



Changes in Intensity of Primary and Secondary Motivation in a Senior Language Learning Programme

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Abstract

Seniors as a target group of our research are considered to be specific in terms of needs and wants influencing their decision to take on the role of a learner. Our aim is to analyse their approaches to learning a foreign language. The study focuses on four factors that influence differences between approaches of senior learners to English language learning. These are: lecturer's personality, age-related social aspects, processes and techniques in language teaching and the personality of the senior learner. A questionnaire of 25 closed response items was designed and respondents chose a point on the scale from strongly agree, partly agree, partly disagree to strongly disagree which best represented their view. On the one hand the results we obtained showed a very positive approach of seniors to language learning. On the other hand senior learners have very low self-confidence negatively influencing their progress in language learning. Due to the size of the sample, our results are informative but can be considered a challenge for further research in the field of senior education. The study is the outcome of the research project KEGA 003UMB-4/2018 Language education of senior learners.

Keywords: *specifics of language education, approaches to learning in senior age, factors of change in approaches to learning*

1. Introduction

Ageing is characterised as a natural and lifelong process. Every organism is exposed to changes; those changes do not start simultaneously, therefore, ageing is characterised as an individual and variable process. The ageing of society is a problem of European society caused by higher economic standards, advances in medicine and population crisis.

1.1 Late Adulthood – Silver Generation

Late adulthood is one of the life stages of ageing. WHO distinguishes early old age (between the age of 60 and 74 years old) and old age from the age of 75. In this period, three distinct ages can be distinguished: biological, psychological and social age. According to the experts, factors affecting longevity are as follows: the first ten years of an individual's life (15%), genetic factors (25%), and such factors as living conditions [2]. We distinguish biological age including the anatomy and the structure of a biological organism; psychological age dealing with functional changes in mental processes, and social age reflecting social aspects of an individual such as family, work and social needs. Although the general characteristics of this stage indicate a number of changes, the ability to learn a foreign language is still present.

1.2 Factors influencing senior education

Drawing on their experience and knowledge, seniors aim to maintain their physical and mental health and are looking for specific activities that will support it. They want to engage themselves in activities they did not have time for earlier, including pursuing further education in various fields, e.g. learning of English language. Assuming the role of learners, seniors know what interests them and what they want to learn. They are very sensitive as to whether a language course will meet their needs, and expect success and make efforts to reach their goal. Seniors need to experience success and increase their self-confidence.

1.2.1 Motivation of seniors

The basic precondition of success in any activity is the motivation of an individual to commence the activity and persist until the goal is achieved. The motivation has to match the mental and physical characteristics of an individual. There are many factors in each learner's personality affecting what and how they learn. Seniors can be considered a very heterogeneous group because of their experiences of different family, social, and work environments. Many authors mention several motivational factors



based on the current needs of seniors [4].

Educational needs

Social needs

Personality needs

Educational needs include the effort of seniors to comprehend and learn something new in their working field or pursue education in a field they are interested in during their leisure time. Social needs include the saturation of social relations and contacts. After retiring, many relationships established in work environment do not last and the parenting and elderly roles gradually diminish as well. Personal needs include increasing self-confidence, proving to yourself and your networks that you can still learn something new, and receiving acknowledgement. The desire to spend leisure time meaningfully can be included too [1].

An English language course enables all these needs to be met, and based on these needs, motivational factors can be further specified into:

Primary motivational factors:

1. Educational needs:

- To gain communication competence
- The ability to understand discourse in written and oral form
- The ability to translate texts to & from English
- To understand the similarities and differences between the mother tongue and a foreign language
- To learn about the foreign culture

2. Social needs:

- Regular contact with other individuals
- Establishing new relationships
- Saturating the need for human co-existence
- Spending leisure time with new friends

3. Personality needs:

- To see whether I can learn a new language
- To prove to myself and my networks that I am able to learn a language
- To be a modern senior
- To overcome my own laziness
- To use leisure time meaningfully
- To get a sense of success and satisfaction

Based on the particular experience, the spectrum of motivational factors is expanding. This is related to the initial feelings experienced while entering a classroom (environment, group, and overall atmosphere). On the other hand, the teacher's personality and professionalism play an important role as it can eliminate negative feelings and strengthen positive feelings.

Secondary factors:

- 1. environment-related factors:** nice, bright, and warm classroom, comfortable furniture, safe classroom movement, classroom location, lift and toilet proximity, equipping the classroom with teaching aids and equipment, timetable
- 2. group-related factors:** making new friends, pleasant group, rituals after class, sense of belonging, encouraging each other, helping, pleasant atmosphere, sharing success, willingness to cooperate in pairs and groups
- 3. learning material-related factors:** content and form-suitable textbooks and other learning materials, available non-textbook exercises, possibility to monitor progress
- 4. teacher's personality-related factors:**

- *Professional skills:* choice of subject matter and learning tasks, appropriate methods of presentation and practice of a language, using various forms of work cooperation (in pairs, in a small group, in a class as a whole, individual), integration of activities focused on communication goal
- *Personality traits:* flexibility, ethical behaviour, respect for the senior personality, providing feedback and adjusting the learning process to seniors requirements, self-reflection.

It is assumed that some factors are permanent and remain as strong at the beginning as throughout the course of education. The intensity or absence of other factors will cause seniors to stop attending the course, which may have a negative impact on the individual [3].



2. Research

Learning is one way in which to efficiently spend the period of old age. Many seniors visit educational institutions offering various courses.. Learning a foreign language in this particular stage of life is a challenging process that leads to many new life situations.

The aim of the research was to find out how motivational factors influence the attitudes of seniors towards learning English language.

Research questions:

VO1: Do seniors have a positive attitude towards learning a foreign language?

VO2: Do seniors have a positive attitude towards social aspects of education?

VO3: Do seniors have positive attitude towards being a learner?

2.1 Research sample

The research sample comprised 68 seniors (63 women and 5 men), aged 60-68, attending an English language course at the University of the Third Age.

2.2 Research method

A custom attitude questionnaire containing 25 statements was designed as the applicable research method. Respondents answered on a four level scale (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree). Respective statements pertain to the following areas:

- Factors related to the teacher's personality
- Factors related to the senior's personality in a learner's role
- Factors related to education
- Factors related to social environment

SPSS software and basic descriptive statistics were used for the evaluation of questionnaire.

2.3 Research results

The obtained results showed that our respondents have a positive attitude towards foreign language education.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of all items

Statements	AM	SD	Med
1. The teacher asks if we are satisfied with her style of teaching.	3.565	0.712	4
2. I am worried if I will be able to respond correctly.	2.681	0.985	3
3. I like attending the course because I am among people.	3.174	0.867	3
4. I made new friends and we also meet outside the class.	2.478	1.002	2
5. Being in a group is more important than learning something.	1.812	0.821	2
6. I feel good about doing well in my classes.	3.377	0.592	3
7. I feel uncomfortable when the teacher corrects me.	1.449	0.808	1
8. The textbook selected by the teacher works for me.	3.493	0.792	4
9. Other classmates have a good relationship with me.	3.551	0.671	4



10.	I am interested in the topics we work with.	3.623	0.567	4
11.	I think I am getting better in English.	3.159	0,754	3
12.	I think I make lots of mistakes.	2.478	0.714	3
13.	I like communicating in pairs and groups.	2.986	0.712	3
14.	I want to be better in English than other classmates.	2.362	0.834	2
15.	The teacher's compliments are important for me.	2.754	0.923	3
16.	We are informed about the course of the class at its beginning.	3.652	0.534	4
17.	I am worried if I will be able to answer correctly in class.	2.652	0.930	3
18.	I hope for a good relationship with the teacher.	3.580	0.600	4
19.	I look forward to English class, because I will learn something new.	3.783	0.446	4
20.	The teacher takes into account our comments and opinions.	3.797	0.437	4
21.	I try to have a good relationship with the teacher.	3.58	0.549	4
22.	I consider the activities we do appropriate.	3.768	0.455	4
23.	We help each other during classes.	3.696	0.597	4
24.	I like the idea of using information technology in class.	3.420	0.858	4
25.	The course meets my learning requirements.	3.536	0.527	4
Items in total		3.136	0.914	3.435

Legend AM = arithmetic mean, SD = standard deviation, Med = median

Research results (AM = 3.136 on 4-stage-scale, SD = 0.914, Med = 3.435) show that respondents have positive attitude towards learning English language.

Four specific areas that could influence senior's attitudes towards learning were observed in the responses (Table 2):

1. Factors related to teacher's personality

Based on the results, it was found that seniors engaged in learning activities have a positive attitude towards the teacher leading their English language course.

2. Factors related to senior's personality in learner's role

The results show that seniors in the role of learners have a rather negative than positive relationship with themselves.

3. Factors related to learning process

Seniors have a rather positive than negative attitude towards learning.



4. Social factors

Seniors understand social factors rather negatively than positively.

Table 2 Descriptive data on individual factors

Factors	AM	SD	Med
1. <i>Factors related to teacher's personality</i> (items 1,8,15,16,18,20,21)	3.489	0.571	3.507
2. <i>Factors related to senior's personality in learner's role</i> (items 2,6,7,11,12,14,17)	2.594	0.888	2.638
3. <i>Factors related to learning process</i> (items 10,19,22,24,25)	3.626	0.373	3.725
4. <i>Social factors</i> (items 3,4,5,9,13,23)	2.949	0.913	3.116
<i>Total</i>	3.136	0.914	3.435

2.4 Discussion

The results show that seniors willing to learn have a positive attitude to learning a foreign language (VO1). Seniors voluntarily decide to pursue further education and try to saturate their needs. Their attitudes are influenced by rational, conative, and affective components; if they are in balance, a positive relation to learning is established. The research also focused on the social factor of education (VO2) and assumed the emergence of new relationships. Seniors perceived this factor rather negatively, and there were more negative responses in items 4 and 5. It was observed that no friendships were formed between the participants of the course. The cause is the fact that the data were recorded in the middle of the course, so friendships were probably not created yet, or the need of social contacts was saturated sufficiently with family relationships.

Age decreases a senior's self-reflection and self-confidence. Although the senior's self-understanding has solid grounds in terms of life experience, self-understanding in a learners's role is different and may not correspond with the reality of educational environment. This mismatch will be negatively reflected in the level of communication competence. Seniors are worried about making mistakes, do not feel confident in language production and do not believe in themselves. The respondents have a rather negative than a positive attitude towards themselves (VO3). The teacher can have a positive impact on seniors, support them, react sensitively to their mistakes and create a supportive environment in a group. Our respondents expressed positive attitude towards the teacher.

2.5 Conclusion

In lifelong learning, the teacher is responsible for the entire preparation and implementation phases of the lessons. If teachers respect the needs of the seniors and respond flexibly to their specific requirements, seniors ought to feel comfortable in the role of a learner. This is a good starting point for developing their communication competence.

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