

## Proyecto en Curso

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Nombre del Tutor del Semillero	Dolly Ramos Gallego
Email Tutor	<a href="mailto:dollytam@utp.edu.co">dollytam@utp.edu.co</a>
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Autores del Proyecto	Mario German Arenas Herrán Jeison Steven Arias Giraldo Luis Eduardo Aricapa Aricapa Yesenia Calvo Duque Julian David Yepes Serna
Ponente (1)	Mario German Arenas Herrán
Documento de Identidad	1125620588
Email	<a href="mailto:mga_land@utp.edu.co">mga_land@utp.edu.co</a>
Ponente (2)	Jeison Steven Arias Giraldo
Documento de Identidad	1088322297
Email	<a href="mailto:Jasonari94@utp.edu.co">Jasonari94@utp.edu.co</a>
Teléfonos de Contacto	3216422266
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### **Teaching English vocabulary as a foreign language to third age adults through the implementation of games in a nursing home in Pereira**

M.A. Dolly Ramos Gallego<sup>1</sup>  
 Mario Germán Arenas Herrán<sup>2</sup>  
 Jeisson Steven Arias Giraldo<sup>3</sup>  
 Luis Eduardo Aricapa Aricapa<sup>4</sup>  
 Yesenia Calvo Duque<sup>5</sup>  
 Julián David Yepes Serna<sup>6</sup>

#### **Abstract**

This report describes the implementation of a qualitative research carried out with third age adults at a state retirement home in the city of Pereira. In order to conduct the study, researchers adopted different types of games as the main technique to facilitate English language learning to this specific

1. dollytam@utp.edu.co, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira.
2. mga\_land@utp.edu.co, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira.
3. jasonari94@utp.edu.co, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira.
4. luiseduardo0822@gmail.com, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira.
5. yesenia.3594@utp.edu.co, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira.
6. judayepes@utp.edu.co, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira.

population. For that reason, it was taken into account the suggestions of Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1984) (as cited by Nguyen-Thi-Thanh & Khuat-Thi-Thu, 2003), who stated that in order to make students interact, share knowledge, and provide their ideas, teachers can generate a different environment through the use of games to facilitate the process of learning languages more interestingly for students. Additionally, the games adopted for the development of the lessons in the implementation of the study, considered the theory of Andragogy proposed by Knowles (1984) and updated by Smith (2002), which embraces five crucial assumptions as the core characteristics of adult's cognitive development during their learning processes.

This research project provided a ten-session English language instruction as an option to the current problematic that third age adults have in regards to their inclusion in bilingual education processes in Colombia. Thereby, this study seeks to enhance the interest and strives to show a different view point towards the English Language Teaching community perception about third age adults' bilingual education. In that sense, it brings new opportunities for further research on the field.

The research project, included the participation of a group of third-age adults, males and females starting from the age of 60 (Ley 1276 de 2009). 6 elders were selected through a purposive typical sampling process in order to collect data. For that reason, interviews, teachers' journals, observations and a survey at the beginning of the study, were employed. After the analysis, data revealed that through the implementation of games, learners developed their repertoire in the foreign language, which was entailed with their daily lives; strategies in line with their learning style that facilitated them to increase and foster their foreign language learning; and the positive and negative students reactions and perceptions towards the games, activities and material implemented during the lessons.

**Keywords:** Andragogy, Elderly, English, Games, Language-Learning.

## **Introduction**

The following is a qualitative research project carried out by the members of the research seedbed In-bloom from the Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con énfasis en Inglés program from the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira. It has as main purpose to teach English vocabulary through games to a group of elderly in a nursing home in Pereira city, as well as to provide with specific information about how a course of English as foreign language must be conducted on this population. Aspects related with the methodology employed, as well as the material used during the different sessions for andragogic purposes (Knowles 1970), have been registered in observation reports, journals and interviews made to the participants by the researchers. The responses of the participants as well as the results on how effective was their learning were also registered in the latter mentioned formats.

As it was stated in the description, this research serves as starting point in an effort to include third age learners in a language learning process, which as target population has always had children, teenagers and middle-age learners. In this way, the present research offers the possibility to continue with this inclusion process by setting the bases for the treatment of the elderly in an English as a Foreign Language classroom.

## **Statement of the problem**

In Colombia, bilingualism has been an important topic in education, for this, the Ministry of Education of Colombia has created programs to integrate English in the academic curriculums of colombian schools. These programs have target young students as their main focus and priority of educating in a foreign language.

Moreover, the Ministry of education had implemented programs like Colombia very well and included material that are focused on younger students and teenagers, but any of these programs and

materials had included elders as a possible community to include in bilingual curriculums. To support the fact that elders can be included in this programs; the Colombian Congress in the Law 1251 of 2008 establishes the rights and duties of elder population describing elderly as every person, no matter the genre, who is aged 60+, and presents the right of having inclusion in education and intercultural participation of this community without judging their age. Taking into account the previously, it is not evidenced the inclusion of elders in bilingual programs. The Colombian Government and the Ministry of Education do not present any type of initiatives to promote educational programs for the development of foreign languages to Colombia elders. As evidence of this, this current project was carried out to find programs and research studies related to the integration of a foreign language education with elder people and also to present evidence and data of the inclusion of elders in an English class in the city of Pereira including the application of games as useful and appealing technique to teach EFL to elders.

Although, there were not sufficient results in the search of studies that integrated elders in bilingual lessons in Colombia, but in other countries it was evidenced the variety of studies that included elders in intercultural lessons and the teaching of foreign languages.

To begin with, Colombian programs at it was told previously related to teaching a foreign language are aimed to the young population, it is why there is no study that integrates the implementation of teaching English to elders with the materials and programs postulated by the government of Colombia; The most similar study found (conducted in Colombia involved adult learners which includes people between 20 to 50 years. Cuervo, Reyes, Diaz & Urrea (2000) conducted a research about teaching English to adults in Colombia. It was carried out in a formal non-intensive high school program in which the students were between 15 and 40 years. The purpose of this study was to provide students the opportunity of finishing their basic studies at night, in which taking English is a requirement in Colombian academic curriculums. Finally, after being exposed to English during 10 sessions of 2 hour a week, students reached the goal of interacting with the language in a basic level.

Thus, considering the needs of integrating third age population within bilingual education in Colombia, this research study intends to create and adapt didactic elements, specifically games, which can be used as tools for the development of learning English as a foreign language in Colombian with third age adults. Thereby, providing an option of education for elderly contributing to their language development in a didactic practice and their inclusion in society as active users in every activity related to politics, education and recreation.

### **Justification**

Having in mind the lack of integrating third age population within bilingual education in Colombia, this research study intends to create and adapt didactic elements, specifically games, which can be used as tools for the development of learning English as a foreign language in Colombian third age adults in the city of Pereira. This project aims to provide an option of education for elderly contributing to their language development in a didactic practice considering the different characteristics of adult learning and taking into account the factors that motivates and involves elders to participate in academic activities. Finally, it is important to highlight the intention of presenting a research that focused on including elders as learners of a foreign language and demonstrating the interaction and the impact that this project generates in elders in terms of language development and social participation

### **Objectives**

#### **Research Questions**

- How does the implementation of games for teaching EFL affect the language learning development of elderly?

- What does it take to design and implement games for teaching EFL to elderly?

## **Objectives**

General objective: the purpose of this research project is to promote the learning of English as a foreign language through the use of games as a technique to teach elder people.

Specific objectives:

- To apply andragogy as the supporting theory to guide teaching activities to elder people.
- To implement games as a teaching technique to promote students learning of English as a foreign language.

To promote the use of language by learning English vocabulary through the learners' experiences with games.

## **Theoretical framework**

In order to create solid foundations for the development of this study, different constructs were analyzed and developed throughout this section. Therefore, the theory of andragogy, Comprehensible input, vocabulary and Games will be defined by the support of well-known theoreticians and experts in the field.

To begin with, according to Knowles (1970), andragogy emerged as the basis to understand that teaching children and adolescents widely differ to the way adult learning is and how it must be implemented. This conception, led to the construction of Andragogy, a new theory concerned to the learning development of adults. Knowles (1970) defines this theory as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 43) this conception represents that adults require a foundation and a guidance/help by externals (teachers) who can facilitate and guide the path of learners. This andragogical model was built upon the development of five crucial assumptions, Self-concept, Experience, Readiness to Learn, Orientation to learn, and Motivation, which differentiate it from Pedagogy and showed the main characteristics of adult's cognitive development during the learning process.

Bearing in mind the importance of considering andragogy when teaching adults, it is necessary to consider and to take into account the level of language that must be subministrated to the learners, specifically what can be implemented in teaching processes of foreign languages to elder students. In this sense, Krashen's Comprehensible input hypothesis (1985), entails the idea of the language input that can be understood by learners despite not understanding all the words and structures in it. In other words, it makes reference to the exposure of language that is slightly more advanced than the learners' current level and that can be understood. This is known as the "i+1", where "i" is the learner's interlanguage and "+1" is the next stage of language acquisition. Piske (2009) suggests that students learn a new language best when they receive input that is just a bit more difficult than they can easily understand, meaning that learners may understand most, but not all, words the teacher is using in a particular activity. For this reason, it is necessary to know the importance of vocabulary selection at the moment of leading a class that involves the "+1" hypothesis.

An essential component of communicative competence is vocabulary or word knowledge which is important for production and comprehension in a second language (Coady & Huckling, 1997). In that sense, vocabulary potentiates the language learning giving an impulse for students to at least convey messages resulting in communication. Cambridge university press (2015) defines vocabulary as the words that exist in a particular language or subject that are used by a particular person. This definition enhances the term of vocabulary due to the fact that vocabulary is not just about to know a meaning of a word but to know the different meanings of a word in different fields or settings.

To exemplify this idea, Qian (1999) argues that when learning a word it is necessary to include the knowledge of pronunciation, spelling, multiple meanings, contexts in which the word can be used, frequency with which it is used, morphological and syntactical properties and how that word combines with other words. In the same fashion, Nation (2001) agrees with this concept as he defines “word” in three significant aspects that he considers teachers need to be aware and focus on; those are: form, meaning, and use.

As vocabulary portrays the essential part of knowing a language, the duty of teachers is to seek out for different ways to involve the vital role of within learning scenario. For example through the implementation of games, which will be defined below

Nowadays, the impact of new techniques and methodologies can generate a big difference in students’ language learning. The implementation of games, however, has been perceived as a pastime rather than a serious way of instruction. In response to that, different authors have suggested the important role that games can bring as the medium of instructions at the time of facilitating language learning. For instance, Fua, Gupta, Pautler, Farber (2013, p.1), states that “games are often considered a pastime for the youth [...]. Recently however, there has been an increased focus on “serious games” intended to produce positive effects for elderly”, meaning that the implementation of games is not only confined to youth, yet they can be applied for elderly, and for academic purposes.

Over time, the concept of game has been considered by relevant authors as a not static term. However, most of the experts in the field, for instance, Hadfield (1990) and Byrne (1995) have agreed in a common definition of games. They proposed games as a system that contains three main aspects. Firstly, games must follow a specific purpose, secondly, as a means of entertainment, and lastly, games are directed by rules which help to define the game and the number of players, provides the sequence of the game, and makes it organized. Taking into account these characteristics, teachers can blend them to specific language purposes and bring them to class as the medium of instruction. Besides, the application of games can generate an engaging and different environment in which students interact, share knowledge, and provide their ideas. (Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1984).

## **Methodology**

The following information presented below show the most relevant aspects considered for the implementation of this research project.

### **Type of Study**

In terms of the nature of this project, this research study is framed as a qualitative research which according to Merriam (1998, p.14) involves different characteristics which help to delineate its concept. There are four main characteristics of qualitative research: It focuses on process, on understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive.

### **Type of Research**

As it was previously mentioned, this project rests on a type of qualitative research known as descriptive case study which in accordance with Gerring (2007), may be understood as an intensive study whose purpose is - at least in part - to shed light on a larger class of cases or population.

### **Context**

This study was carried out by the Semillero de investigación In-Bloom from the Licenciatura en Bilingüismo at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira and it was conducted with the third age

population. Currently, in the city of Pereira there are seven “Centros de Bienestar del Anciano” or C.B.A.

### **Setting**

This study took place at El Divino Pastor, a retirement home for elderly located in Pereira - Risaralda, which has had a long and remarkable trajectory of work with the third age adults. This institution provides the conditions for the appropriate personal cleanliness, comfort and well-being of the third age people.

### **Participants**

The participants involved in the current project conform a selected sample group of 8 healthy third-age adults with basic or no academic background, males and females starting from the age of 60 (Ley 1276 de 2009).

### **Role of the researchers**

The team of researchers are: One main researcher and five co-researchers. They are students from an English language teaching degree program and they were in charge of leading different activities and developed different roles throughout the implementation.

### **Data collection methods**

The methods applied during this study were surveys, interviews, observation and journal. These were implemented before, during and after the implementation of the activities for teaching to elderly. They explored aspects of motivation, cognitive development and emotional responses of the participants involved. Finally, 12 sessions were implemented in order to carry out this project during 6 weeks, and each one had a length of 1 hour.

## **Preliminary Findings**

In this section, three main findings, which aim at developing and answering the research questions that guided this project, are going to be presented. Each finding will be described from a general point of view, in order to provide an insight about the results obtained after implementing games to teach English as a foreign language in a nursing home in the city of Pereira.

The first finding focuses on the fact that, in order to deal with challenges and difficulties, the learners were required to make an effort in the understanding of a foreign language due to the fact that it was their first encounter with English. For this reason, it was necessary for them to come up with certain strategies to help them in their language learning process in line with their learning style. This finding evidenced four type of strategies that were used by the elders to solve problems and to support the understanding of the target language.

Firstly, data demonstrated that the learners adopted words from their L1 as reference to learn the new target vocabulary owing to the fact that this English words sound similar to words in Spanish. Nevertheless, the words of both languages differ in terms of meaning; in other words, they were not cognates, for instance linking the word in Spanish “*Juan*” to the word in English “*One*”. The second strategy found in the data collected, showed that elders supported their learning through the use of writing and taking notes as an extra help to be in contact with the language to retain vocabulary easily. The next one explains how adults adopted repetitions as a strategy to remember and recall new vocabulary, increasing their insight and knowledge of pronunciation of the words. Lastly, data disclosed that some learners adopted collaborative learning as a strategy to support their learning process. This resulted in assisted partnership help when instructions, games, or language implemented during the lessons turned difficult for them.

Besides, after the interpretative process of information, data also revealed that through the implementation of games, presented positive language outcomes. Language learning was evidenced by the students recall of the vocabulary used in previous classes when teachers elicited it from them for reviewing purposes and also by using that vocabulary in different stages of the new sessions when it was necessary. This was supported by the implementation of games and the consideration of the five assumptions of the Andragogy Theory when planning the interventions, contributed with the achievement of certain language production goals of the third age adults.

Finally, the last preliminary finding is still on the process of development, and discusses about the reactions from the students towards the games that were implemented during the lessons; data revealed positive attitudes and responses from the learners regarding their language learning during the games proposed for each topic implemented.

### **Conclusions**

In this section some aspects related with the final phase of the project are highlighted. The process in which the members of the research team are involved in order to finish coding the data and interpreting the results, the three preliminary findings that this research has obtained.

In the project's closure, consent interviews were applied to all the participants of the study. The data collected during the study qualitatively is being analyzed quantitatively for later publishing of the results and findings. The preliminary findings are stated in the "Preliminary Findings" section of this document and they will be presented the day of the event. Several sessions are being held in order to process the data and to convey between members of the research team the findings that have emerged to this day, which are the following: Learning strategies adopted by the participants of the project through the different sessions held, how intrinsic motivation was raised due to their inner interest in learning and the last finding that has to do with linguistic learning outcomes and how did they take place in this group of third age adults.

### **Impact**

This project aims to create a different view of the inclusion of elders in an English class and to provide a perspective of how to involve elders in intercultural activities as an active community. Furthermore, the data collected during the application of the research project will provide a perspective and a wide view of the implications and considerations that are required for the teaching process of a foreign language with elders. Additionally, this research intent to develop a social contribution by selecting elders of a nursing home in Pereira, integrating young adults and third age adults to interact in several activities and share knowledge in different aspects of learning and teaching including English as the main focus of interest.

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