

Learning strategies in the English subject in adult education in the region of Araucanía

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Abstract

This mixed study seeks to identify the Learning Strategies of the English Language of Adult Education Students to later determine the most effective methods of teaching the English language in this area, evaluating the relationship between variables such as gender and ethnicity within the sample, through the application of questionnaires to Integrated Education Center for Adults.

In the qualitative field, a design called basic qualitative study was used for teachers of the English subject, in addition to a sample of 154 students distributed in three educational establishments belonging to Temuco Education Centers. Results in the quantitative area, in the gender variable of the survey answered by students, showed that neither males nor females had important attitudes in any of the factors (school responsibility, social cognitive skills, academic ability, personal aspects). On the other hand, interviews with teachers show that less effort can motivate students and improve their learning process in English.

Finally, this work is expected to help future or current teachers to consider learning strategies for adult students and the most efficient techniques to be developed in the classroom.

¹ It refers to teaching strategies developed for adult learners. It is often interpreted as the process of engaging adult learners with the structure of learning experience.

Introduction

Adult education is a field that is very different from other levels of education, and teachers need to consider the various aspects that adult students bring. This mixed study aims to identify English learning strategies in adult education to later determine the most effective ways to teach English in this area. According to Harmer (2011) adults are heavily dependent on intellectual practice in learning English, while children learn in a natural way. Carvajal (2013) also states that adult life experience allows teachers to apply a wide range of activities in their classes. In addition, adults generally tend to be more self-disciplined than children. In this context, the following aspects have been considered to achieve and answer specific objectives and research questions: a) Identifying English learning strategies for adult education students b) analyzing gender and ethnic differences related to learning strategies c) to analyze the level of association that possesses the dimensions of academic responsibility, socio-cognitive skills, academic competencies and personal aspects of English language learning strategies.

"Learning strategies are activities or mental processes that students consciously perform to process, understand, and adopt information received during the learning process." (Roux & Anzures, 2015, p. 325). For English (Wardaniek, 2018) states that we have the importance of these learning strategies to help students learn English more effectively, easily, comfortably, and quickly in new situations, so the "let's learn by doing" is a proposal that can encourage and lead students to feel comfortable when learning English, for example, working in groups or peer working as they can enjoy it and avoid feeling any kind of embarrassment.

To ensure that the students feel close to the contents, contextualized flashcards are presented for instance when teaching physical description in Unit 2 "All about you", in which they are encouraged to describe celebrities belonging to 60s, 70s and 80s. As well as in Unit 4 "Lunch Time" a contextualized reading about Chilean specialties was included to reach the same goal: to make a connection between the content and students' daily life. Another practical activity is metacognition since it is indispensable for students to be autonomous in their learning process and to keep a critical attitude about the contents and their own way of learning. They were asked and presented the following questions and statements: "Did I behave as the way my teacher expected me to?", "Today my learning process stopped when/because...", "Today I had the following idea/doubt...", "Today I learned when...", "What I enjoyed the most about the class was...", "Did I do my best in the class?", "This class would be improved if..." and "Did I accomplish the objective of the class?"

Today, schools tend to focus on the student environment not only socially but also intellectually. The latter can be a guide for learning English when there is a mixture of intellectual background and emotions.

Methodology

Design

A mixed study was carried out which combines both qualitative and quantitative research. This is a correlational study that is considered as non-experimental (Salkind, 1999) due to its focus on the relationship between ethnicity and gender variables in the quantitative domain. Additionally, qualitative basic research (Merriam, 2009) was conducted to clarify teacher Emic's perception of strategies and methods of teaching English.

Research Questions and Objectives

The general objective of this study is to find out which strategies for teaching English in adult education are the most effective. The research questions are: a) What are the learning strategies for teaching English to adult students in Araucanía? b) Are there any differences between gender and ethnicity variables when learning English in adult education? c) How is the degree of partnership expressed in terms of academic responsibility, social cognitive skills, academic ability, and personal aspects of an English learning strategy?

Participants

All the participants of this research in the quantitative area are students that belong to first- and second-year high school of an Integrated Education Centers for Adults (from now on called C.E.I.A). Those are located in the ninth region of Chile.

Non-probability convenience was the name of the sampling used by researchers that rely on data collection from population members who are conveniently available to participate in study (Saunders, 2012). As it is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Participants Quantitative Area

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Women	61	39.6%
Men	93	60.4%
Total	154	100%

Regarding the qualitative area, a sample of four teachers were interviewed complying with the following requirements:

- To be a teacher of English.
- Have a minimum of one year of teaching experience in the Chilean system.
- To work at a *C.E.I.A.* for at least one year.

Table 2
Participants Qualitative Area

	Age	School	Years of experience working in adult education	Years working at his/her school
Teacher 1	27 years	C.E.I.A. Hacia un Nuevo Horizonte	3	3
Teacher 2	27 years	C.E.I.A. El Sembrador	3	3
Teacher 3	31 years	C.E.I.A. Selva Saavedra	5	3
Teacher 4	46 years	C.E.I.A. Miguel de Cervantes	12	11

Instruments

As this is a mixed research, two different instruments were conducted. The qualitative instrument was an interview that explored four teachers' perceptions about what strategies are used in the English classes when teaching adults. Within this context, half of the teachers were interviewed personally whereas the rest of them were interviewed by email. To analyze the data the software ATLAS.ti was used.

This interview included four topics along with research questions:

- Resources: What kind of resources are frequently used in English language teaching in Adult Education?
- Methodology: What kind of activities are carried out in English Language Teaching (*ELT*) in Adult Education?
- Evaluation: What kind of strategies and resources are used in evaluation in English language teaching in Adult Education?
- Feedback: What are the various methods used in English classes to provide feedback to students?

Every question from the interview is related to the main topic which sought to collect the participants' emic view of the studied phenomenon. Afterwards, this instrument was carefully analyzed and subjected to validation that was carried out by experts who work at Universidad de La Frontera, in Temuco.

The collection of quantitative data was carried out in the context of a class through a questionnaire to obtain specific data. Before the application, the respondents were invited to participate, explaining to them the objectives of the study and the value of its development. The freedom to participate was explained in detail along with the responsibility in reading the instrument. The steps to follow in the development of data collection were explained to the participants. Once the data had been collected, 154 answers were analyzed by the SPSS program.

The original questionnaire, "Students Skills and Beliefs Survey" (Sytnik, 2014) was adapted, yielding a Cronbach alpha equivalent to .91 in terms of reliability. The beliefs item was discarded, while the other items were organized in four dimensions: a) emotional factors, b) cognitive skills, c) learning skills and d) motivational factors.

This information led and allowed the researchers to use this instrument successfully although a few changes were applied:

- It was translated from English to Spanish for later application.
- Originally the questionnaire contained six items, nonetheless the researchers used five (due to the belief item previously discarded) and all of them were organized into categories to benefit the format understanding.

Procedure

A survey was applied in *C.E.I.A.*, which contained 35 questions subdivided into 4 dimensions, each dimension measuring a different aspect. It should be noted that the questionnaire was obtained from the research "Students Skills and Beliefs Survey" quoted before. The dimensions into which this questionnaire was subdivided were emotional factors, cognitive skills, learning skills, and finally, the last dimension encompasses motivational factors. All the information was carefully explained in both English and Spanish because some of the students were foreigners.

Additionally, in relation to the interviews, an informed consent had to be signed by the four participants. The development of the interviews was supported by the interview guided instrument that served as a basic instrument for the formulation of questions, which considered emerging questions to the information provided by each interviewee. The data were recorded on a digital device, and then exported to the ATLAS.ti.

Data analysis

The quantitative data was carried out using SPSS fifteenth version and included the following steps:

First, the data were scanned for correct entry. Second, the demographic data belonging to the last section of the instrument was subjected to frequency analysis. Third, each subscale, together with the total scale, was subjected to the Cronbach Alpha reliability test through the internal consistency method. Fourth, for each factor of the scale variables were created based on the average obtained from the items. Fifth, with the variables created, normality tests, correlation and comparison of means were accurately performed.

Qualitative data was analyzed through ATLAS.ti 7 which was originally proposed by Mayring who described in Cáceres (2008). This analysis seeks to identify narrative pieces of texts that support the analysis of qualitative data through the creation of categories of analysis developed according to the research questions asked in this study.

Results

Quantitative Data

Cronbach's alpha reliability test for both full-scale ($p = 0.915$) and emotional factor questions ($p = 0.771$) for the school environment perception questionnaire to perform the analysis. Tested for consistency. For cognitive, the skill was a value of ($p = 0.785$), and for learning factors, the value was ($p = 0.645$), but the results can still be considered suspicious. However, it has been verified and has been found to be reliable. Finally, the fourth element constitutes the dimension of motivation, and the value obtained was ($p = 0.740$). These results of $p > 0.6$ show that all scales have a high degree of internal consistency.

Table 3
Academic responsibility

Gender	Frequency	M	SD
Women	61	2.09	0.67
Men	93	2.16	0.58
Total	154	-	-

$t(152) = 0,71, p = 0,478, IC \text{ del } 95 \% 0,27 \{, 0,13\}$

The results indicated that women have an important attitude towards the first dimension of academic responsibility.

Table 4
Social-cognitive skills

Gender	Frequency	M	SD
Women	61	2.02	0.63
Men	93	2.16	0.53
Total	154	-	-

$$t(152) = 0.68, p = 0.496, 95\% IC \{0.13, 0.27\}$$

There was no significant difference between females and males in terms of the three-dimensional average of school skills.

Table 5
Personal skills

Gender	Frequency	M	SD
Women	61	24.02	0.72
Men	93	2.13	0.59
Total	154	-	-

$$t(152) = 1.03, p = 0.301, 95\% IC \{0.09, 0.32\}$$

Although the objectives did not include fluctuating ethnicity, it was also decided to use comparisons to analyze differences between Mapuche and non-Mapuche students.

Table 6

Academic responsibility: Between Mapuche and non-Mapuche students

Students	Frequency	M	SD
Non-Mapuche	75	2.17	0.60
Mapuche	58	2.22	0.65
Total	133	-	-

$$t(131) = 0.54, p = 0.585, 95\% IC \{0.16, 0.28\}$$

Table 7

Socio-cognitive skills: Between Mapuche and non-Mapuche students

Students	Frequency	M	SD
Non-Mapuche	75	2.16	0.61
Mapuche	58	2.12	0.56
Total	133	-	-

$$t(131) = 0.41, p = .685, 95\% IC \{-0.16, 0.24\}$$

In the second average referring to the dimension of socio-cognitive skills, it does not present a significant result among students of the Mapuche ethnic group and those of non-Mapuche students.

Table 8
Personal skills

Students	Frecuency	M	SD
Non-Mapuche	75	2.25	0.60
Mapuche	58	2.20	0.70
Total	133	-	-

$$t(131) = -0.40, p = .689, 95\% IC \{-0.27, 0.18\}$$

Finally, the results obtained in the dimension of personal aspects do not present any difference between Mapuche students and non-Mapuche students.

For the correlation between the load of academic responsibility, socio-cognitive skills, the academic skills and the personal skills dimensions, the Spearman Rho test was applied. Analyzes in Table 3 showed that the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level bilateral.

Table 9
Pearson correlations between the variables used in this study

Variables	1	2	3	4
Average 1	-			
Average 2	.734**	-		
Average 3	.567**	.665**	-	
Average 4	.671**	.729**	.742**	-

Note. $n = 154$; ** $p < .01$

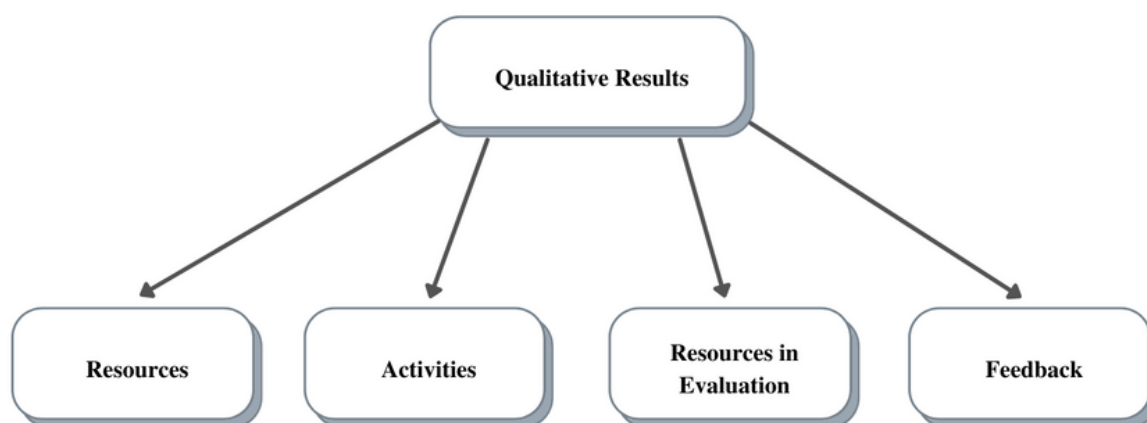
Qualitative Data

Regarding the qualitative results, the ATLAS.ti. program was used together with the Cmap-tools program. The answers to each of the research-related questions are given below.

1) What resources are used in teaching English in adult education? Through data analysis the following categories with respect to resource types were identified: 1) Print, 2) Audiovisual and 3) Technology.

Figure 1

Qualitative results



Graph contains the topics in which the questions were based on. Then the answers were detached in different categories.

There were four different questions geared towards the interviewees, in relation to:

1. What resources do they use?
2. What activities do they implement?
3. What resources or strategies do they use when evaluating? and
4. How do they give feedback to the students?

Printed Resources

This is a resource that is primarily written on paper and is also called text-based material. Teachers N°. 1, 2 and 3 said that advice cards and index cards are the mainstream in interviews. The latter is used more often in vocabulary lessons because images and text are related. The interviewed teacher considers all aspects of the student, including Emphasizing poor learning disabilities and the usefulness of this type of material. One of the interviewees, teacher 3 explained that flashcards are a bit more dynamic, but the brain has been found to connect words and images, and even adults have difficulty learning a language, so it helps to understand the meaning. I understand the word.

Audiovisual Resources

Teacher N°. 1 said that this refers to already transmitted audio and video communications such as: B. Material-related tasks, or task-related materials, and materials that are based on actual materials. The use of videos and certain materials is mentioned in the interview.

We will use video here as well, as the latter is one of the most widely used resources to motivate students. However, this type of audiovisual resource has the disadvantage of not finding a level of English that matches the student's proficiency, resulting in dissatisfaction and discouragement.

Technological resources

It is technology-based and is defined as a material that contains tangible or intangible elements. Important resources include the use of computers and mobile phones, but intangible games and audio are played through speakers. In all interviews, these materials are mentioned in popularity and novelty. Applications like Kahoot are platforms that allow teachers to interact with students by grouping server-based answer questions with arbitrary content, said teacher N° 3.

What kind of activities are carried out in teaching English in adult education? Analyzing the answers identifies six types of activities. Practical work, solving grammar exercises, reading, and listening activities, role-playing and contact with real English videos. There are many ways teachers can use it. Activities that emphasize student participation, such as practical training, listening comprehension, and simulation games, are introduced.

On the other hand, some activities are more difficult for students and the teacher's job becomes even more boring. Examples include watching videos in real English, solving grammar exercises, and reading comprehension. Teachers point out that less effort is more motivating for students.

What type of strategies and resources are used in evaluation in the teaching of the English language in adult education? Responses identified five ways to evaluate students. Dialogue, group presentations, oral questions, practical and written exams. It has been observed that most of these ratings are group ratings and only two are individual ratings.

In addition, teachers find that through a brief assessment, students focus on their final grades and improve their grades. Student availability is another aspect to consider when assessing, as there are specific cases such as family issues, work issues, and so on. Students prioritize them before making an assessment and contact the teacher later to plan a day when they can receive a late assessment.

What are the various methods used in English classes to provide feedback to students?

Analysis of the responses identified the following categories of students' feedback formats:

I) positive feedback, II) negative feedback, III) metacognition and IV) co-assessment.

Positive feedback

This refers to the return of teachers in support of improving student performance. In this section, teachers use candies, bells, concepts, and phrases to reward excellent performance, which often gives students a high level of motivation.

Negative feedback

Negative feedback occurs when teachers are dissatisfied with a student's grades and is generally important and attempts to identify and correct mistakes to achieve learning. In some cases, respondents prefer to provide feedback to their students in this way, as it can lead to frustration. However, some comment that feedback should be provided in this way if it is objective and rigorous.

Metacognition

Metacognition is an instance that allows you to look back at the cognitive processes associated with the generated learning. The teacher decides how this learning reflex is generated. In this case, summarize in writing or verbally at the end of the lesson. Here you will deepen the aspects related to the lesson (which most enjoyed this class was ...), student behavior (Did I do my best in this class?) and content (What did I learn today?).

Co-evaluation

This refers to feedback between colleagues to assess their performance through observation. This method is easy to use because the teacher said it would be very useful for students to learn best when working in groups and assessing together and having a flexible assessment method. Variable age is not considered, but it must be said that age does not correspond to learning. Even Universidad Católica presupposes a similar idea. The university has had a program called *PAM* (Senior Adult Program) for over 30 years. It is primarily technology, general culture, self-development, and self-care, and the (Catholic University, 2018) Returning to any of the above Chandia (2018), one of the teachers of the *PAM* program, believes that students "learn when they take a course and lose the fear of making mistakes." Students may feel embarrassed at first but will support our theory of dealing with it throughout the course.

Discussion

The quantitative results of this study showed that both ethnicity and gender did not completely affect adult learning behavior in the class, so the differences observed between these variables are not significant in this study. However, regarding the information gathered through surveys and interviews, unexpected discoveries made students hesitate to speak English during class, but especially for lessons and challenging activities.

Another relevant finding was that students enjoyed working in groups, especially when it comes to instructive and rewarding activities such as the ones promoted by “The English Camp” (MINEDUC, 2019) programme that was set in *EPJA* (Education for young and adults) which succeed along with *PIAP* programme (English Opens Doors) (MINEDUC, 2020).

From the perspective of acknowledging the deficiencies in this study, the results showed, among other things, that students are sometimes too involved in different circumstances of their own lives which lead to a reorganization of the assessments. This fact persists in every interview, and it is important to consider such disadvantages when teaching adults. Because you can find students who are doing other important activities.

In addition to the student situation, another important fact is the lack of information on previous adult education and research in English at the local level. Therefore, it was difficult to compare the results of this study with other studies or other theoretical proposals based on students in this region. Despite the lack of information at the local level, researchers can find information on international research on this subject for further studies. Adult education is also a valuable area where students can meditate on their daily lives and expand from there to their own perspective, so further research on this subject is considered necessary.

On the other hand, some teachers choose not to adhere to the prescribed curriculum and to do practical work using real English videos and grammar exercises. Navarro’s (2014) research reveals another situation in which teachers can use students’ realistic texts to build their own discourse and become a master of their history. In conclusion, he stated that adult education is an ongoing reflective process that prepares learners to look back on their daily lives and express their perspectives from there.

In addition, the comparison of results in terms of feedback or feedback to students is supported by (Kapur, 2018) as feedback rewards are considered encouragement and

motivation and contribute to the smooth functioning of the learning cycle. Besides, the author adds that both students and teachers need feedback. As a teacher, it is important to know if the student is learning and how they have progressed in the classroom. The learning reflection process is called "metacognition" and is the method mentioned in one of the interviews, so a similar situation occurred in the results of this study.

In conclusion, as a teacher, it is imperative to consider the key aspects that characterize adult students and, depending on them, ultimately plan lessons based on dynamic and innovative activities of a collaborative nature. Empathy and understanding of situations that prevent students from staying in school is because teachers must provide solutions to adults to counter the significant impact of students having problems during their studies. It is an additional factor that plays a basic role.

Conclusions

The findings of this study explore a relationship between ethnicity and gender variables in English classes in adult education. Results show these aspects do not affect the way adults learn English, however, researchers have discovered important factors that teachers need to consider when teaching adults like age groups, different nationalities, backgrounds, specific workplace issues, and familiar settings. For example, an English teacher had to rebuild his assessment since one of his students went home because his daughter was ill. This situation is very common in adult education. Adult learners are accustomed to working together to support each other and not being afraid to ask questions. They also enjoy fewer demanding reviews, rather than complex reviews like individual tests, and ultimately get positive feedback through rewards such as positive texts, candies, and stamps. Therefore, it was possible to achieve general objectives and research questions.

The main limitations identified in this study were:. Data from previous studies of English in adult education are severely restricted at the regional level, so the collection of information is based on documents on general areas at the international and national levels. Further research and experimentation on learning strategies in adult education is urgently recommended, as it makes sense to magnify the various restrictions that adults have when learning English for this purpose.

In addition, the current curriculum needs to be updated with other academic proposals that really focus on the right strategies to meet the needs of adults. As Sanchez (2015) states students feel safe and supported, their personal and unique needs are considered, and their life skills and achievements are recognized and respected.

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