



Current Research Topics and Themes: A Brief Literature Review from a Study at a Language Center in Colombia

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Abstract

This literature review examines recent research on English Learning Programs concerning topics and findings with a particular focus on how these components permeate inquiry initiatives at Language Centers of public higher education institutions. Drawing from scholarly research on adult language education, career development through language acquisition, and the sociocultural impact of language learning worldwide, including Colombia, particularly a Caribbean language program, the review synthesizes current topics and compares research findings at the international and national level. It also shows the gap among different countries as a contribution to further research in Colombia. Themes from the literature suggest that adult learners often view English proficiency as a key asset for professional advancement and personal empowerment. The review concludes by offering implications for teacher researchers advocating for more research-based evidence to improve foreign language teaching and learning at foreign language centers.

Key words: Adult English Programs, Impact, Grown Ups English Program, Career Goals, Life Project Expectations

Rationale

This research is justified by the need to better understand and strengthen English learning programs for adults in public higher education, with a particular focus on the Language Center at Universidad de Córdoba in Colombia. Although international studies recognize English as a key tool for professional growth and personal empowerment, there is a lack of localized, evidence-based research to guide the development and improvement of programs in regional contexts like



the Colombian Caribbean. This literature review identifies thematic trends, compares national and international findings, and highlights research gaps to support more informed and effective practices at Universidad de Córdoba's Language Center. The research questions that guide this research are: What are the prevailing trends and findings in global and national research on adult English language education? and What gaps exist between local practices in Colombia and the broader body of international research on adult English education?

Conceptual Framework

This study draws on key theories to understand adult English learning in higher education. **Andragogy** explains adult learners' motivations and needs (Knowles, 1984); **Sociocultural Theory** highlights the influence of social context and interaction in language learning (Vygotsky, 1978); **Communicative Language Teaching** supports meaningful language use in real-life situations (Savignon, 2002); **Bourdieu's concept of language as capital** shows how English proficiency can enhance social and professional mobility (Bourdieu, 1991); and **Critical Pedagogy** emphasizes empowerment and equity in education (Freire, 1970). These frameworks guide the analysis and connect theory with practice in the context of the Universidad de Córdoba's Language Center.

Methodology

The analysis of results is conducted in alignment with the methodological approach and the study's objectives, ensuring a coherent and rigorous interpretation of the findings. This research utilized a **systematic literature review** and **thematic content analysis** to synthesize international and national studies on adult English learning programs, particularly focusing on the Universidad de Córdoba's Language Center context.

The selection of sources was guided by criteria ensuring relevance to adult learners in higher education, with special attention to sociocultural and pedagogical dimensions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis revealed key patterns, such as the emphasis on learner autonomy consistent with Knowles' (1984) **Andragogy theory**, which stresses the importance of self-directed and goal-oriented learning in adult education.



Sociocultural factors influencing English acquisition, especially in the Caribbean Colombian context, were interpreted through Vygotsky's (1978) **Sociocultural Theory**, which underscores the role of social interaction and cultural mediation in cognitive development. For instance, learners' motivations and challenges reflected the interplay between language as a tool for social mobility (Bourdieu, 1991) and the local cultural identity.

Pedagogical approaches observed in the literature, such as **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** (Savignon, 2002), were examined in relation to their effectiveness in promoting meaningful communication and learner engagement in the university's language programs. Additionally, the study considered Critical Pedagogy's (Freire, 1970) principles of empowerment and equity, which provided a lens to analyze how language centers can foster inclusive and socially conscious education.

Development

The analysis of results was conducted in close alignment with the methodological framework and the central objectives of this study, ensuring a systematic, coherent, and theoretically grounded interpretation of the findings. A **systematic literature review**, supported by **thematic content analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was employed to synthesize relevant international and national studies on adult English learning programs, with a particular focus on the context of the Language Center at the Universidad de Córdoba.

The **selection of sources** was guided by well-defined criteria emphasizing relevance to adult learners in higher education and the exploration of sociocultural and pedagogical dimensions. This ensured that the findings were grounded in current research and directly connected to the needs and realities of adult learners in Colombia's Caribbean region.

Through thematic analysis, several key patterns emerged. Among the most prominent was the theme of **learner autonomy**, which closely aligns with Knowles' (1984) **Andragogy Theory**. This theory emphasizes that adult learners are self-directed, goal-oriented, and motivated by internal and external needs, particularly in professional and personal development.



Additionally, the research considered **sociocultural factors** shaping English learning, using **Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory** as a lens to interpret the role of social interaction, cultural context, and community in the learning process. The data revealed that learners often perceived English as a form of **symbolic capital** (Bourdieu, 1991), essential for accessing social mobility, employment opportunities, and global engagement, while still navigating tensions between global language acquisition and local cultural identity.

Pedagogical models featured in the literature, such as **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** (Savignon, 2002), were examined for their capacity to promote authentic language use and learner engagement. The effectiveness of these methods in university programs was often linked to their flexibility and relevance, particularly when paired with **blended or technology-enhanced learning environments**, which accommodate adult learners' time constraints and learning preferences.

Furthermore, **Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy** provided a framework for evaluating how language centers serve as transformative and inclusive learning spaces. **In doing so, this section presents a coherent and well-supported argument regarding how the research was conducted and how the findings were interpreted in accordance with the study's objectives and the adopted theoretical framework.** This alignment between methodological rigor, theoretical depth, and contextual insight strengthens the validity of the study and positions it as a meaningful contribution to adult English education practice in Colombia and Latin America.

Results and Conclusions

This literature review has examined current research on adult English-learning programs, with a special emphasis on their implementation and impact in public higher education institutions—particularly the Language Center at Universidad de Córdoba in Colombia. Drawing on theoretical foundations such as Andragogy, Sociocultural Theory, Communicative Language Teaching, Bourdieu's concept of language as capital, and Critical Pedagogy, the study illustrates how adult learners perceive English proficiency not only as a practical asset for career advancement but also as a powerful tool for personal empowerment and social mobility.



By synthesizing findings from both international and national studies, the review highlights recurring themes like learner autonomy, sociocultural dimensions of language learning, and pedagogical practices that foster meaningful communication and inclusion. Crucially, it also identifies significant research gaps between global trends and local practices in Colombia, underscoring the urgent need for context-sensitive, evidence-based approaches tailored to the regional context.

The implications of this review support teacher-researchers and institutional leaders by reinforcing the transformative potential of adult English programs and advocating for program development grounded in both theoretical frameworks and the realities of local learners. Ultimately, the findings call for more targeted research and strategic initiatives to enhance adult English education in settings such as the Colombian Caribbean.

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