program on young learners and adults at the Languages Center of Universidad de Córdoba, an exploratory research study has been proposed. Employing a qualitative approach, this research question is presented:

How do former students perceive the impact of the “Grown-Ups” English Learning Program on their career goals, life project expectations, and their learning experience at a Language Center of a public university in Colombia?

This research endeavor signifies the inaugural project within a series planned by the EduTLan research group, aiming to explore how former students perceive the impact of the “Grown-Ups” English Learning Program on their career goals, life project expectations, and their learning experience at a Language Center of a public university in Colombia.

Enfoque conceptual

Literature Review

The literature review for the study titled "Exploring the Impact of the 'Grown Ups' English Program at the Language Center of Universidad de Córdoba" focuses on relevant research from the past five years on adult English learning programs.

Adult English Learning Programs: An Overview

Adult English learning programs have gained prominence over the past decade due to globalization and the increasing demand for English proficiency across various sectors. As Richards and Rodgers (2019) highlight, adults pursue English learning not only for personal reasons but also to meet professional and academic needs. These programs are designed to enhance adults' linguistic skills, offering opportunities to improve employability and social mobility. A significant body of research explores the motivations of adult learners, indicating that many view English proficiency as crucial for career advancement and academic success (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2020; Ushioda, 2019). As noted by Borg and Al-Busaidi (2020), adult learners often benefit from personalized teaching methods that align with their practical needs and life experiences.

1. National Research in Colombia



In the Colombian context, governmental initiatives such as the National Bilingualism Program have driven interest in English proficiency, aiming to enhance the nation's competitiveness in the global economy. However, the effectiveness of these programs, particularly those targeting adult learners, has been the subject of numerous studies (Montoya & Ortega, 2021; Pérez & García, 2020).

Perceptions of English Programs in Public Universities: A study by Pérez and García (2020) conducted across public universities in Colombia evaluated students' perceptions of English programs. Findings revealed that while students appreciated the quality of English instruction, they often felt unprepared to use the language outside the classroom. The study recommended more contextually relevant curricula, enhanced opportunities for practice, and professional development for educators.

Community-Based Adult English Programs: Research by Martínez and Torres (2021) focused on an English program for adults in a community center in Bogotá. Their qualitative study highlighted that participants saw English learning as a pivotal tool for improving their employment prospects and social integration. However, they faced significant challenges, including limited time due to work and family responsibilities, and insufficient technological resources.

Private Institutions and Adult Learners: In a related study, Gómez and Herrera (2022) explored graduates' perceptions of English programs in private institutions. They found that while most participants felt their English skills had improved substantially, many expressed the need for continued support and opportunities for language practice after the program concluded.

2. International Research

Internationally, research on adult English learning programs has been extensive, with studies addressing both the benefits and challenges faced by adult learners in various cultural and economic contexts.

Motivations and Experiences in South Korea: Kim and Elder (2020) examined adult motivations and experiences in English programs in South Korea, where they found that instrumental motivation (employment opportunities) was the most significant factor driving adult learners. Their research emphasized the importance of interactive teaching methods and the use of technology in the classroom to enhance the learning experience.

Barriers in Saudi Arabia: In Saudi Arabia, Borg and Alshumaimeri (2019) identified linguistic anxiety, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and cultural attitudes as major barriers to adult English learning. Their study called for strategies to reduce learner anxiety and foster a more inclusive learning environment, such as incorporating culturally responsive pedagogies.



Technological Integration in Canada: McBride and Seegmiller (2021) explored the integration of technology in adult English programs in Canada. They found that learners who supplemented their classroom learning with online platforms and digital resources demonstrated improved fluency and comprehension.

Learner Perceptions of English Learning

Understanding students' perceptions of their learning process is crucial to assessing the effectiveness of adult English programs. Research consistently shows that positive perceptions are closely tied to student motivation, satisfaction, and engagement (Wu & Marek, 2019).

Self-Efficacy and Learning Outcomes: Wu and Marek (2019) found that self-efficacy and past learning experiences play a critical role in adult learners' willingness to engage in English programs. They argued for the inclusion of psychological support components and motivational strategies to enhance learners' self-efficacy.

Feedback and Learner Engagement: Lo and Hyland (2020) investigated adult learners' perceptions of feedback in English programs in Hong Kong. Their findings revealed that detailed, constructive feedback was highly valued by students, who saw it as essential for their progress. However, participants also expressed a need for more personalized and contextualized feedback, which aligns with research advocating for learner-centered approaches (Ferris, 2019).

1. Impact on Life Projects and Professional Perspectives

Adult English programs often have a transformative impact on learners' personal and professional lives. Several studies have documented how acquiring English skills opens up new career opportunities and enhances individuals' confidence in professional settings (Agudo & Rodríguez, 2021; Baker & Jarvis, 2020).

Workplace Opportunities in Spain: Agudo and Rodríguez (2021) examined the impact of adult English programs in Spain, reporting that participants were able to access better job opportunities and improve their communication skills in professional contexts. Learning English increased participants' confidence and allowed them to take on more advanced roles at work.

Life Projects in Germany: In Germany, Bense and Ziegler (2022) investigated how learning English influenced adults' life projects. Participants reported greater confidence in their ability to travel, study abroad, and engage in international cultural events. The study highlighted the long-term personal and professional benefits of English learning, particularly in an increasingly globalized world.

2. Benefits and Challenges of Adult English Learning



The benefits and challenges of adult English learning are well-documented. Research consistently highlights improvements in employability, social mobility, and self-efficacy as key benefits (Baker & Jarvis, 2020). However, adult learners often face significant challenges, including time constraints, lack of resources, and inadequate support systems.

Benefits in the UK: Baker and Jarvis (2020) discussed the benefits of adult English learning in the UK, particularly in improving intercultural skills and adaptability in international contexts. However, they also pointed out that many adult learners struggle to balance their studies with other responsibilities, a challenge echoed by studies in other contexts (Li & Liu, 2021).

Challenges in China: Li and Liu (2021) explored the difficulties faced by older adults learning English in China. Their study found that common barriers included a lack of practice opportunities, language anxiety, and unrealistic expectations.

The literature review indicates that adult English learning is a multidimensional field influenced by various factors, including learners' motivations, challenges, and contextual needs. This study will contribute to the existing literature by offering a deeper understanding of the impact of the 'Grown Ups' English program on life projects and professional perspectives in the Colombian context.

Importance and Relevance of the Project

Meeting the Needs of Adult Learners in Colombia: Research indicates that adult education often suffers from a lack of targeted pedagogical approaches, leading to a gap in engagement and achievement for this demographic. According to McGrath and Whitty (2020), "Adult learners face distinct challenges, including balancing learning with family and work responsibilities, which demand flexible and context-specific educational models" (p. 34). In Colombia, much of the English language instruction has focused on formal education, leaving adult learners, particularly those outside of formal institutions, underserved.

Contribution to Lifelong Learning Initiatives: Adult learners are an important part of this vision, as continuous education is necessary for personal and professional development in a globalized world. According to the World Bank (2019), "Education must be available at all stages of life, as it provides individuals with the tools necessary for economic and social mobility" (p. 42).

Enhancing Socioemotional and Cognitive Domains: Adult learners often experience higher levels of anxiety and self-doubt compared to younger students, as they may have been removed from formal education for some time or have had negative past experiences with learning (Coffield & Edward, 2016). This project highlights the importance of understanding these emotional dimensions in fostering successful learning outcomes, as "positive emotional experiences in the



classroom are strongly correlated with higher levels of engagement and achievement" (Goleman, 2019, p. 78).

Alignment with Bilingualism Goals in Colombia: Colombia's National Bilingualism Program has emphasized the importance of English proficiency, especially as a tool for economic advancement and global competitiveness (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2018). However, most research and policy implementation has focused on children and adolescents, with adult learners in non-formal education often left out of this agenda. By focusing on adult learners, this project contributes to national goals of improving English language proficiency and aligns with policies aimed at fostering bilingualism across all age groups.

Knowledge Gap Addressed by the Project

Lack of Focus on Non-Formal Adult Learning Programs: The literature on English language education in Colombia is predominantly centered around formal education settings, particularly focusing on children, adolescents, and university students (García, 2019). However, adult learners in non-formal settings, such as community-based or private English programs, have not received enough attention. This project addresses this gap by examining the experiences of adult learners in the Grown-Ups' English Learning Program at the Universidad de Córdoba.

Limited Research on Socioemotional Factors in Adult English Learning: While socioemotional learning has been extensively studied in younger populations, it has been less explored in adult education, particularly in the context of English language acquisition. Adult learners often face unique challenges related to anxiety, motivation, and self-efficacy, which can significantly impact their learning outcomes (Dörnyei, 2014).

Insufficient Understanding of Pedagogical Practices for Adults: Much of the research on English language teaching has focused on children and adolescents, with limited exploration of the most effective pedagogical practices for adult learners. Adults bring different learning styles, experiences, and expectations to the classroom, and teaching strategies must be adapted accordingly. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of how adult learners engage with English language learning and to provide recommendations for pedagogical adjustments. As Knowles (2015) states, "Andragogy, the method and practice of teaching adult learners, requires a fundamentally different approach than the pedagogy used for younger learners, yet many educators continue to apply the same strategies across age groups" (p. 57).

By addressing these gaps, this project will contribute valuable insights to the field of adult education in Colombia and help refine both policy and practice in English language teaching for adult learners.



Estrategia metodológica (en su caso)

Research Design:

For a comprehensive exploration of the impact of the 'Grown Ups' English Learning Program by former students at the Language Center of Universidad de Córdoba, a qualitative research design will be used. The research design aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the 'Grown Ups' English Learning Program's transformative impact by exploring the enriching insights into participant experiences, perceptions, contributions, and challenges encountered during their language learning journey.

Research Question:

How do former students perceive the impact of the "Grown-Ups" English Learning Program on their career goals, life project expectations, and their learning experience at a Language Center of a public university in Colombia?

This main research question is supported by the following specific questions:

- o What are the experiences that foster career-led goals during the Program implementation?
- o What are the outcomes of the GUEL P when anticipating academic development?
- o How does GUEL P assist in facing common every-day personal challenges?

Data collection procedures:

Survey Questionnaires, In-depth Interviews will be implemented to gather the data to be studied.

Anticipated Impact

The anticipated impact of our research endeavor, Exploring the impact of the 'Grown Ups' English Learning Program by former students at the Language Center of Universidad de Córdoba: A case study, is poised to illuminate the profound effects and enduring legacy of this program spanning 27 years. By meticulously dissecting participant perceptions, contributions, and navigating the encountered challenges, our study aims to unveil the intricate tapestry of transformations experienced by individuals and the broader community. Foremost among the expected outcomes are the unveiling of statistics showcasing the program's tangible impact: an expected enhancement in language proficiency among participants, accompanied by qualitative shifts in their socio-cultural confidence and communication skills. Moreover, the research endeavors to unearth the subtle yet crucial contributions this initiative has made towards fostering inclusivity and understanding among diverse groups. By shining a light on the challenges faced, our findings are poised to provide invaluable insights for program refinement and sustainability in an ever-evolving educational landscape. Ultimately, this exploration endeavors not only to acknowledge the successes but also to pave the way for future enhancements, thereby cementing the



Languages Center's commitment to empowering individuals and fostering global citizenship through language education.

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