



IMPACT OF ECONOMIC EDUCATION ON CITIZEN UNDERSTANDING OF UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

Francisco, Borelli

UNCOMA, Argentina (franciscoborreli73@gmail.com)

Facundo Sebastián, Gonzalez

UNCOMA, Argentina (facugonzalez8888@gmail.com)

Lucas Joaquín, Urquilux

UNCOMA, Argentina (lurquilux@gmail.com)

Tomas, Cardozo Allende

UNCOMA, Argentina (tomas.cardozo.rugby@gmail.com)

Abstract

In the present study, we evaluate the impact of an educational intervention on Universal Basic Income (UBI) in two study groups in Argentina. An interview design was used with a treatment group that received training and a control group, both evaluated after the intervention using structured surveys administered to a total of 28 participants. The results demonstrate that the training significantly increased the understanding of UBI, with an improvement in the identification of its essential characteristic: unconditionality. The trained group also showed a more critical and realistic view of the fiscal challenges, an aspect that is the main concern of the respondents. Although a slight inclination towards favorable positions was observed, doubts persist about its fiscal viability and its labor effects. The work concludes that economic education is a relevant tool to foster an informed public debate on innovative redistributive policies in the Argentine context.

Keywords: Universal Basic Income; Economic Education; Citizen Perception.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- **Establishing the Territory**

The debate on the implementation of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) has gained great relevance in recent decades, both in developed and developing countries. The literature shows that it is an ideologically transversal proposal, discussed by economists, politicians, and international organizations as an innovative alternative to face structural problems such as poverty, inequality, and the transformation of labor markets (Hoynes & Rothstein, 2019; Ghatak & Maniquet, 2019). The breadth of interest in UBI is reflected in the increase in publications, parliamentary debates, and pilot experiments in different regions, which reinforces the relevance of studying its viability and effects.

The available studies have approached UBI from multiple angles. On the one hand, Hoynes and Rothstein (2019) analyze its feasibility in advanced countries, comparing it with traditional transfer programs and highlighting the tensions surrounding its financing and distributive effects. On the other hand, Francese and Prady (2018), from the International Monetary Fund, propose an analytical framework that incorporates key dimensions such as coverage, progressivity, and generosity, evaluating the redistributive impact of a UBI in different contexts through micro-simulations. These contributions highlight the richness of the debate, but also its conceptual and methodological diversity.

- **Establishing the Niche**

Despite the growing academic production, significant gaps persist in relation to the social and political understanding of UBI. Most studies focus on economic feasibility or redistributive effects, but few systematically explore how citizens understand this policy, what level of knowledge they possess about its objectives, and what perceptions exist regarding its potential benefits and risks. As noted by Banerjee, Niehaus, and Suri (2019), even in developing countries where pilot experiences have been carried out, it remains uncertain how beneficiaries' expectations align with the objectives of public policy designers. This constitutes a limitation that restricts the informed implementation of any pilot in local contexts. In the Argentine case, where levels of poverty and food insecurity represent urgent challenges, there are still no studies that address UBI as an object of analysis from the perspective of citizen knowledge. Ghatak and Maniquet (2019) emphasize that, although the normative justifications for UBI may be solid, its acceptance depends on social and political factors specific to each country. This gap is evident in the absence of research that links the theoretical and comparative dimension of international literature with the actual perceptions of vulnerable communities in the interior of the country.

- **Presentation of Current Research and Relevance**

The present work seeks to contribute to filling this gap through an analysis of the impact of an educational intervention on UBI in vulnerable Argentine communities. It proposes to compare a group that receives specific training on this policy with a control group that does not receive it, evaluating both through pre- and post-intervention surveys. In this way, the degree of improvement in knowledge and understanding of UBI will be

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measured, as well as the perceptions about its advantages, disadvantages, and viability in the Argentine context. With this approach, the research not only relies on international theoretical and empirical evidence but also adapts it to an applied study at the local level. This focus is fundamental because it complements previous macroeconomic analyses (Hoynes & Rothstein, 2019; Francese & Prady, 2018) with a micro and social dimension, centered on citizen understanding. Furthermore, it directly connects with Sustainable Development Goal No. 2 of the 2030 Agenda: to end hunger, achieve food security, and promote adequate nutrition. By evaluating the effect of training on UBI, this study provides evidence on the capacity of economic education to foster an informed debate on innovative policies against hunger and poverty, thus contributing to guiding future public policy decisions in Argentina. Next, the article presents the methodological design, results, discussion, and conclusions of the research.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design, aimed at measuring the impact of an educational intervention on the level of knowledge and understanding of Universal Basic Income (UBI). The study will work with two focus groups of 15 participants each, selected in vulnerable communities in the interior of Argentina. The treatment group will receive structured training on UBI, while the control group will not have access to this instance. Both groups will be evaluated using structured surveys administered at two moments: before the training, to establish the baseline, and one month later, to observe possible changes in acquired knowledge and self-perception on the topic. The surveys include closed questions, perception scales, and some open-ended items on the definition, objectives, operation, possible forms of financing, and perceptions of UBI's advantages and disadvantages. The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive and comparative statistical techniques, calculating frequencies, percentages, and variations in correct responses between the two measurement moments, as well as differences between the treatment and control groups. The processing will be done with tools such as Excel and, eventually, statistical programs such as R or Stata, if necessary. Although the sample is small and does not allow generalizing the results to the entire Argentine population, the design used makes it possible to identify significant trends and evaluate the effect of the training as an instrument for citizen dissemination and awareness.

3. RESULTS

The survey consisted of nine questions applied to 28 people divided equally between a Trained Group and a Control Group, differentiated by whether or not they had received theoretical and audiovisual training on UBI. This equitable division guarantees homogeneous conditions for comparing general perceptions, although the results are analyzed jointly to capture the global trend of the sample. Regarding the age profile, most of the respondents are between 24 and 26 years old, with a peak of 28.6% at 24 years, and a slight male majority (60.7%). This tells us that the participating group is mainly

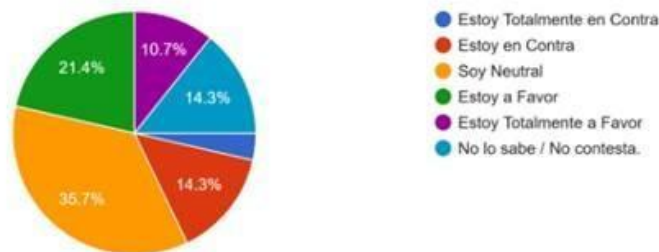
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composed of young adults, which can be associated with greater openness to new economic and social proposals such as UBI. Regarding prior knowledge before the surveys, 64.3% claimed to have heard of UBI sometime, while 28.6% had never heard of it, and only 7.1% said they knew it in depth. This low level of prior knowledge reinforces the relevance of the training applied, which sought to broaden the conceptual understanding of the measure. When evaluating the understanding of the concept, 64.3% correctly identified that UBI is unconditional and paid individually, regardless of employment status or income. This percentage indicates that the majority managed to grasp the essential characteristic that distinguishes UBI from other social programs. Regarding perceived obstacles, 67.9% of respondents consider the high fiscal cost to be the main barrier to implementing a UBI, followed by 21.4% who did not know or did not answer, and 7.1% who mentioned effects on the birth rate. This reflects a predominant fiscal concern over other political or social factors. On the other hand, 57.1% believe that the universality of UBI simplifies administration and reduces political discretion, which demonstrates a positive perception of its potential for efficiency and transparency.

Figure 1. General opinion on the implementation of UBI

Si se propusiera un IBU en nuestro país (financiado, por ejemplo, con una reforma fiscal), ¿usted estaría a favor o en contra de esta política?

28 respuestas



Source: Own elaboration.

In global terms, 35.7% remained neutral, 32.1% expressed themselves in favor or totally in favor, and 28.6% expressed opposition. These results show a diversity of opinions, although with a slight inclination towards favorable positions or openness to debate about the measure. Our results show that the training contributed to a better understanding of UBI and that there is a partially positive assessment of the proposal, especially regarding its efficiency and equity. However, doubts persist about its fiscal sustainability, its labor effects, and the administration of resources, which indicates that support for UBI is still in an exploratory and reflective stage among the surveyed public. This aligns with the bibliography consulted by us.

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Table 1. Comparison of results between the Control Group and the Trained Group

Statement about UBI	Totally Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Totally Agree	Don't Know / No Answer
It would reduce the willingness to work	7%	18%	25%	25%	7%	18%
It is fiscally unviable	10%	21%	14%	21%	14%	21%
It would improve the efficiency of the social protection system	4%	11%	29%	32%	7%	18%
Recipients will spend the money responsibly	14%	21%	17%	17%	7%	24%
It is a necessary tool to face inequality and automation	11%	11%	21%	25%	4%	29%

Source: Own elaboration based on survey results

Next, we will analyze Table 1, which contains the main statements about the perception and attitude towards UBI of all respondents:

As observed, the data obtained from the 28 respondents show a positive effect of the training on the level of understanding and assessment of Universal Basic Income (UBI).

Labor Effects: Opinions are almost equally divided between those who believe that UBI would not discourage work (25% in Totally Disagree/Disagree) and those who consider a neutral effect (25%). Meanwhile, those who do believe it would (32% in Agree/Totally Agree) are the ones who tip the balance.

Fiscal Viability: There is polarization: 35% agree with fiscal unviability, while 31% disagree. This underscores the lack of consensus on its economic feasibility. The polarization occurs because the percentage of neutrals (14%) is low compared to the extremes.

System Efficiency: The majority (39%) agree that UBI would simplify and improve the efficiency of the social system, which reflects a positive perception of its administrative capacity.

Responsible Use: Social skepticism in this regard is notable, with 35% of respondents disagreeing with the idea that recipients will spend the money responsibly, compared to only 24% who do trust it.

Inequality/Automation: Positions lean slightly toward agreement (29% in favor) that UBI is a necessary tool, although the high percentage of Don't Know/No Answer (29%) indicates uncertainty about the structural impacts of the policy.

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Another piece of data that we must highlight, due to its social relevance, is the high percentage of Don't Know/No Answer in all responses. A phenomenon that is interesting to analyze in the future.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of our research show that the training had a positive effect on the knowledge and understanding of what Universal Basic Income (UBI) is, therefore, we confirm the relevance of economic education as a tool to improve citizen understanding of public policies. In this sense, we agree with Francese and Prady (2018), who also highlight the importance of a clear conceptual framework for understanding the redistributive effects of UBI. For the trained group, we observed a better identification of the essential characteristics of UBI: universality, unconditionality, and individuality; which demonstrates that information can modify perceptions and reduce confusion regarding other types of social programs. On the other hand, we saw in the results that the main concerns of the respondents are the fiscal viability of the program and its possible effects on the labor market. This also aligns with another of our selected texts, that of Hoynes and Rothstein (2019), who studied it in developed country contexts. The perception of high fiscal cost as the main obstacle reflects social awareness of budgetary limitations and the need for a sustainable financial design. A significant proportion of participants valued the administrative simplicity of UBI, which aligns with the arguments of Banerjee, Niehaus, and Suri (2019), who point out that its universality could reduce bureaucracy. And in relation to the paper by Ghatak and Maniquet (2019), the divided opinions regarding the responsible use of money and the possible labor disincentive reflect the "moral" fears that accompany this type of policy. We also noted that the several neutral or undecided responses, even after the training, suggest that UBI remains an abstract concept for a large part of the population. This reinforces the idea that the public debate is still in an initial phase and that citizen education is essential to build informed consensus on its implementation. Despite the positive findings, we found some limitations in our research journey, starting with the small sample size (28 respondents), which prevents generalizing the results to the entire Argentine population, in addition to the concentration of participants in the young adult range in Neuquén, which could have influenced the receptivity towards UBI. For future research, it is crucial to broaden the scope with more diverse and representative samples in terms of age and region. We can also suggest delving deeper into fiscal viability and labor disincentive effects, through quantitative and qualitative studies, respectively, that address these points in greater detail. It may also be valuable to implement long-term evaluations of educational interventions to reduce the proportion of neutral responses and generate a more defined stance on the UBI policy.

5. CONCLUSION

Our project demonstrates that educational intervention significantly improves the understanding of Universal Basic Income, evidencing the potential of training as a

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strategy to strengthen public debate on redistributive public policies. The respondents who received training showed greater conceptual clarity and a more favorable disposition toward the measure. These results support the hypothesis that economic education contributes to reducing the distance between technical knowledge and the social perception of public policies, as noted by Francese & Prady (2018). At the same time, and although the predisposition toward UBI was partially favorable, relevant doubts persist about its fiscal viability, its possible effects on labor supply, and the administration of resources. These tensions reflect the theoretical and practical difficulties identified by Hoynes and Rothstein (2019), as well as the need to adapt the discussion to the particularities of the Argentine context. In this sense, our study provides evidence on the importance of education and information to foster a more conscious and participatory citizenry in the design of innovative social policies. Furthermore, this work is framed within SDG 2 of the 2030 Agenda, which seeks to end hunger, achieve food security, and promote adequate nutrition. From this perspective, the research results reinforce the idea that policies like UBI could constitute complementary tools to achieve human development and social equity goals, provided that society understands and debates its form of implementation. The project met its SMART objective by demonstrating, in a measurable and achievable way, that an educational intervention can increase knowledge and understanding of UBI. This achievement not only validates the initial hypothesis but also lays the groundwork for future research aimed at evaluating the impact of economic education on public opinion formation. In this sense, the study represents a valuable contribution to future colleagues by offering a replicable methodological model and a concrete example of how the articulation between economic theory and educational action can strengthen the link between academia, public policy, and society.

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