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Learning Experiences in a Migration Context: California Adult Education in Spanish

Experiencias de aprendizaje en un contexto migratorio: educación de adultos en idioma español en California

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ABSTRACT

This study contributes to an understanding of the motivation behind and meanings of the participation of adult migrants, based on their educational experiences within the Plazas Comunitarias program in California. Qualitative semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and a theoretical framework were conducted to guide the analysis. Making friends, learning for work, being able to help and becoming someone were the main motivations recorded. This study contributes to the scarce studies on the motivation in school education of adults and migrant adults. It demonstrates that when migrants are able to balance their time, family obligations, and financial resources, it becomes feasible to attend school and create opportunities to boost their self-esteem, and improve their social lives and living conditions. Challenges of the research include the response time to enter the Plazas Comunitarias program, and the fear of migrants to be interviewed.

Keywords: 1. educational lag, 2. adult education, 3. immigrant students, 4. Mexican migrants in California, 5. Learning in Spanish.

RESUMEN

Este estudio contribuye a la comprensión de las motivaciones y significados de la participación de adultos migrantes a partir de sus experiencias educativas dentro del programa Plazas Comunitarias en California. Se realizaron entrevistas cualitativas semiestructuradas, observación directa y un marco teórico para orientar el análisis. Las principales motivaciones registradas fueron hacer amigos, aprender para el trabajo, ayudar y ser alguien. Este estudio contribuye a los escasos estudios sobre la motivación en la formación escolar de adultos y adultos migrantes. Se muestra que cuando los migrantes logran compaginar su tiempo, el apoyo familiar y los recursos económicos, se vuelve factible asistir a la escuela y crear oportunidades que refuercen su autoestima, su vida social y mejoren sus condiciones de vida. Los retos de la investigación incluyen el tiempo de respuesta para ingresar a las Plazas Comunitarias y el miedo de los migrantes a ser entrevistados.

Palabras clave: 1. rezago educativo, 2. educación de adultos, 3. estudiantes inmigrantes, 4. migrantes mexicanos en California, 5. aprendizaje en español.

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INTRODUCTION[3]

This article analyzes the educational experiences of migrants of Mexican origin in the Plazas Comunitarias programs run by the Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos (INEA) (National Institute of Adult Education) of the Mexican government that also operate in the United States. Plazas Comunitarias[4] are community education programs, created in 2000 in Mexico to reduce the educational backlog of the over-15 population. There is a long-standing educational backlog in Mexico, as in several other countries (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2023) where educational policies targeting vulnerable populations have failed to overcome inequalities in basic education.

The curricular proposal of the community education programs is to take adult education to the Hispanic community in the United States together with the Modelo Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo (MEVyT) program (Model Education for Life and Work). Many Mexican migrants and other Latinos have access to learning opportunities on the other side of Mexico's northern border. Community education programs focus on the social needs of a vulnerable population in conjunction with the consular network. Nevertheless, the issue of transnational adult education has been insufficiently studied in the academic field. For this reason, the authors of this study are interested in the following research questions: How do immigrants of Mexican origin who attend Community Adult Education Programs in California make sense of their educational experiences? What motivates immigrants to attend community adult education programs? Furthermore, the authors of this study are the team leaders of this research group. They are researchers specializing in social sciences from Mexican universities and have conducted this qualitative research together (Martínez Arellano & Uribe, 2019).

The conceptual categories underlying the answers to these research questions are the adult education lag and educational motivation. In regard to the former, the authors draw on Mendoza (2019) and Frausto Martín del Campo (2017). Authors they consulted in regard to educational motivation include González-Peiteado and Rodríguez-López (2017), Iñiguez Berrozpe and Marcaletti (2017), Torres (2017), Darkenwald (1977), Morstain and Smart (1977), and Boshier (1971, 1976). The reports by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009, 2016, 2022), and the articles by Iñiguez Berrozpe and Marcaletti (2017), Torres (2017), and Rothes et al. (2014) provide a multifactorial overview

[3] This article is based on a study that is part of the research project "Experiencias educativas de migrantes mexicanos en programas de Plazas Comunitarias en California" (Educational Experiences of Mexican Migrants in Community Education Programs in California), developed by an interdisciplinary team of academics from the Universidad de Colima and the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California in Mexico (Uribe Alvarado, 2019; Uribe, 2020). The research was financed by the Fondo Sectorial de Investigación para la Evaluación de la Educación (CONACYT-INEE) (FON.SEC./12/2019, Project 285617).

[4] Plazas Comunitarias are schools where education is provided at no cost to Spanish-speaking adults in the United States. In this article, Plazas Comunitarias is translated as Community Education Programs or Community Adult Education Programs.

of motivation. These bibliographic orientations and their research work prompted the authors to produce the present document.

This article is organized into four sections: the first briefly discusses the production of fieldwork data and the profile of the participants; the second deals with the social construction of educational experience in a migration context based on the interviews, which show a qualitative aspect that relies on the testimonials of participants; the third section provides details of this educational experience, involving a cycle that includes the educational lag prior to migrating, as well as the vulnerability experienced by migrants on their arrival in their new place of residence; the fourth describes the motivations of students to attend the adult education programs of the INEA in California. It also includes testimonials in which participants recount their experiences of life, school, and migration. Finally, comments and conclusions are offered.

THE STARTING POINT: OBTAINING THE RESEARCH DATA

The migrant population has steadily increased worldwide. The sociopolitical conditions of each country define its behavior and impact. According to recent data (United Nations, n.d.; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2019), there are 280.5 million international migrants, approximately one in thirty people around the world. However, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic that transformed social life and impacted global public health also affected migration, with international migration decreasing by 27% in 2020 (Noticias ONU, 2021). The United States, one of the regions with the highest concentration of migrants, has over 50 million and has been a key destination since the 1970s:

> The United States of America has been the main country of destination for international migrants since 1970. Since then, the number of foreign-born people residing in this country has more than quadrupled,—from less than 12 million in 1970, to close to 51 million in 2019 (IOM, 2019, p. 25).

The characteristics of Mexican migrants living in the United States mean that they are a more vulnerable social group because they have less educational capital (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2019; Noe-Bustamante, 2020). Moreover, adult migrants, who, for a variety of reasons, failed to complete their basic education (elementary and middle school) before emigrating, experience an educational lag. According to the National Institute for Adult Education (INEA, n.d.), the population over 15 years of age may fall into this category. Several factors contribute to the educational lag of a population, not only the type of education they receive, but also the participation of their families, the state and the student's own motivation (Mendoza, 2019; Frausto Martín del Campo, 2017).

Community Adult Education Programs are basic education support classes provided by the Ministry of Public Education, not only across Mexico but also in the United States. The INEA established Community Education Programs in the United States to provide educational support for Hispanic migrants and the Mexican consular network in 2000. By 2021, over 250 community programs had been registered in the United States, 60 of which are registered in the state of

California, the highest number in the country (Consejo Nacional de Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo, 2021).

To conduct this research, the authors worked with a combination of quantitative data, including a survey with a total of 262 participants and qualitative data, and interviews with 52 students and 10 teachers from the Community Education Programs. Throughout the field work in California, the support of the Mexican consular network was fundamental. The network oversaw the operation of the adult education programs of the Mexican government in the United States, through which the authors obtained permission to access schools, particularly through the Consulate General of Mexico in Los Angeles.

In each educational program, the authors requested permission by email and phone from the teachers and principals. In some cases, they held personal meetings with leaders of the Hispanic educational programs or teachers at consular offices. Only after they had obtained institutional authorization from the schools did they begin the interviews and survey. All participants agreed to sign an informed consent or permission form to allow the use of their information and ensure the confidentiality of their data. Teachers were always present in the classrooms to support the authors and assist the students.

This article analyzes the learning experience in migratory contexts based on the interview data gathered from the students. They conducted interviews in several cities in California, visiting 26 Community Education Programs linked to the Mexican consular network in this state. Although the authors contacted all the community programs in California, not all of them replied.

The interviews conducted after the quantitative survey explored the following topics:

1. The cultural experience: students' daily life and work routines.
2. The educational experience: the expectations of the participants in regard to learning.
3. The MEVyT educational model: the perspective of students on curricular content and their experiential relationship in learning programs.
4. The MEVyT model in the migration context: students' expectations of their life experience in the United States.
5. A final section, which the authors called social fear, was added as a result of the persecution and criminalization of migrants in the United States due to the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President.

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS IN A MIGRATION CONTEXT

International migration studies do not have a comprehensive theory encompassing the full range of social complexity. There are fragmented theoretical trends (Portes & DeWind, 2006; Masseroni, 2016) coupled with theories of intermediate scope reflecting on specific topics in various social science disciplines. In terms of methods, both quantitative and qualitative perspectives have remained crucial to international migration studies (Masseroni, 2016). Qualitative research has existed for several decades:

> With regard to the analysis of international migration, particularly Mexican migration to the United States, the 1990s experienced a flourishing of qualitative studies in the field already accomplished by the anthropological analysis of the community and the impulse of the transnational perspective (Ariza & Velasco, 2015, p. 14).

As a social research technique for the construction of the narratives of migrants, the interview has consistently proven to be an excellent instrument in the production of observables in the academic field of migration. In this context, several types of interviews are used: structured, open, direct, qualitative, and conversational.

Qualitative interviewing is at the center of ethnographic work or forms an integral part of the complexity of ethnographic practice (Galindo, 1987; Spradley, 1979). Consequently, interviewing qualitatively involves an exercise of accurate observation of the environment and the person with whom one is speaking, as well as constant reflexivity. In the act of interviewing, mutual agreements are given, and sometimes asymmetric relations become evident, highlighting both the ability to raise questions and to reply. Within the qualitative interview, an interactive process of mutual discovery by the interviewer and interviewee comes into play (Uribe, 2013). In the case of oral history interviews (Halbwachs, 2004), the transnational context (place of origin and/or destination) plays a significant role in the construction of meaning and analyses.

The authors conducted most of the interviews using an open-ended, semi-structured conversation guide in the community schools, and the remainder in students' homes. They audio-recorded all the interviews, subsequently transcribing them in Word. The authors analyzed the interviews using the collective hermeneutics method (Molitor, 2001). This is a methodology of interpreting meanings that "seeks to discover the social schemas of interpretation contained in people's stories" (Molitor, 2001, p. 9). Although theory informed the initial ideas for the a priori analysis, the interviews contributed further elements to the understanding of the educational experience and the meaning of the students' motivation.

Collective hermeneutics (Molitor, 2001) is a process of analyzing (in this case, carried out by the research team) the socio-biographical stories of a group of people seeking to identify the overt and latent meanings (structures of consciousness) an interlocutor expresses about a phenomenon or social problem. In this study, this process is used to explain the experience of being a migrant and the motivation behind becoming an adult learner.

To conduct the analysis, the authors faithfully transcribed the stories told by the participants, dividing them into sections corresponding to the answers given to the interview questions. They met for two- to three-hour sessions because the analysis was a laborious task. In the second step, the authors identified the relationship between the meaning of the section and the context of the story to clarify what the participant meant. During this analysis, several discussions were held to achieve consensus.

The hermeneutic analysis enabled the authors to capture what was said textually by the participants, as well as their intentions, and what was expressed unintentionally, which can

translate into meanings. A differentiation process was required (involving the review of each interview), in which the authors collected data, organizing it into empirical categories that were subsequently contrasted with the conceptual categories resulting from a review of the state of the art. Finally, all these categories were moved to a data integration and explanation phase.

Studies on motivation in adult learners have been constructed using predominantly quantitative methods (Boshier, 1971, 1976; Morstain & Smart, 1977; Gordon, 1993). This theoretical perspective initially guided the authors' analysis of the transcribed interviews. After a detailed review of the transcripts, they were able to recognize, differentiate and organize the main factors in students' motivations. They subsequently coded the information based on the typology mentioned below in Table 1 entitled "Motivations of Mexican migrants to attend community education programs in California." For this article, only a third of the 62 interviews conducted for the entire research (Uribe Alvarado, 2019) project were used. Below is a selection of meaningful elements regularly repeated in the participants' testimonials, in which the educational experience, together with the migration context of American life, were tightly interwoven.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

For the purposes of this research, the educational experience serves as the link between the experiential and learning processes of migrants with formal education in their countries of origin and destination, namely the basic education in the adult education program offered by the National Institute for Adult Education in California. For migrant students, attending community programs not only constitutes an opportunity for learning, but also for social interaction with other people who are also both lagging and grappling with education and social mobility.

The migration context refers to concrete experiential references on the mobility journey that migrants embark on from their departure from their place of residence until their arrival at their place of destination, as well as the representation of their life as migrants in the United States. The authors focused on salient elements that participants mentioned in their narrative during the interviews and on the specific questions of the survey, their reasons for emigrating to the United States, as well as returning to their country of origin at some point, if applicable.

The educational experience in a migratory context involves three stages or circumstances, wich are presented below:

A. Educational lag before migrating. Students show educational deficiencies in terms of training in school grades before moving from their place of residence in Mexico to the United States.

B. Educational lag in the country of residence. Students live in vulnerable conditions in the United States because they lack a minimum basic education, encountering difficulties in their lives due to their poorly paid jobs. They are not always equipped to continue their schooling.

C. Effects of fighting the educational lag in California. This is a process of transformation for students. Access to community educational programs is a factor that creates knowledge and

transforms the lives of migrants and their families. There are important reasons that drive migrants forward in their transnational lives.

Educational Lag Before Migration: In Mexico

Reducing the educational lag is one of the biggest challenges faced by governments to advance in terms of progress and development, as well as being a reference on the international agenda (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2022, 2023). In Mexico, there has been an educational lag for decades. Although it has declined, it has yet to be eliminated (Torres, 2017). The public policy to reduce the educational lag of the population over 15 years of age and in general to support the education of citizens is a responsibility of the state according to article 3 of the Mexican Constitution (Frausto Martín del Campo, 2017). However, educational policies are dwarfed by reality. Worldwide, more than 700 million people are illiterate (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, n.d.). According to information from the INEA (2021), 29.1% of the population in Mexico ages 15 or older have not completed their basic education. Of that group, 4.5 million are illiterate.

When immigrants first arrive in the United States, they face a series of challenges to beginning a new life. The change of place of residence affects social, familial and above all emotional aspects. When poorly educated migrants decide to emigrate, they face greater problems than others who have completed high school or university or are proficient in English. Not surprisingly, the employment possibilities of skilled migrants in the United States are greater than those of people with low educational attainment (Vázquez Maggio & Domínguez Villalobos, 2018). Migration profiles have changed in recent decades as increasing numbers of people with high educational attainment seek better opportunities, migration with minimal or low education continues to take place (Noe-Bustamante, 2020).

According to the authors' review and analysis of qualitative data, the reasons why people were unable to access education in their places of origin vary. The three main reasons were that women were denied access due to their gender, child labor, and home context. These topics are elaborated on in the next section, with the support of the participants' testimonials.

a) Women denied education because of their gender

Access to education in vulnerable populations is also affected by gender. Many girls are prevented from going to school at an early age; daily life and social customs, misinformation, and the patriarchal culture in Mexican communities close the doors to education for women. Several participants in this research stated that in their childhood and adolescence, their parents did not allow them to go to school. According to the traditional, macho belief permeating the daily lives of thousands of families in Mexico states, women should devote themselves to household tasks, but never think about education. This is what Aurora, a participant in adult programs in Santa Barbara, California, recalls,

> There, in Mexico, in Guanajuato. I came from there. I worked a lot in Mexico since I was seven years old, you know? I really wanted to go to school, but my dad wouldn't let me. [...]

> I don't know why my dad sent my brothers to school [...]. Men [had privileges], yes, but not me [...] Then I said to him: "Dad, I don't know how to read for you, because you never wanted to send me to school," and then Sele, my cousin, said: "Uncle, why didn't you send her to school? She has the right to rebuke you because it was so selfish." He said: "no, daughter, women have to be in the kitchen, cooking, making tortillas."

b) Child Labor

The education gap correlates with the inequality in access to resources where child labor plays a central role. Due to social inequality, many children and adolescents are forced to work to help support the family, which prevents education from being an option. In Mexico, basic education is free and compulsory by constitutional decree, but many people do not know this and the conditions of poverty and vulnerability prevent access to education, as Mariano, one of the participants from a community program in Santa Barbara, California says: "Yes, the others [siblings] did [studied], because I started working when I was about 12 years old. I started working to help my brothers, so they could eat."

c) Family Context and Poverty

Another element that prevents access to education is the loss of or abandonment by one's parents. Many emigrants shared their memories of the time when they were orphaned, which prevented them from accessing education in their places of origin. Camila, a 62-year-old participant, told the authors about the challenges she faced after the loss of her mother, as no close family member or friend was able to support her in continuing her basic education. Many years later, she was able to overcome this educational backlog by enrolling in a community education program in Los Angeles, California. She mentioned that now that she was older, had a job and a supportive family, she felt she was in a better condition than when she was a child and experienced more shortages in Mexico: "[I completed] first grade only. [I was] about 7 or 8-years-old, because my mother died, that's why I didn't go to school or have any studies.

Large families suffering from poverty in the country of origin have difficulty accessing basic education. When there are several children in a household, there are insufficient resources to meet basic needs. In this context, access to education is not always possible. Poverty and education are a vicious circle that is difficult to break, although the situation is complex and goes beyond this circle. On the one hand, poverty contributes to the lack of education, with the lack of information and educational attainment leading to fewer job opportunities and a better quality of life. On the other, poverty, with the lack of resources and inequality it involves, prevents access to education. (Uribe Alvarado, 2010)

In the following testimonials, two participants share the issues of poverty and education. First, Cecilia speaks of the shortages in the family due to the number of children. Then Glenda also says that she had limited access to education and was forced to work as a child:

> At that time, my parents also... had many children, there were many of us, and my father worked the land, and then due to the shortage of money, he said: "you cannot go to school, because you must stay to put fertilizer on the cornfield."
>
> Well, I only studied first and second grade, not because I didn't want to study, but because I didn't have the opportunity. I come from a family where my mom had 12 children, so it was difficult because I had to work since I was eight.

Having parents who, due to their circumstances, did not receive an education, can be a factor that affects the motivation for the latter. Although some people decide to progress educationally even though their parents did not receive basic education, others cannot. The structural nature of poverty is not conducive to changing their status or breaking the cycle of deprivation. The educational lag is multifactorial and contextual. It is not only due to a lack of interest but also to the structural and cultural conditions in which people find themselves. In the absence of information and school grades, students suffer from a lack of job opportunities and poor quality of life.

Educational Lag in the Resident Country: United States

For anyone leaving their place of residence, arrival in the country of destination is not always easy. Migrants face challenges in the process of adaptation that can take years, as in the case of Mexicans in the United States, where most of the group of participants in this study are located. There is a network of social links that allow migrants to cope with the challenges in their new life. For many migrants, the priority is work, so they begin seeking employment, with some securing jobs even before they arrive at their destination. Studying is therefore not an immediate need, although it may be a long-term one, at least from the perspective of the participants in this study.

For people who arrived as adults (over the age of 30, for example) in the place of residence[5]—access to education is more difficult than for young people or adolescents. Although adult education programs provide an opportunity to get ahead, this is not always a priority for newcomers or even for those who have been living in the United States for several years.

Another important element in migratory pathways is social fear. Although all migrants encounter uncertainty with mobility, those without legal residence documents face even greater challenges. One of the most common basic emotions that emerge in the narrative of migrants attending community education is fear. Although they are apparently reluctant to talk about this, their silence is eloquent, while in many cases, migrants narrate their experiences. Social fear is related to the lack of documents.

Uncertainty creates fear, which Bauman (2006/2007) says emerges as a result of living in the context of a liquid modernity. In his words:

[5] In this research context, the state of California.

> Fear is at its most fearsome when it is diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached, unanchored, free floating, with no clear address or cause; when it haunts us with no visible rhyme or reason; when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere but is nowhere to be seen. "Fear" is the name we give to our uncertainty: our ignorance of the threat and of what is to be done—what can and what cannot be—to stop it in its tracks, or to fight it back if stopping it is beyond our power (p. 10).

Among migrants, fear can combine with helplessness, creating a traumatic experience. In this study, the authors take up the topic of fear in both the interviews and the survey. Migrants associated fear with insecurity or with uncertainty itself. For Juventino, for example, fear has many nuances, alluding to the feelings of many students when they tried to go to school, but their fears prevented them:

> There are many kinds of fears that can happen. I also see it like when a person cannot ride a bike. The first time he tries, and falls, and already the person begins to feel afraid. He says: "I'm not going to ride it," and sometimes, the person tries again and learns to ride a bike, but if he does not, that fear will be with him his whole life […] Not only of the bicycle, but of many things, there are many fears. […] Many people still have that fearful thinking. They are not going to school and are cooking or walking around or working and have that fear. I think fear is a very difficult situation.

In that same dialogue, Jazel, another participant, contributes the following: "People are afraid of ICE too. ICE will catch us, we no longer want to go to work, many people no longer go out, they would like to go to a dance or go somewhere far away."

Another of the greatest fears of migrants in the United States is driving a car without a license. In the state of California, a driver's license is an identity card. The distances involved in urban life mean that cars are a basic need, and for a person without a license, there are many risks. The following two students, Ángel and Carola, share their experiences of fear, which they say is now in the past. After regularizing their migratory situation, they felt less afraid. If they respect the laws, they feel they have no reason to fear:

> I used to be afraid of being stopped by a cop, but right now I feel like I'm not so afraid, although there is a fear of driving without a license. I have a friend who said, "Listen, when you go to drive, read well and travel carefully. Don't drink if you drive. That's the important thing. If you come to a country that's not your country and you want to do what you want: be drunk, drive when you're high, that's the worst thing you can do." Thank God, I haven't done any of that and I haven't had those problems. Knowing that it's not my country means I won't do things I shouldn't.

> Interviewee (Carola): Well, I was afraid before, because I might've been deported [nervous laughter] but I fixed my immigration documents, and I'm no longer afraid [laughs]. […] Yes [I feel safe], because as the saying goes, now we walk with our heads held high because we hardly went out for fear that we would be arrested.

Lucía, attending a community education program in Santa Barbara, California, decides to maintain an optimistic attitude, and hides her fears, although inside she feels fear, but prefers to face reality:

> So, I'm afraid that I'm afraid, you know. I'm not, and I want other people not to be afraid, I know that we've lived half our lives like this, but we shouldn't be afraid. We must wait, whatever will be, will be, and we won't be able to avoid that... because those concerns only create more problems.

GOING TO SCHOOL IN CALIFORNIA: MOTIVATIONS FOR STUDENTS

Background to Motivations in Adult Education

The decision that leads students to complete their formal education in their country of residence is complex, undergoing several phases. Although students realize they need to be trained because daily life itself demands it, they do not immediately find specific information on education, sometimes even believing there are no more possibilities for them after they have emigrated. In some cases, they are scared or ashamed to ask.

In specific situations, children or close relatives of migrants are unaware of their lack of education. One of the migrants said during the interviews that his children never knew he could not read or write. He did not know how to tell them and only dared do so when he began studying in adult programs. By then his children were over 21.

In everyday life, when migrants have to provide data or records of their identity for an official procedure, they ask for help from an acquaintance or family member or express a lack of clarity about the procedure, not always assuming that they need help. When they need to help their younger children with their homework, they are confronted with their reality and forced to address their own lack of education. In most cases, they also lack proficiency in the English language. In addition, knowing the motivation expressed by Mexican migrants to enroll in the education programs provided by the community programs in California sheds light on the reasons that lend meaning to their participation in school life.

Formal school processes serve as a means of adaptation to social environments (Sancho et al., 2002), with students enrolled in study courses being more socially integrated than those who are not. In the interviews, the authors found various elements constituting elements of social integration, such as finding groups of friends, obtaining better tools for work, and even recognition by family members as they achieve better results in school as discussed below.

There is a lack of research on the topic of adult education and other topics related to the educational field itself (Torres, 2017). In studies on motivation in adult students and older adults, the literature shows a predominance of quantitative methodologies in which the most common technique has been the survey (González-Peiteado & Rodríguez-López, 2017; Iñiguez Berrozpe

& Marcaletti, 2017; Darkenwal, 1977; Morstain & Smart, 1977). This literature does not describe the involvement of adults in literacy processes or the school lag involved in a migratory situation.

Findings of qualitative studies conducted over three decades ago by Morstain and Smart (1977) show that when the profiles of men and women are compared, men have more instrumental profiles, because they believe that studying will help them improve their socioeconomic status. Conversely, women study to establish personal relationships, escape the rut, and satisfy their curiosity. And although the authors argue that their results cannot be generalized because they will depend on the socioeconomic and demographic level of the participants, they could be a starting point for similar studies. In the present research, conducted under different conditions, both men and women consider that studying can not only contribute to their being better people, but also to improving their income levels and quality of life.

In 1976, Boshier conducted a critical analysis of 14 quantitative studies using motivational orientation in older adults as a factor of analysis, identifying strengths and weaknesses in the measurement. Foremost among these is Houle's typology, providing an overview of the organization of motivation, although Boshier (1976) states that this may be insufficient for characterizing specific contexts.

Houle's study (cited in Boshier, 1971, 1976) proposes the organization of motivational factors according to the following three categories: 1) goal orientation: subjects determine whether learning can be used; 2) activity orientation: subjects participate for social reasons, to be with others and make friends, with academic content taking second place and 3) learning orientation: subjects participate for the sake of knowledge, regarding it as a natural, continuous part of life.

In this context, age is often regarded as a limiting factor in learning in adult education, but as Iñiguez Berrozpe and Marcaletti (2017) note, this perspective is one of the myths of adult education: "The scientific literature has used age as a homogenizing element of this population group when explaining their educational exclusion, this being one of the so-called myths of global aging" (p. 61).

The authors of the present study consider that the motivations of students to access and continue with school learning is a heterogeneous, holistic, and complex issue (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2009, 2016, 2022; Iñiguez Berrozpe & Marcaletti, 2017; Torres, 2017; Rothes et al., 2014) combining social, family-specific, cultural, economic, and psychosocial issues, and other aspects of the social field of adult education.

A study by González-Peiteado and Rodríguez-López (2017) explores three types of motivation in an adult population with an average age of 42.23 years attending school to learn a foreign language. To construct the instrument, the proposal of Vallerand (1992, cited in González-Peiteado & Rodríguez-López, 2017) was incorporated, highlighting the following variables: intrinsic motivation, oriented towards knowledge, achievement and stimulating experiences and extrinsic motivation, particularly external regulation, and demotivation. The study concludes with the need

to undertake actions to stimulate intrinsic motivation, highlighting the importance of the role of the teacher in the motivation process.

This last factor is relevant to research. Interviewees consistently expressed the importance of teachers in their academic progress and the creation of a pleasant environment, which translates into the motivation not to drop out. As the following testimonials point out, teachers' dedication sometimes extended as far as opening their homes to their students to enhance the educational experience, as Ámbar comments:

> Our teacher, our tutor, gives us her time, and I thank her very much. I feel that because of her we will have our elementary school certificate; she gives us a day of her time at home. She gives us up to four or five hours and more if she can, which is a lot for us, because she stops doing her chores to devote herself to us. She has a lot of patience, and she is a lovely person, I feel that because of her, we will have our elementary school certificate, because she is a person who does not give up. She has a lot of patience and if, as she says, I can complete middle school, I will carry on.

In a similar experience, teaching support involves providing spaces of conversation and personal communication that create bonds of trust, as Maribel explains:

> Ana is the best teacher. As a teacher she serves as a psychologist, if we have a problem we approach her, or she talks to us, if she has a small problem. I have a lot of communication with the teacher [...] she tells me her about her things, I tell her mine, because it is nice to have that level of trust.

In addition, teachers are valued for their academic background, which serves a motivation for students in their learning process, as expressed by Altamira: "Yes, she is very well trained psychologically and she's very patient, she is very well qualified. She has worked in Tijuana for a long time at various schools."

The student-teacher relationship is a key aspect of extrinsic motivation. It yields favorable results in the school environment and the personal lives of participants so that they do give up and on the contrary, make a greater effort to compensate the support of their teachers.

Motivations of Migrant Students

According to the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the educational experience in adult life is an important means of enhancing economic, individual, and social aspects, as well as "non-monetary social" aspects (Beltrán, 2014, cited in Prestes & Diniz, 2015, p. 2). It should be noted that in the 1990s, public policies began to promote the so-called "second chance" as a process that encourages the participation of adults from literacy processes to higher education as a possibility for this sector to achieve better levels of economic, social and cultural well-being.

In the case of community educational programs in California, the learning experience has made an impact on the lives of students the educators, as Amanda, a teacher from the community school in California, observes:

> I've been working in this program [...] for 18 years and I have the great satisfaction of having been able to serve the Hispanic community, mainly Mexican, Guatemalan, Salvadoran and Honduran Latinos [...] I feel great in this experience [...] It is a great satisfaction to do my bit with my knowledge and help so that they can get ahead in this country. I have the satisfaction of having had perhaps over a hundred graduates during the program.

From the experience of fieldwork in conducting direct interviews with participants (see Table 1) in the school ethnography environment, the authors of this article constructed their own qualitative categories of social research related to motivations. Although some articles only use quantitative data (Darkenwald, 1977; Morstain & Smart, 1977), they were a useful reference for guiding and identifying key topics in the qualitative accounts of the students they interviewed. The final categories constructed in their analyses, in other words, the main reflection on the systematization and construction of observables, was qualitative.

An important element in the construction of the analytical categories of the authors of this article is the issue of migration. In the studies analyzed, the migrant student does not appear as an informant. In this respect, the migration issue in this research is an unusual reference enabling the authors to think about the transnational situation, in which people create their sense of purpose in life from the interaction between two cultural worlds: their countries of origin and destination. Formal education, and consequently the educational experience of adults, is an element that forms part of the migration context. Table 1 shows the systematization of motivations as categories constructed in this research.

Table 1. Motivations of Mexican Migrants to Attend Community Education Programs in California

Objective orientation	Activity-oriented	Learning guidance
Learning is valued if it can be used.	Participates for social reasons, such as spending time with others and making friends, in which content takes second place.	When they participate for the sake of knowledge itself and regard it as a natural, continuous part of life.
1. Knowledge for work 2. Knowledge to complete their schooling 3. Knowledge to acquire independence 4. Knowledge as religious training 5. Knowledge to learn English 6. Knowledge to help others	1. Socialize 2. Use up time 3. Spend time with the family 4. Recognition	1. Knowledge to develop themselves 2. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge

Source: Own elaboration, based on the proposal of Houle (cited in Boshier, 1971, 1976), and on the data analysis of Uribe Alvarado's (2019) research project.

As already mentioned, the categories of analysis were constructed *a posteriori*. In this respect, the authors have different categories from those mentioned in the proposal put forward by Morstain and Smart (1977). They believe that the religious factor, for example, can be a key incentive for engaging in school learning in the community education programs. There students can learn to read to understand the word of God, as one of the participants, Evelia, puts it:

> But as here we were told of the word of God. That was what made me look for a place to study. Because they said to me, "this is what it says in the Bible," but I didn't know anything, but I do want to read the Bible.

Another motivational category with a particular impact on the population in the context of migration is learning English as a means of joining American society and having access to better paid jobs. As mentioned by one of the participants, Ernesto, learning English is useful for understanding his child's school assignments and interacting with other students:

> I'm already learning a little English because there are papers that my son gets saying that his grades are already improving and I'm not really good at that English thing and I think I must learn something so I can see his grades.

Adult motivation to obtain an education is an issue that forms part of several factors present in the daily lives of immigrants, who are required to attend class regularly, do their homework, and need support from their family to meet the academic goals of the program demands. Other categories contributing to the motivation to acquire knowledge in adult education programs are described below.

Knowing How to Use What Is Learned

Women, more than men, emphasize their enthusiasm for *knowledge to continue learning*, not only to read and write, which already gives them independence and equips them to get a better job. Once they resume studying, they are reluctant to stop.

Some of the testimonials related to this instrumental orientation show that the participants value *the knowledge that can be used* in everyday life. Tatiana's testimonial speaks volumes. She has a vision of the future of her own academic career and appreciates the efforts made by teachers to help students achieve their dreams,

> It's really wonderful, I am very excited about this program and hopefully many people will appreciate the time these lovely men and women share with us. It is an opportunity for any woman who has a goal and wants to do something in life to succeed, and this is the first step. And here we see many dreams that have been achieved through this program. I'm one of them with the dream of graduating as a social worker.

Another factor that is part of this instrumental orientation is *knowledge for work,* a space where students can directly apply what they have learned, which in some cases inspires them to seek better opportunities, feel useful and to increase their incomes. In the case of Evelia, she aspires to

know how to help at home and feel fit to find a better job: "I would like to know how to do accounting so I can go out to work and help and get a job that brings in more money."

Acquiring the confidence to perform better in his current job is crucial for Miguel:

> It has helped me because I have more confidence in doing my work when I fill out papers and so on. For many years, I had been lying in my work about whether I knew or not, and I used to ask others for help, so I was there for many years. Now I can do the math and I'm very happy.

Others also wish to learn and engage in other entrepreneurial activities, such as setting up a business, a beauty salon, or a bakery, or learning fine art painting or accounting. As they put it, reading and writing and a little English would give them the tools required to turn their business idea into a reality; age is no object.

One powerful element of motivation in the testimonials is *knowledge to have independence.* For students, this involves acquiring confidence, self-esteem, doing things through willpower. Men and women describe events in their daily lives that become extraordinary once they have learned to read and write.

Living in the city of Los Angeles and getting around is no easy matter. Although street and road signs are easy to follow, being unable to read creates an enormous amount of stress. Being able to understand the signage provides security and tranquility, as the participants in this study report. Cintia's academic achievement, which began with her learning to read and write and has enabled her to attend elementary school, shows the independence she has achieved through her progress at school:

> I understand the signs, I used to drive just like that, without reading, but I learned them by heart. To get to work, I would take the freeway and go to Santa Monica. I would spell out the signs so I would not get lost. One day I got lost and called my husband, and he said, "Spell the letters, tell me," and I got there. I told him letter by letter and he found where I was. That was about nine years ago, now I don't get lost.

This testimonial shows the importance of feeling independent of taking care of oneself, and of privacy. Knowing how to read and write becomes a powerful tool, a practical, useful form of *knowledge in everyday life.* "It's like living blindly", said Angel, one of the participants, because he was unable to read. It is like not seeing and when you manage to learn you discover a new world:

> It feels nice because I felt good to see that I wrote that. When I started going and finished my literacy course, I wrote to my wife in a heart, "I love you, mom of my children." My daughters laughed because my wife saw it and didn't understand because she couldn't read, so she just looked, and I read.

The last factor within *goal orientation* is learning to be able to help. Although this was not recurrent in the participants' narratives, it highlights the value they place on the knowledge

acquired for the benefit of their communities and others like them who are vulnerable. Evaristo, 69, began at the adult elementary education level in February 2016. Today he is in high school, attending the community education program three times a week, and studying computing and English. He talked about his motivation to attend school, "I would like to know how to help, I need to train to be a volunteer."

Caring for others is a type of motivation that encourages students to continue in school. The set of motivations comprising goal orientation shows how knowledge is an instrumental asset directly benefiting the quality of life of students, and indirectly benefiting their families and communities. It enables them to give and share, to communicate more easily and to move confidently through the city. Knowledge then becomes a valued aspect, whereby a person can make an additional effort and include it in their life trajectory, which could involve sacrificing a certain amount of leisure time or time with the family.

Knowledge to Improve One's Social Life

For an adult, or older adult who may be retired, or have a lot of free time, life can be monotonous. When they wish to expand their circle of acquaintances or make friends, the school environment can be a safe, controlled place for doing so. It is a space where they can find like-minded people seeking new experiences beyond knowledge.

In this section, activity-oriented motivations (as mentioned in Table 1) that involve socializing, spending quality time with others, being with the family, and recognition will be mentioned. The first one involves the search for new circles of friends, as described by Violeta, a student:

> I come and I like to see people, I feel good seeing people, I have a lot of time to attend, you know. That's why I go out, so I don't have to be alone in the house, you know. Or just TV, I have the TV on all day. It's better to see people, you know.

According to Erasmo, school becomes a place to get out of a rut, leave the loneliness of your home and have a good time:

> School is like therapy, even when there are problems at home and the atmosphere exhausts us, school can be a refreshing place to forget the reality that burdens us for a moment. When you have a problem, no matter how small, you forget it when you talk to people at school, you talk about very different things than if you stayed home and were thinking about problems.

Classes therefore fill in time, which weighs more heavily when a person is lonely or exhausted by domestic chores. This motivation was only observed in the case of women because they are the ones who spend most of the time in the domestic sphere or taking care of the family environment. Going to school allows them to feel productive and alive, as Altamira, one of the students, remarked: "I can't just be at home doing the washing and ironing."

The role of housewife performed by several of the women interviewed leaves them both emotionally and physically drained over the years. These women have chosen to attend literacy

classes, which enables them to learn and grow so that they can obtain another kind of satisfaction that complements their motivation to continue going to school.

The nuclear family, one of the most recurrent factors in the narratives, is linked to the *example in the family environment.* Both men and women are encouraged by their families to enroll in school, which in turn leads them to take on new challenges. This is what the participants say about the support of the family. For men, their wives and children constitute a major incentive. Ernesto provided the following emotional testimonial,

> My wife is very happy because she says that I want to better myself, "Now you can read and write and write a letter on your own and it is good that you are doing all this…" My son is also happy. He is 14 and he sees that I am learning a little more.

The search for recognition from both the family and others is a fundamental part of the growth of self-esteem, reflecting a person's intellectual capacities and drive. Studying and going to school can be postponed for a while to support the family at difficult times, as Juventino comments: "I am also showing them that it was not because I did not want to continue studying, but because I had to help my parents and now, I can take it up again."

Likewise, Maribel's message is clear, it is never too late if you want to learn, you can:

> My little girl asks me, "Mom, where are you going?" and I tell her I'm going to school, and she stares at me and tells me that I'm too old to go to school, but I tell her it's never too late to learn.

The authors' analysis shows the motivations related to learning. Some people over 65 only come to school for pleasure and because they can, because it has been a lifelong dream and now, they can make it come true. The desire to know even a little bit more is enough says Camila, "Well, it motivates me to attend because I want to try to learn, even if it's a little, but I learn, that's what motivates me."

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this article, the authors have referred to an academic research project involving fieldwork in California with migrant students who underwent learning experiences at the INEA Community Adult Education Programs. The questions raised at the beginning of this research paper were: How people of Mexican origin who attend community adult education programs in California live the educational experience? What is the motivation of migrants to attend educational programs for adults in community schools? The authors conclude with the following reflections.

Educational Experience

This is an experience marked by *the educational lag*, caused by the vulnerable and unequal conditions of students in their country of origin, which limits the possibility of finding better living conditions in the United States. This condition is exacerbated when migrants do not speak English

fluently, as is the case of most of the students in this research project. Migrants therefore experience a double vulnerability or lag in transnational education.

Educational lag experienced in the place of origin, becomes more complex in the place of destination, due to the dynamics of the lives and work of immigrants, as well as the social fear of going to school. Education at any level *is not always a priority* for a Mexican immigrant, which they bring from their place of origin and continue to experience in their destination in the United States.

Educational Motivation

The authors observe that school motivations are a complex subject with different perspectives. They observe a need in students to acquire knowledge *that will help boost their self-esteem and achieve better living standards* in the United States. Community Education Programs in California from Mexico therefore provide motivation for students to make progress in reducing the educational lag. Perseverance, time, and supportive family conditions to enable them to attend school are also required, together with basic financial resources.

Social life and friendship are one of the reasons students to go to school, because *they share learning processes with migrants with the same needs* and similar socio-cultural status and they can also speak and learn in their native language, Spanish.

Global Inequality

Adult education in immigration contexts has been insufficiently studied. More research is required on issues related to adult education in a transnational condition or in migratory contexts, in both theoretical and methodological terms, particularly qualitative methodologies, absent from most education research papers.

The existence of over 200 community adult education programs in California reflects the need for social impact, which in turn requires inclusion in public policies on either side of the border, the strengthening of binational work agendas and a specific budget. Just as there are thousands of immigrants in California who lag behind in education, worldwide, there are millions of migrants and asylum-seekers, who have not completed their basic and general education and lack access to the latter.

The research topic referred to in this article is a global issue due to the constant movement of people living in poverty who are unable to complete their basic education in their countries of origin. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2019) has identified quality education and inclusive education as a universal human right for citizens, including children, youth, and adults. It has also underlined the need to facilitate migration and orderly mobility, with planned public policies. These two situations reflect the inequality in the world.

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