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Language Learners: Learners' Perspectives

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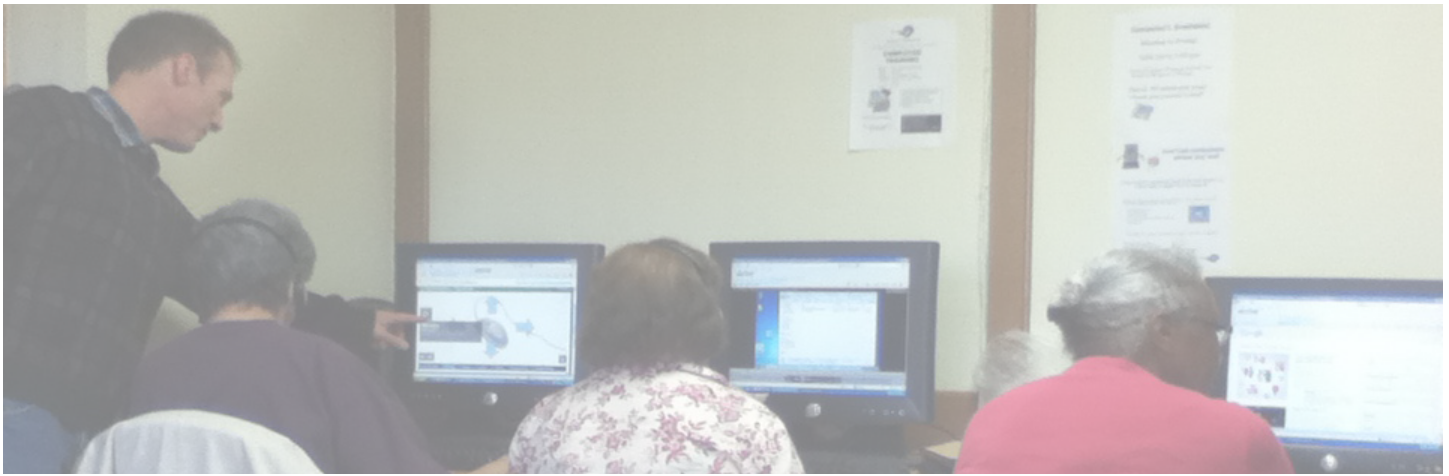
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Learners' Perspectives

Digital Literacy Acquisition in Brief: *What Research Tells Us about Language Learners*

Overview

These findings are from an Institute of Museum and Library Services funded research project that interviewed more than 100 participants within a multi-state Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) project. The BTOP project included six lead partners who developed local networks of community organizations to provide adults with an opportunity to learn to use computers and the Internet.

While these networks created a variety of implementation strategies and ways to serve learners' needs, they shared these key features:



- *curriculum on the Learner Web, an online platform designed specifically for adult learners, which included digital literacy material in English and Spanish*
- *in-person tutor support*
- *the opportunity to work at their own pace and identify their own goals*



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Learners' Perspectives

Key Discoveries

- Bilingual tutors appeared to have a set of skills that made them well suited for working with language learners. English Language Learners preferred working with a bilingual tutor, even if the tutor didn't know the learner's first language.
- Learners wanted a say in which language they used for learning. Programs need to be flexible about language choice because sometimes learners were better served by learning in their first language, and sometimes better served by learning in English.
- The type of language used within the materials influenced which language learners chose. When materials are written in academic or technical language (a high register), some learners, like Guadalupe, may have felt less confident of their ability to understand and learn. Even though Spanish might have been a learner's dominant spoken language, some wanted to learn in English because the Spanish they knew wasn't the same as the Spanish used in the materials.
- Some learners wanted to know the English words common on the Internet. Although there may have been Spanish translations for different parts of the computer and the Internet, many learners felt that the predominance of English online made it necessary to recognize and understand Internet and computer terms in English.
- Some learners wanted to learn digital literacy in English because they wanted to develop their English skills, and other learners wanted to experience the program in both languages to reinforce their digital literacy skills and their language skills at the same time. These individuals used the flexibility of the program to go through the program twice--once in Spanish and once in English. Which language they started with was the learner's choice.

On the Ground

"There are a variety of ways that English language learners can be supported in developing digital literacy skills. Tutors worked with learners to guide them toward the material and language that best fit the learner's needs. Tutors also provided support to learners by offering translations into either language, supporting vocabulary learning, and helping the learner move between languages as a way to reinforce content and language learning. The materials also included video and pictures, which aids learners in grasping the content and improving their digital literacy skills regardless of the language used."

~ Program Coordinator

Voices from the Field

Guadalupe was a recently widowed woman in her early 50s. She moved to the United States from Mexico when she was young, and she identified Spanish as her preferred language. When she was applying for jobs, she discovered that computer skills are needed. After a year as a learner, Guadalupe became one of the bilingual volunteer tutors within the program. One of the many things Guadalupe taught us is that language choice is complicated.

"I been here forty years, I never went to school here though. My Spanish, when you don't use it that much, it become also like a second language. I'm working on this because I learn in English. I read in English, but I write in Spanish. I speak Spanglish. When I saw the program in Spanish and the kind of Spanish they were using-- the areas skillful and academic-- I said, I don't understand it."

The Learner Web provided an option for learners to choose whether they wanted to learn in English or Spanish. The lab also provided bilingual tutors; Guadalupe could get help in the language she was most comfortable with. Guadalupe chose to learn in English because her knowledge of Spanish and Spanglish are conversational, and she felt the Spanish used in the learning material was more technical. However, Guadalupe continued to work on developing her Spanish in her role as a bilingual tutor. She gained confidence in her English and her Spanish abilities as she built her digital literacy skills and helped others build theirs.

Learners' Perspectives

What Do These Findings Mean For Your Work?

This program was a tremendous win-win-win for bilingual learners-- they acquired digital skills while polishing first-language vocabulary and learning digital terminology in English.

~ Adult Education Director



Acknowledgements & Further Information

These research efforts were informed and supported by a National Advisory Committee and a Research Applications Committee made up of professionals who support adult learners.

More information about the project, research findings, publications, and project data can be found in PDX Scholar at:
http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/digital_literacy_acquisition/

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Digital Literacy Acquisition in Brief: What Research Tells Us about...

Language Learners

- Tutors' Perspectives
- The Role of Online Materials
- The Learner/Tutor Relationship
- Learners' Perspectives

Program Design

- Tutor-facilitated Digital Literacy Acquisition
- The Learner Path
- Volunteering in a Digital Literacy Program
- Learning Digital Skills in a Time-limited Program
- Learning Digital Skills in a Corrections Setting

Tutors

- Personal Qualities of Tutors
- Tutoring Strategies and Organizing Learning
- The Tutor/Learner Relationship

Learners

- Development of Self-confidence
- Measuring Success
- Impact
- Learners Who Become Tutors
- Self-paced Learning