

Analysis of Obstacles and Supporting Factors in English Learning for Adults

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ABSTRACT

English learning for adults plays a crucial role in supporting professional needs and self-development amidst the demands of globalization. However, adult learners often face various obstacles that can affect the success of their learning. This study aims to analyze the obstacles and supporting factors in English learning for adults in an integrated manner, taking into account the learners' real-life contexts. This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with adult English learners participating in learning in non-formal and informal contexts, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The research findings indicate that the main barriers to English learning for adults include time constraints due to work and family demands, language anxiety impacting self-confidence, and linguistic difficulties related to distance from formal learning. Conversely, supporting factors such as motivation based on practical needs, social support, and the use of independent learning strategies and digital technology have been shown to help learners manage these barriers. This research confirms that barriers and supporting factors interact to shape the adult learning experience. These findings are expected to form the basis for developing English learning programs that are more flexible, contextual, and tailored to the needs of adult learners

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1. INTRODUCTION

English language learning for adults is increasingly important in today's global context. English is widely used in the workplace, education, and international communication [1]. For adults, English language skills are often associated with increased employment opportunities, career development, and access to global information [2]. Therefore, many adults try to learn English even though they have to divide their time between work, family, and other responsibilities [3]. However, in practice, learning English for adults does not always run smoothly.

Various studies show that adults face various obstacles in learning English [4]. One of the main obstacles is limited time. Work demands and family responsibilities often make it difficult for adults to engage in regular and ongoing learning. Furthermore, psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes, anxiety when speaking, and low self-confidence also pose significant obstacles to language learning [5]. Other frequently reported barriers are limited vocabulary and difficulty understanding language structures, especially for adult learners who have not been involved in formal learning activities for a long time.

In addition to these obstacles, several supporting factors play a significant role in helping adults learn English. Strong motivation to learn, particularly related to job needs and career development, is a key factor in driving successful learning [6]. Support from the surrounding environment, such as family, coworkers, and learning communities, can also increase adult learners' enthusiasm and consistency in learning [7]. In addition, the use of independent learning strategies and learning approaches linked to everyday life situations has been proven to help adult learners understand and use English more effectively and meaningfully [8].

Although numerous studies have been conducted on English language learning, most research focuses on school-age or college-aged students. Research specifically addressing adult learners remains relatively limited, particularly in the context of English as a foreign language [9]. As a result, the unique **needs and characteristics of adult learners**, such as a practical learning orientation, diverse life experiences, and limited learning time, have not been fully accommodated in the development of English learning methods and programs [10].

Furthermore, previous research tends to discuss barriers and supporting factors in English learning separately. Barriers are often viewed as the primary problem to be addressed, while supporting factors are discussed in a separate context, not directly linked to the barriers learners face [11]. This approach does not provide a clear picture of how obstacles and supporting factors interact in the English learning process for adults [12]. In fact, in everyday learning practices, certain supporting factors can help reduce the impact of obstacles learners encounter.

Based on these conditions, there is a research gap that requires further study. There is still little research that integrates analyses of barriers and supporting factors into a comprehensive study of English learning for adults [13]. In addition, the context of adult life, such as work demands, family responsibilities, and limited learning time, has not been a primary focus in language learning analysis [14]. Therefore, research is needed that places greater emphasis on adults' English-learning experiences in real-life contexts.

This research is important because its results are expected to provide practical contributions to the development of English language learning programs for adults. A more comprehensive understanding of the barriers and supporting factors in English learning can help educators and language training providers design more flexible, relevant, and tailored learning experiences that meet the needs of adult learners [15]. In addition, the findings of this study can serve as a basis for policymakers in formulating programs to improve English language competency among the productive age group [16].

Thus, this article aims to analyze the barriers and supporting factors in English learning for adults in an integrated manner. The novelty of this research lies in its approach, which examines both aspects simultaneously and grounds the analysis in the context of adult learners' lives. It is hoped that this research will make a practical contribution to improving the quality of English learning for adults and enrich the study of language learning in the context of adult education.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a qualitative descriptive design [17]. This approach was chosen because the research objective was to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of adult learners regarding barriers and supporting factors in learning English. The qualitative descriptive design enabled researchers to explore participants' perspectives, perceptions, and meanings constructed from their learning experiences in real-life contexts. This approach was deemed most appropriate for uncovering the complexity of the language learning process in adults, which is influenced by personal, social, and situational factors [18].

Participants and Research Context

Participants in this study were adult English learners aged 25 or older who had participated in English learning in non-formal or informal contexts, such as language courses, job training, or independent learning. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, with consideration given to their English learning experience and active involvement in the learning process. The purposive approach was used to ensure that participants had relevant, data-rich information aligned with the research objectives [19].

The number of participants was not determined at the outset; rather, it was guided by data saturation. Data collection was stopped when the information obtained was repetitive, and no significant new themes emerged. This principle was used to ensure the depth and completeness of the qualitative data, not to achieve statistical representation.

Data collection technique

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. This technique was chosen because it allowed researchers to explore participants' experiences in depth while maintaining focus on the main research topic. The interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and literature review, including questions about English learning experiences, obstacles encountered, and factors that facilitate the learning process.

Interviews were conducted in person or online, depending on the participants' availability and convenience. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Throughout the interview process, researchers also took notes on key points.

Research Procedures

The research began with a preparatory phase, including developing interview instruments and obtaining participant consent. After participants provided informed consent, interviews were conducted individually. The researchers sought to create a

comfortable, dialogic atmosphere in which participants could share their experiences openly and reflectively.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework developed by [20]. Thematic analysis was chosen because it provides a systematic and flexible procedure for identifying patterns of meaning in qualitative data. The analysis process consisted of six stages:

1. familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts.
2. initial coding of relevant data sections.
3. grouping codes into initial themes.
4. review and refinement of the theme.
5. defining and naming themes.
6. preparation of analysis reports integrated with data citations.

During the analysis process, researchers strive to maintain the relationship between empirical data and theoretical interpretations, so that the resulting themes are not only descriptive but also analytical and contextual.

Data Validity (Trustworthiness)

To ensure the validity and quality of the research, several trustworthiness strategies were used, as proposed by [21]. Credibility was maintained by cross-checking data interpretations by comparing findings across participants and providing limited clarification to several participants. Dependability was strengthened by systematically documenting the entire research process, from data collection to analysis. Confirmability was maintained through peer debriefing to minimize subjective researcher bias. Furthermore, researchers continuously reflected on their position and role in the research process.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ethical principles of qualitative research. All participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights as participants. Participants' identities were kept confidential using code names or pseudonyms. Participants were also free to discontinue their participation at any time without consequences.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

Thematic analysis of the interview data yielded several key themes representing barriers and supporting factors in adult English learning. These themes demonstrate that adult learners' learning experiences are influenced by the interaction between the demands of daily life, their psychological state, and the learning strategies they develop. Barriers and supporting factors do not emerge in isolation but intersect, forming complex learning dynamics.

Barriers to English Learning in Adults**a. Time Constraints and Dual Role Demands**

Time constraints were the most frequently cited obstacle among participants. Most adult learners must juggle their time between work, family, and study, often leaving English learning as a lower priority. One participant said, "I have the desire to learn, but after a long day at work, I feel exhausted, especially with the housework I still have to take care of" (P3).

This quote demonstrates that time constraints are not solely related to learning management but also to physical and mental fatigue. This finding aligns with [22], who asserted that social role conflict is a major challenge in adult education and often impacts the sustainability of the learning process.

b. Language Anxiety and Low Self-Confidence

Psychological barriers, particularly anxiety when using English, also emerged as a significant theme. Several participants expressed a fear of making mistakes when speaking, especially in environments perceived as formal. One participant stated, "I actually understand, but I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing, so I often choose to remain silent" (P6).

This fear suggests that language learning for adults is not only about linguistic mastery but also about affective factors. These findings support the concept of foreign language anxiety, which can hinder active learner participation and impact language development [23].

c. Linguistic Difficulties and Distance from Formal Learning

Some participants also expressed difficulty understanding vocabulary and language structure, particularly due to their long absence from formal learning. One participant stated, "I haven't studied in a long time, so I feel like I'm slow to grasp the material, especially when there's a lot of terminology" (P2).

These findings suggest that past learning experiences influence adult learners' self-confidence and readiness to learn. This aligns with the principles of andragogy, which emphasize the crucial role of prior experience in adult learning [24].

Supporting Factors in English Learning for Adults**a. Practical Needs-Based Motivation**

Instrumental motivation is a key supporting factor in English learning for adults. Many participants learned English due to work demands or professional needs. One participant stated, "At work, we're often asked to communicate in English, so we have no choice but to learn" (P1).

This motivation, stemming from real needs, helps learners persist despite various obstacles [25]. These findings reinforce the view that practical orientation is a hallmark of adult learning and contributes positively to the sustainability of learning.

b. Social Environmental Support

Support from the surrounding environment, both family and colleagues, also ¹ plays a crucial role in supporting the learning process. One participant said, "My family always encourages me, so even though I'm tired, I still try to learn a little" (P5). This emotional support helps learners manage psychological stress and maintain consistency in their learning. This finding aligns with the sociocultural perspective, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in the language-learning process [26].

c. Independent Learning Strategies and Utilization of Technology

Another prominent supporting factor was the use of self-directed learning strategies. Participants used digital apps, online videos, and everyday-life context-based materials. One participant explained, "I study using apps in my spare time, so I don't have to attend classes all the time" (P7).

This strategy provides adult learners with the flexibility to adapt the learning process to their time constraints. This finding supports research showing that digital technology can increase the autonomy and effectiveness of language learning for adult learners [27].

Interaction between Barriers and Supporting Factors

Research findings indicate that barriers and enabling factors interact dynamically. Strong motivation and environmental support have been shown to mitigate the impact of time constraints and anxiety. One participant stated, "Even though I have little time, because I need it for work, I still try to study" (P4).

This shows that the success of learning English in adults is not only determined by the absence of obstacles, but also by the strength of the supporting factors available to the learner (Li et al. 2026). Therefore, a holistic learning approach becomes important in the context of adult education [28].

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of a contextual approach to understanding English learning in adults. Barriers and supporting factors need to be understood within an interconnected system of learning experiences.

Practically, the results of this study indicate the need to design English language learning programs that are flexible, relevant, and sensitive to the life circumstances of adult learners. An approach that integrates psychological support, needs-based motivation, and independent learning strategies has the potential to increase learning success.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the barriers and supporting factors in English learning for adults by situating their learning experiences in real-life contexts. Based on thematic analysis of interview data, the research findings indicate that English learning for adults is a complex and dynamic process, influenced by the interaction between social role demands, psychological conditions, and learning strategies developed independently by the learner.

The main barriers faced by adult learners include time constraints due to work and family demands, language anxiety that affects self-confidence, and linguistic difficulties stemming from a distance from formal learning experiences. These barriers are not isolated but interconnected, often reinforcing each other. Physical and mental fatigue, for example, not only limits learning time but also affects learners' emotional readiness to use English actively.

On the other hand, this study also found that supporting factors play a significant role in helping adult learners manage these barriers. Motivation based on practical needs, particularly those related to professional demands, is a key driver of learning continuity. Social support from family and colleagues also provides emotional reinforcement, helping learners maintain their learning commitment. Furthermore, the use of self-directed learning strategies and digital technology provides flexibility, allowing learners to adapt the learning process to their time constraints and living conditions.

One of the important findings of this study is that the success of English learning in adults is not determined by the absence of barriers, but rather by the extent to which supporting factors can offset and reduce their impact. This finding underscores the need for a more holistic approach to understanding language learning in adults, where barriers and supporting factors are viewed as part of a single, interacting system of learning experiences.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the study of language learning and adult education by emphasizing the importance of a contextual and integrative approach to analyzing learning experiences. This research broadens the understanding of how andragogical principles, affective factors, and social context intertwine in adult English learning. Practically, the findings of this study provide implications for educators and language learning program organizers in designing more flexible, relevant, and responsive learning experiences that meet the needs of adult learners, including providing psychological support and utilizing learning technology.

However, this study has limitations, particularly the relatively limited number and context of participants. Therefore, further research is recommended to include a wider range of learning contexts and to combine qualitative approaches with quantitative data to obtain a more comprehensive picture of English language learning among adults.

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