



Methodological Approaches in Studies on the Impact of English as a Foreign Language Empowerment in Colombia

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Abstract

This study presents an analysis of methodological approaches employed in research that examines the impact of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) training programs in Colombia. Prominent qualitative designs, such as case study, action research, qualitative research synthesis (QRS), and critical communicative methodology are highlighted. The study is grounded in the need to understand how these approaches capture experiences, perceptions, and transformations associated with English learning in contexts of education for work and human development. The purpose is to provide a comparative overview of the most relevant methodological frameworks, discuss their scope and limitations, and propose strategies that ensure scientific rigor, validity, and social relevance in future research.

Keywords: *English as a Foreign Language, qualitative methodology, educational impact, training programs.*



Justification

The expansion of English language programs in Colombia, driven by bilingualism policies and labor market demands, requires rigorous evaluations that account for their real impact on learners. Although multiple studies exist, the methodological pertinence of the approaches employed has not always been addressed. This research seeks to answer: ***What methodological approaches allow for a more rigorous and in-depth understanding of the impact of English language training programs in the Colombian context?***

The specific objectives are:

- To identify the predominant methodological approaches in studies on the impact of English language training programs in Colombia.
- To critically examine the extent to which these approaches contribute to understanding educational impact.
- To propose methodological innovation criteria in order to guide future studies towards enhanced academic relevance and greater social significance.

Conceptual Framework

The study draws upon frameworks in qualitative educational research (Creswell, 2018) and scholarship on English language teaching in Latin American contexts (González, 2020). Key methodological traditions include:

- Case study** (Yin, 2018): in-depth analysis of individual or group experiences.
- Action research** (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005): a cyclical process integrating practice and reflection.
- Qualitative Research Synthesis (QRS)** (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007) enables the integration of findings from prior studies.
- Critical Communicative Methodology** (Gómez, Puigvert & Flecha, 2011) is based on horizontal dialogue and active participation of research subjects.

These approaches provide theoretical and methodological bases to understand English learning as a tool for personal, social, and professional transformation.



Methodological Strategy

A comparative qualitative approach was adopted, based on a documentation review and critical analysis of studies on English programs in Colombia (2014–2024). Studies were selected under criteria of pertinence, methodological quality, and relevance to the Colombian context.

Development

The analysis revealed that case studies are particularly effective in exploring individual experiences in depth, allowing researchers to capture the complexity of personal trajectories, contextual factors, and the nuanced challenges faced by learners and teachers of English in Colombia. By focusing on singular or small groups of participants, case studies provide thick descriptions that illuminate how broader educational policies and practices are experienced at the micro level.

In contrast, action research has demonstrated its capacity to facilitate pedagogical innovation and classroom transformation. This methodology empowers teachers to act as both practitioners and researchers, enabling them to critically reflect on their practices, test new strategies, and evaluate their impact in real time. Such an approach not only improves classroom dynamics but also fosters professional development and collaborative knowledge construction within educational communities.

At a broader level, Qualitative Research Synthesis (QRS) provides an integrative view of national trends. By systematically reviewing and synthesizing existing studies, QRS allows for the identification of recurring patterns, gaps, and areas of convergence or divergence across research. This methodological approach is particularly relevant in Colombia, where diverse contexts and regional disparities necessitate a comprehensive understanding of how English programs are implemented and perceived across the country.

Meanwhile, critical communicative methodology emerges as an innovative approach that ensures both scientific rigor and social validity. This methodology emphasizes dialogue, co-construction of knowledge, and the inclusion of marginalized voices in the research process. By situating participants not only as subjects but also as active collaborators, critical communicative research promotes democratic participation and aligns with principles of equity and social justice in education.

Finally, the triangulation of approaches and the deliberate inclusion of participants' perspectives were identified as essential strategies to strengthen research on English programs.



Triangulation enriches findings by combining different methodologies, data sources, and theoretical lenses, thereby enhancing credibility and depth. Equally, privileging participants' perspectives ensures that research outcomes remain grounded in lived realities, contributing to more contextually relevant and transformative understandings of English language education in Colombia.

Table 1. Comparison of Methodological Approaches in Studies on the Impact of English Programs in Colombia

Approach	Characteristics	Strengths	Limitations
Case Study	Natural context, narratives	Depth, richness of data	Limited generalizability
Action Research	Cycles of action and reflection	Immediate pedagogical change	Requires high teacher participation
Qualitative Research Synthesis	Integration of multiple studies	Broad and integrative overview	Dependent on quality of prior studies
Critical Communicative Methodology	Horizontal dialogue, participation	High social validity	Requires strong collective commitment

Note: Adapted from Yin, 2018; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Gómez et al., 2011.

Results and Conclusions

The review of methodological approaches in EFL research in Colombia reveals consistent patterns and pressing gaps that shape the field. These findings highlight both the strengths of current practices and the opportunities for innovation needed to enhance the rigor and social relevance of English training programs. The key insights can be summarized as follows:

- Qualitative designs predominate in EFL research in Colombia.
- There is a lack of longitudinal studies that assess the sustained impact of programs.
- Action research and critical communicative methodology foster participatory and transformative processes.



- The articulation of traditional approaches with innovative ones (e.g., QRS and dialogical methodologies) is recommended to strengthen research findings.
- Methodologically rigorous research not only contributes to scientific advancement but also reinforces the social relevance of English as a Foreign Language training programs in Colombia.

This review closely aligns with our core project, *Exploring the Impact of the "Grown Ups" English Learning Program*, by situating our case study within broader methodological and pedagogical discussions in Colombian EFL research. The predominance of qualitative designs reinforces our own choice of a case study approach to capture participant experiences over the program's 29-year trajectory. Likewise, the identified need for longitudinal perspectives resonates with our focus on long-term impacts on language proficiency, socio-cultural confidence, and community transformation. Moreover, the emphasis on action research, critical communicative methodology, and dialogical approaches underpins the participatory spirit of our study, where learners' voices and challenges serve as catalysts for understanding program impact and sustainability. By directly addressing these gaps and recommendations, our project not only contributes to the scientific rigor of EFL research but also affirms the social relevance and transformative potential of adult English education in Colombia.

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