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A positive aging approach to later-life language learning.
The Polish older adults' perspective

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Introduction

The global population is aging. According to the estimations by The United Nations, by 2050 16% of the world's population will be over the age of 65. Therefore, people are growing older and are generally doing so more healthily (United Nations, 2022). Even though aging populations face many challenges, including age-related illnesses or limitations, they thus also have more and more interesting opportunities to take care of their wellbeing and social functions, resulting in positive aging (Klimova & Kacelt, 2020; Słowik-Krogulec, 2023; Niewczas, 2023). One of such activities may be foreign language learning in later adulthood.

The subject of the research presented in this dissertation is the teaching and learning of English by Polish seniors, with particular emphasis on the concept of positive aging. This fits into the empirical research work in the field of applied linguistics. Nowadays the learning and teaching of foreign languages for older adults has become an important issue. According to research conducted in the last decades in Poland and globally in the field of foreign language geragogy (Jaroszevska, 2009, 2011, 2013a; Antoniou et al., 2013; Bąk et al., 2016, Słowik, 2016; Słowik-Krogulec, 2019; and van der Ploeg et al., 2020), learning foreign languages in late adulthood has a positive impact on cognitive functions in older individuals. For older persons, acquiring proficiency in a foreign language frequently additionally serves as a beneficial means to discover a fresh sense of purpose or a new social group to engage with, thereby improving their overall state of well-being (Pikhart & Klimova, 2020; Niewczas, 2023).

Later-life language learning is a multifaceted area of study that demands an interdisciplinary approach due to its inherent complexity. This field intersects with various research domains, including linguistics, psychology, gerontology, education, and sociology. Understanding how older adults acquire new languages involves not only the cognitive and linguistic aspects of language learning, but also the psychological, social, and physiological changes that accompany aging. Furthermore, the integration of educational methodologies tailored to the unique needs of older learners requires insights from instructional design and adult education theories. This holistic approach ensures that all relevant factors are considered, leading to more effective and inclusive strategies for supporting older adults in their language learning.

This dissertation focuses on the teaching and learning of English by elderly individuals in Poland, with a specific emphasis on the concept of positive aging. Therefore, an applied linguistic perspective merges with a positive psychology view, making this work interdisciplinary, just like the later-life learning process itself. The perspective is innovative, because, for many years, foreign language learning in old age remained outside the interest of researchers, despite the continuously growing number of older adults looking for meaningful ways to spend their free time following retirement. It is also crucial because, according to the European Commission, Poland, together with Slovakia and Croatia, is home to the greatest proportional population share of ages 65 + in the whole of Europe. This number has increased significantly between 2013 and 2023¹. Combining the linguistic perspective with the approach of positive psychology allows for a shift away from focusing on the negative aspects of aging and deficits, towards adopting the perspective advocated by Arnold (1999), who claimed that negative emotions like anxiety, stress, or fear hinder the learning process, whereas positive emotions like self-confidence, empathy, or motivation facilitate it. It is crucial to focus on positive aspects that the older age offers rather than deficits only. This is the perspective granted by positive psychology and a positive aging approach.

Various important reasons impacted the selection of this topic. Firstly, the author's years of experience as an English language instructor for older adults, along with a focus on educational gerontology, highlighted the challenges of teaching foreign languages to older adults. Teaching Polish seniors also provided insights into the specificity of instruction for this age group and revealed gaps in research. Understanding the different aspects of language learning in older adults is crucial in order to tailor it to this age group. Research in this area can provide valuable insights into teaching methods, materials, and other implications for adult education. This dissertation, therefore, addressed some of those aspects and the main research goal of the project was the evaluation of the present status of English teaching methods among Polish older adults and the analysis of various aspects of their language learning process, so that it can be facilitated and adjusted to the third-agers' needs, preferences and abilities.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_structure_and_ageing

It is also important to acknowledge here that the definitions of *older adults* vary across Europe as does the starting age of late adulthood. As postulated and advocated in recent studies in geragogy, the terms *older adult*, *older individual*, *late L2 learner*, *third-age learner* or *third-ager* are used in this dissertation as synonyms of the word *senior*. However, the meaning of the word *senior* differs. Studies and public discourses in America and Western Europe avoid using the word *senior* because they perceive it as a biased term that evokes negative stereotypes about older adults². Poland, on the other hand, does not shy away from using the term *senior*, as it remains a widely used term to characterize this age group in academic discourse, official documents, and government initiatives pertaining to older adults. The name *senior* does not have a negative connotation in Polish scientific research or in the Polish public discourse³; it is also in no way discriminatory or politically incorrect in Poland. This refers both to the use of the word in scientific studies published in English and the use of the name in Polish scientific and public discourse.

When it comes to the terms describing older adults' learning, *later-life learning* is mostly used together with the word *third-age learning* to emphasize the characteristics of older adults included in the definition prepared by Laslett (1991, p. 153), who described the third age as an era of personal achievement and fulfillment.

The dissertation is divided into two parts: theoretical and empirical. The theoretical part elaborates on the various aspects of later-life language learning in general (Chapter 1) and Poland in particular (Chapter 2). It also gives a holistic account on the situation of older adults in Poland. More specifically, Chapter 1 offers a description of the theoretical background related to later-life and the explanation of terminology regarding the third age, old age, and aging. It defines aging and its types, and discusses the biological, cognitive and psychosocial changes affecting the aging body and mind. It also introduces multidisciplinary perspective in later life language research, presenting the results of the recent in the area of foreign language geragogy, both in Poland and worldwide.

² See APA's *Inclusive Language Guide* (second edition, 2023): <https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>.

³ <https://www.gov.pl/web/family/senior-policy>.

Chapter 2 focuses on the concept of lifelong learning in Poland, including language learning in later adulthood. What is more, stereotypes existing in the Polish society regarding older people are described and the idea of positive education is introduced, also as a way of countering the marginalization of older adults in Poland. Finally, characteristic features of older adults as language learners specifically in the Polish context are presented. Chapter 3 introduces the research project and covers the methodology chosen for the study. The research goal is presented, the participants of the research are introduced, together with methods and tools employed to examine later-life language learning in our sample. A mixed method approach was chosen for the study, with the aim to evaluate the present status of English teaching methods among Polish older adults and to propose solutions that would make it more pleasant and effective. The project comprised four study legs, all of which are described in Chapter 3: course book analysis, lesson observations, focus group interviews and a larger-scale survey for older adults. Chapter 4 outlines the findings of the study in chronological order, from the outcome of the course book analyses to the survey results. A short general discussion marks the end of the chapter, followed by the presentation of limitations. Chapter 5 presents the most important conclusions to be drawn following the analysis of the results of the study. Based on the overall outcome, teaching implications are presented. Among these, the concept of positive foreign language geragogy is presented, accompanied by its 10 pillars, followed by an example lesson structure and a thematic catalogue that may be useful for instructors running a language course for older adults. Chapter 5 then concludes by describing possible challenges in later-life language learning and offering suggestions as well as directions for the future research.

Chapter One: Theoretical background of foreign language geragogy

Much research indicates that foreign language knowledge has social and economic advantages in an aging and increasingly globalized society (see, e.g., Bąk et al., 2014, 2016; Bialystok et al., 2014; van der Ploeg, Keijzer & Lowie, 2023). Consequently, one avenue of lifelong learning could be studying languages. This chapter thoroughly examines important aspects of the aging process and language learning. In particular, it shows the need for inter- and multi-disciplinary perspectives to understand the interplay between language and aging. In so doing, it will also specify the terminology denoting the older adult life stage. Due to the multidisciplinary character of later-life language learning emphasized in this monograph, some topics are necessarily discussed concisely or simply signaled with reference to the literature. The chapter concludes with a close look at the research in the field of later-life foreign language teaching and learning, both internationally and in Poland.

1.1. An aging population and its ramifications

Global longevity is on the rise, with a vast majority of individuals now anticipating life beyond their sixties. Although higher life expectancy is often regarded as an achievement (Ulatowski, 2014), it remains an inevitable and significant challenge worldwide, including in Poland. The United Nations General Assembly has officially designated the years 2021 to 2030 as the United Nations Decade of Healthy Aging.⁴ This global endeavor entails the cooperation of governments, nonprofits, international organizations, specialists, higher education, the media, and the commercial sector. It aims to achieve a decade of focused, influential, and cooperative actions to promote longer and healthier lifespans.⁵ In the European Union (EU), the average life expectancy at birth in 2021 was 80.1 years (EUROSTAT, 2023).⁶ Coupled with steep declines in birth rates (EUROSTAT, 2023), the populations of especially so-called developed countries are rapidly aging, making the issue of demography one of the biggest for world leaders, governments, and experts, as it requires adjusting public policies, healthcare, and patterns of work and retirement, and so on (United Nations,

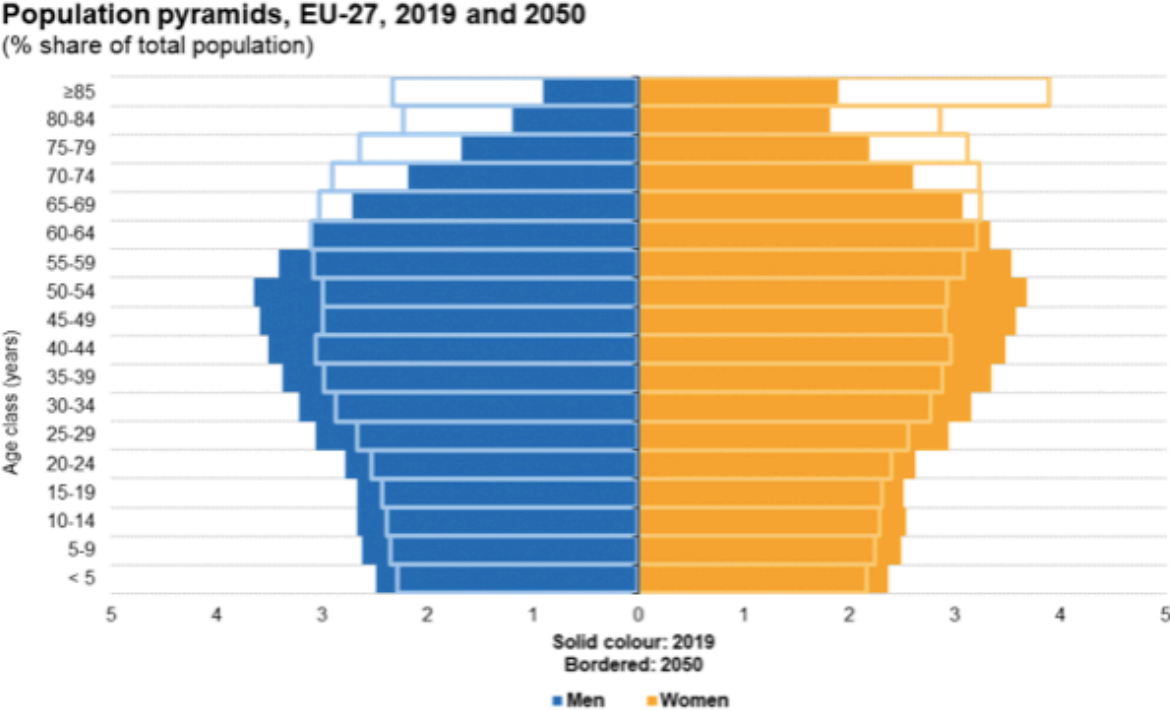
⁴ <https://www.decadeofhealthyageing.org/>

⁵ <https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing>

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20231106-1>

2002)⁷. This section thus examines the numerical representation of demographic aging on global, European, and Polish levels. Subsequently, it delves into the factors contributing to it, as well as the outcomes of this demographic shift. The following graph shows the projected population pyramid for Europe in 2050.

Figure 1: Population pyramid, EU-27, 2019 and 2050



Source: Eurostat (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/demo_pjangroup/default/table?lang=en)

As can be seen, the general population of older adults is increasing both by size and proportion in every European country. Comparing these numbers to worldwide figures, the World Health Organization (WHO) projects that, by 2030, around 16 percent of the global population will be 60 or older⁸. By 2050, the worldwide population of those aged 60 and above is expected to quadruple, surpassing an estimated total of 2.1 billion people. It is further estimated that the number of people aged 80 or older would triple by 2050, reaching a total of 426 million, which is significantly higher than the figures recorded in 2020. Poland is no exception to this

⁷ More about aging populations and its ramifications can be found here: UNFPA, Population aging and development, 5/2002.

⁸ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>

steady increase in the proportion of older individuals. The population aged 60 and over exceeded 9.8 million by the end of 2020—the proportion of Polish older adult individuals (denoting those over 60) has now reached 25.6% (GUS, 2021). Statistics for Poland forecast that the population of individuals over age 60 in Poland will increase to 10.8 million by 2030, and to 13.7 million by 2050. By that time, the proportion of older adults in Poland’s overall population is projected to surpass 40% (GUS, 2021). According to a report prepared in 2021 by Poland’s Main Statistical Office, the age distribution of the older adult population is primarily composed of individuals in the 60–64 range. Most older adults reside in urban areas—the urbanization rate for individuals aged 60 and above was 65% in both 2019 and 2020 (GUS, 2021). This situation has consequences both in terms of healthcare expenses and social security systems. Declining health in older adulthood constrains daily functioning, which in turn exerts a substantial impact on well-being (WHO, 2015).

The rapid aging of society is also associated with a frequent occurrence of age-related diseases, including dementia, which is characterized by a decline in cognitive abilities (Arvanitakis, 2019; Cipriani et al., 2020). Statistics show that, currently, approximately 50 million people worldwide suffer from dementia, a number expected to increase rapidly to around 152 million by 2050 (Klimova et al., 2019, p. 1). It is thus crucial to find ways to enhance cognitive and social functioning in older individuals.

Finally, the later stages of life are typically characterized by transitions such as retirement and relocation, along with the need to adapt to losses. One example of a major life event marking the onset of older adulthood is retirement. As researchers observed (e.g., Kubicek & Koruna, 2011; Zhan et al., 2023), retirement has been associated with different effects on physical and mental well-being, varying based on individual attitudes and the reasons for retiring. Approximately one-third of retirees encounter challenges in adjusting to specific aspects of their new life stage, such as reduced income and changing social roles.⁹ What is more, while some individuals actively choose retirement, anticipating a break from work, while others are compelled to retire due to health issues or job loss (Lytle et al., 2015). Adequate preparation for retirement and providing counseling to retirees and their families facing challenges can

⁹ <https://www.msmanuals.com/professional/geriatrics/social-issues-in-older-adults/effects-of-life-transitions-on-older-adults>

be beneficial. An all-encompassing public health strategy should acknowledge and consider both present and anticipated patterns, and formulate policies in line with these trends.¹⁰

The aforementioned issues related to health and psychosocial matters in late adulthood are further discussed in subsection 1.3 of this thesis.

1.2. Terminology connected to old age and aging

1.2.1. Old age and aging

Since aging is at the core of this dissertation, it is crucial to explain the terminology used in the relevant professional literature. As Jaroszewska (2013a) rightly pointed out, there is consensus in the scientific discourse that, while “old age” describes a state, the term “aging” applies to a dynamic process leading to old age (2013, p. 15). More difficult to define are the cut-off points of late life, and what “older adult” denotes. Indeed, physiological signs of biological aging are manifested at varying rates among individuals, making the term hard to implement practically (Victor, 2005).

In the social sciences, the initiation of later life is often linked to a specific ‘chronological’ or ‘calendar age’, such as 60, as endorsed by the United Nations (United Nations, 2017), or 65, as utilized by EUROSTAT.¹¹ In studies focused on older adults in developing countries, like those done in Africa, considerations were made for lower life expectancies, setting the onset of later life at 50 or 55 (WHO, 2010). Despite the frequent use of calendar ages to signify the beginning of “old age,” they provide, at best, only a general indication of the biological aging process in individuals in the absence of social, historical, and geographical contextual factors (Victor, 2005).

The existing literature has multiple definitions for “old age”. Trafiałek (2006) described it as an inherent stage of life that succeeds youth and maturity, signifying the ongoing progression of aging. The final third of life is characterized by a decline in organism efficiency, reduced mobility, a weakened immune system (biological and physiological old age), difficulties in adapting to changes, and, in socio-economic

¹⁰More about it can be found in: WHO (2021). Global strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property.

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ageing_Europe_-_introduction#Defining_older_people

terms, often accompanied by poverty, loneliness (psychological old age), the need for assistance (economic old age), and social marginalization (social old age) (Trafiałek, 2006, p. 69).

Conversely, Szatur-Jaworska asserted that *old age* refers to “the ultimate phase of an individual’s existence, commencing from the commonly established point of old age. The phenomenon described is a complex interaction between biological and psychological processes, which also involves changes in an individual’s social activities” (Szatur-Jaworska, 2000, p. 33). Considering the complexity of the aging process and the interdisciplinary interest it has generated, at least six “thresholds of old age” are distinguished by Klimczuk (2012):

- Biological (related to the assessment of the organism’s efficiency and vitality);
- Demographic age (the number of years lived);
- Psychological (related to the individual’s intellectual, sensory, and adaptive functioning);
- Social (reflecting the social situation of the individual; determined, for example, by whether one fulfills social roles, such as grandmother or grandfather);
- Economic (related to the individual’s position on the job market);
- Legal (social security; determined by the term when a citizen is entitled to social benefits such as pensions and retirement).

The demographic criteria seem to be the easiest to operationalize. An example of this is the current measure of “post-productive age” in Polish statistics, which is 60 years for women and 65 for men.¹²

WHO proposed the following division/norms:

- *Pre-elderly/middle age* (45–59 years);
- *Early old age/third age* (60–74 years);
- *Old age*, also known as late old age (75–89 years) — this age group includes the so-called “old age” or the “fourth age”;
- *Longevity* (90 years and older) — those who reach this age are known as “oldest”.

(Zych, 2001, p. 202).

¹² <https://www.president.pl/news/president-signs-into-law-bill-lowering-retirement-age,36289>

Furthermore, it is crucial to differentiate between the concepts of *old age* and *third age*. Although *old age* is typically considered the final phase of the human life cycle and is often seen as unavoidable, the notion of a *third age* was introduced by Laslett (1989, as cited in Laslett, 1995), who proposed that an individual's life can be divided into four distinct stages: the first stage, characterized by reliance on parents, the development of social connections, learning, and immaturity; the second stage, designated by autonomy from parents, maturity, social obligations, and work; the third stage, centered around retirement and enjoyment; and the fourth stage, involving dependence, decline, and death. Within the realm of education, the phrase *third age* is frequently employed to refer to the stage of life marked by advanced age. Significantly, this time is characterized by the presence of older individuals who are both mentally and physically sound, allowing them to fully relish their retirement years (Pot, Keizer, & de Bot, 2018). According to Laslett (1995), *the third age* refers to the enduring dignity, creativity, social importance, and public significance of older individuals. Barring a *fourth age* of decline, these qualities persist through later life, and frequently even after that (p. 10).

1.2.2. Seniors or older adults?

Literature has used the following terms to refer to older adults: *third-age learners*, *older adults*, *third-agers*, and *seniors*. However, there is a divergence of opinion over whether certain phrases are ageist and stereotyped. Avers et al., (2011) claimed that human language use should continue to evolve throughout the lifespan and become more sophisticated, so it is sensible to use exact, accurate, value-free terminology that is preferred by older persons (p. 154). Consequently, they promote phrases like *older adult* and *older person* as the established ones. Putnam (2015) concurred, observing that phrases such as *the elderly*, *senior*, and the descriptors *elderly and vulnerable* are considered reductionist and diminish the significance of one's physical and mental state. Therefore, he argued that the use of such terminology debases the power and agency of individuals in their later years (2015). Instead, Putnam suggested *older adult* as the preferred and widely accepted term. This is in line with

Ramscar, who also advocated a more positive approach instead of focusing only on decline related to older age (2013, 2014).

Given the focus in this thesis on the Polish context, it is necessary to explain the terminology used to refer to *older adults* in the Polish language. In Poland, the term *senior* most commonly refers to individuals in the so-called post-productive age, which is 60 years for women and 65 for men, corresponding to the retirement age.¹³ However, there are also other approaches; for example, in the discourse of social policy, one can encounter the age criterion of 50+ as a defining factor of senior age (Jaroszevska, 2013a). Given the lack of universally accepted criteria for older age, this dissertation departs from the norms proposed by the World Health Organization, where the threshold of older adulthood is considered to be 60 years (Zych, 2001, p. 202).

What is more, the task of finding an appropriate term for older adults has long been a prevalent problem in Poland and elsewhere (Zalega, 2016). The most commonly used Polish terms to characterize older individuals include *seniorzy* (*seniors*), *ludzie w podeszłym wieku* (*people of advanced age*), *ludzie starzy* (*elderly people*), *osoby po 50, po 60 roku życia* (*people over 50, 60, etc.*), *emeryci* (*retirees*), *babcie/dziadkowie* (*grandmothers/grandfathers*) (e.g. Burkacka, 2014; Czekanowski, 2014; Żurek, 2016). Despite their popularity, these phrases frequently face criticism in the Polish public sphere. As stated by Czekanowski (2012), the word *senior* is widely employed in Polish to denote older citizens. Burkacka (2014) maintained that the selection of adjectives such as *senior* and *nestor* should be contingent on the unique context and individual, notwithstanding their positive connotations. However, it is important to acknowledge another difficulty in finding the appropriate terminology for older individuals, a group that is highly heterogeneous and intricate (Grotek, 2016). This dissertation adopts the term *older adults*, yet uses it interchangeably with *older individuals* and *third-agers*. Still, the word *seniors* is not avoided, as this remains one of the most popular terms to describe this age group in Poland, including the use in official documents and governmental programs regarding older adults. It is also worth noting that the word *senior* does not have a negative connotation in Polish scientific research or in public discourse. It is in no way discriminatory or politically incorrect.

¹³ <https://www.president.pl/news/president-signs-into-law-bill-lowering-retirement-age,36289>

1.2.3. Positive, healthy, successful or active aging?

In recent years, there has been a global shift in attitudes toward old age. With a growing cohort of older adults, better healthcare, and an increasing leisure opportunities for older individuals, old age is no longer perceived as a passive period marking the end of the lifespan, as more researchers observe (e.g., Barbaccia et al., 2022; Prakash et al., 2022; Wu & Chao, 2023). Older adults themselves have begun to perceive their retirement as a period in which they can develop and fulfill themselves, travel, and even make new friends, while at the same time adjusting to the changes happening in their lives, (e.g. the end of professional activity, potential deaths of partners and family members, new roles with their [extended] families) (e.g., Barbaccia et al., 2022; Prakash et al., 2022; Wu & Chao, 2023).

This optimistic outlook has been driven by the positive psychology movement, which advocates the notion that our perception of our daily lives influences our happiness. The ideas of Positive Psychology are now encapsulated in a new term that specifically pertains to the later stages of life: *positive aging*. Positive aging posits the existence of intrinsic sources of enjoyment in later life stages, which are associated with the natural progression of aging (Hill & Smith, 2015). To clarify, *positive aging* refers to our capacity to prioritize the meaningful aspects of life during our later years, despite physical or mental obstacles, rather than just avoiding these difficulties (Hill & Smith, 2015). Numerous other models have also recently emerged (Hill, 2005), including *successful aging* (Rowe & Khan, 1999) and *active aging* (WHO, 2002), which confirm the increasing prevalence of the positive approach to aging.

Positive aging embodies several key characteristics. Hill (2005) defined it as the capacity to access previously untapped coping abilities. Secondly, it requires being adaptable and open-minded in thoughts and actions. Thirdly, it encompasses making decisions that prioritize personal well-being, even if it means letting go of familiar activities that are no longer feasible due to declining functionality. Finally, positive aging entails maintaining an optimistic outlook on the challenges of aging (Hill, 2005).

Inherent in these positive aging characteristics is the construct of the *activity stance*. In order for people to age well, they need to live in a manner that inhibits the development of disabilities and diseases, enabling them to maintain both their physical

and mental capacities and to take part in societal activities (Rowe & Kahn, 1987, 1997). A concept that has been related to the idea of successful aging is that of maintaining a busy lifestyle and holding on to values that are often observed in middle adulthood (Rowe & Kahn, 1987, 1997; Crowther et al., 2002). A few years after its introduction, the notion of *productive aging* arose in the United States. A decade later, *active aging* gained popularity across the world (WHO, 1994).

The term *active aging* was coined in the 1990s to emphasize the link between physical activity and older adult well-being (World Health Organization, 1994). The worldwide aging trend led to a shift away from the previous life cycle perspective, which associated later life with a lack of participation (Boudiny & Mortelmans, 2011). The active aging narrative promoted older persons' participation in society by emphasizing their competence and wisdom (Daatland, 2005). In the WHO's 2002 study, *active* meant participating in social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and civic activities. Active aging was also linked to building on life experiences, and then finding activities in older adulthood that capitalized on them, such as volunteering based on childhood skills (Poscia et al., 2015).

According to the European Commission (EC) (2021), lifelong learning promotes the potential for well-being in later life. It builds on earlier acquired learning skills despite the new skill being introduced late in life. For instance, the development of hobbies can significantly improve individual well-being, preserve health, and mitigate the adverse effects of aging. These benefits span a range of factors—physical, emotional, and societal. Personal gain and fulfillment are the main reasons people choose hobbies (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). What is more, participating in activities long into old age helps maintain health and delay or avoid age-related deficits and sensory impairments, while also counteracting age-associated deteriorating health, strained familial connections, grief, or a lack of direction (Galenkamp & Deeg, 2016). Sociological theory suggests that aging often necessitates reassessing and acquiring new social roles (Fabiś et al., 2015).

In translating research findings on active and healthy aging to health policy and long-term care, the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized the fundamental prevention of disability and premature mortality, as well as the reduction of risk factors

associated with unhealthy behaviors (WHO, 2017a, 2017b). At the same time, the highlighted the importance of developing environments that are aging-friendly and offer accessibility to social services (WHO, 2017a). What follows is a list of the ten specific components that make up a complete global policy framework for the promotion of healthy growth and aging:

- a platform for the exchange of innovative ideas and practices,
- the formulation of national policies and strategies that prioritize health and aging,
- the collection of global data on healthy aging,
- the support of research on aging and health in the present and future,
- the provision of age-specific guidelines and tools in healthcare systems,
- the establishment of a long-term care system,
- the guarantee of an adequate workforce for integrated care,
- the launch of a worldwide campaign to combat ageism,
- the prioritization of research on the economic impact of aging,
- and the strengthening of a global network of cities and communities that are conducive to healthy aging for the elderly (WHO, 2017a).

In sum, the World Health Organization's comprehensive policy framework aims to promote healthy aging through such initiatives as innovative idea exchange, national policy formulation, and global data collection on aging. By supporting research and launching campaigns to combat ageism, this framework lays the groundwork for improving the well-being of older adults. Engaging in various activities such as language learning aligns with these goals, providing cognitive stimulation, fostering social connections, and enhancing the overall quality of life in later years.

1.2.4. Active Aging Index

In addition to the WHO's implementation and monitoring of healthy aging policies, the United Nations and the European Commission collaborated to develop a tool that could accurately measure various aspects of *active aging*. This includes assessing the societal and economic impact of older individuals in different areas of life, as well as weighing the environmental factors that facilitate successful active aging. The Active Aging Index (AAI) was thus created and introduced in 2012 to assess and track

active aging policies in European Union and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) countries.¹⁴

The AAI comprehensively measures several aspects of active aging, encompassing both the ability to age actively and the actual experience of active aging. The index uses 22 indicators across four categories, and is tested separately for women and men. This allows for the identification of gender gaps in the field of active aging. The model thus offers a versatile structure for evaluating the initial condition of active aging at both the national and local levels, identifying current policy deficiencies and possible benefits, and tracking advancements in aging policies. Figure 2 shows the indicators of the AAI for four domains: employment; participation in society; independent, healthy and secure living; and capacity and enabling environment for healthy aging.

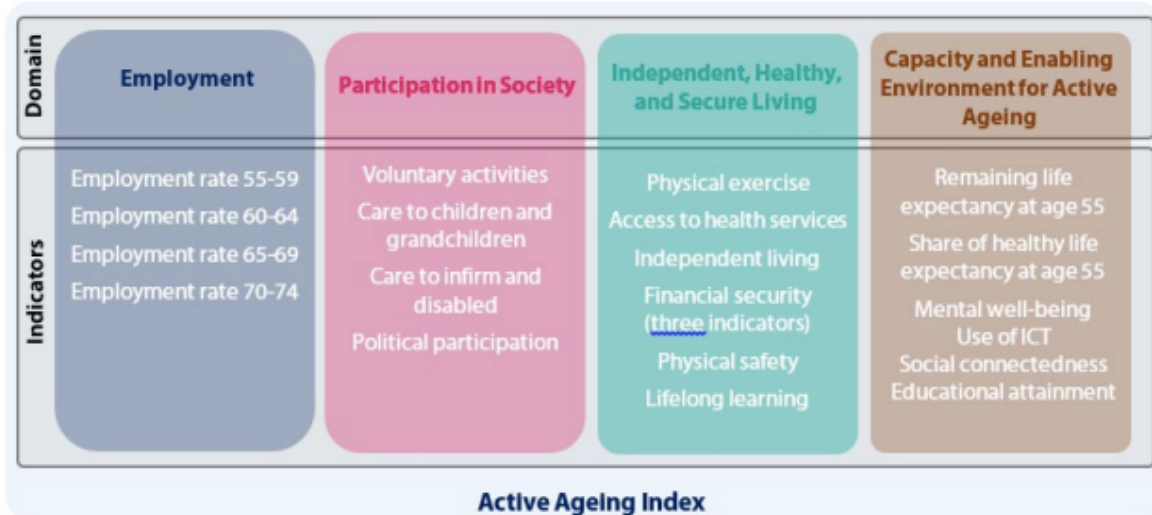


Figure 2: Active Aging Index

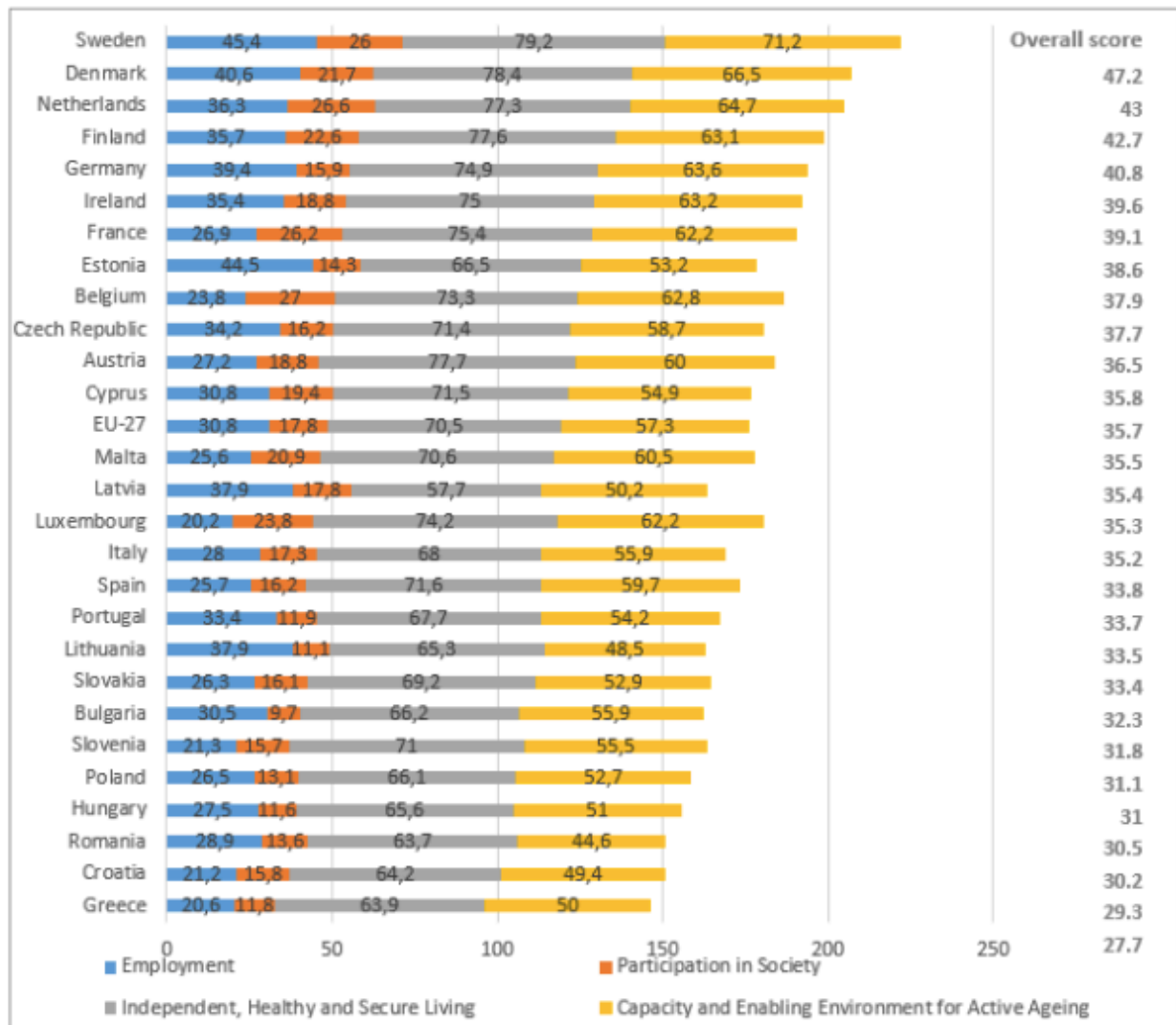
Source: UNECE 2019.

Figure 3 shows the AAI score for European countries in general and in the four above-mentioned domains. Although the EU discourse aims to implement various elements of Active Aging policies, it needs to be said that different places within the EU interpret these guidelines very differently. In the Polish context, where the discourse surrounding

¹⁴ More about AAI: UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (2019), Active Aging Index Analytical Report.

active agency strategies and their associated senior policies is relatively new, the future of public policy faces many challenges (Perek-Bialas et al., 2006; Ruzik et al., 2013).

Figure 3: AAI score overall and by domain, EU-27, 2018



Source: AAI, 2018. Available at: <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

1.3. Changes associated with aging

This section takes up the age-related changes indicated in Section 1.1. These changes are grouped into three categories: *age-related biological, cognitive, and psychosocial changes*. This division was based on the categorization of aging symptoms

explained by Steuden: *chronological age, biological age, social age, and psychological age* (2011).

Prior to considering the modifications that can be made in foreign language learning with older individuals and the characteristics of older language learners, it is essential to determine the specific changes that aging also brings to the classroom. As rightly noticed by Parnowski (2013, p. 10), numerous physiological changes occur during old age, manifested clinically through somatic and central nervous system alterations. As the body ages, diseases typical of old age often emerge, and these can also leave their mark on psychosocial health. With the increasing population of older individuals, health-related problems associated with aging also rise. In what follows, biological age-associated changes are explored, before turning to cognitive and, finally, psychosocial changes linked to older adulthood.

1.3.1. Biological changes

The body's biological aging may well be the most characteristic process of adult life. Likely too, it is the most impactful from the perspective of cultural and educational activity during the elderly years (Kornadt et al., 2020). While the achievements of modern medicine allow a slowing or mitigation of some of the associated changes, biological aging remains inevitable for all living beings, including humans. This section will present some of the most popular biological theories of aging, as well as sensory acuity changes connected to it.

Biological theories of aging

Although many theories have been put forward to explain how aging occurs, none seem to fully, adequately, and holistically capture the aging process (Davidovic et al., 2010, p. 139–146). According to conventional aging theories, age is neither genetically predetermined nor an adaptation. Two primary types of modern biological theories of human aging have been postulated: so-called damage or error theories and programmed theories (Jin, 2010; da Costa et al., 2016). For the latter, aging occurs in accordance with a biological schedule, possibly an extension of the one that governs childhood development and growth. Variations in gene expression that impact the

systems in charge of upkeep, repair, and defense reactions would determine this regulation. The damage or error theories attribute aging to environmental insults to living things that result in cumulative damage at different intensities (Guo et al., 2022). As part of the damage or error theory, we can observe: wear and tear theory, rate of living theory, cross-linking theory, free radicals theory, and somatic DNA damage theory (Kochman, 2015).

As long as there is no consensus on these aging theories, it might be possible to encourage healthy aging and extend human lifespans by comprehending and testing both new and established theories. Furthermore, it is crucial to remember that the aging process of the musculoskeletal, digestive, cardiovascular, and excretory systems impairs mobility, respiratory efficiency, hydration, adaptation to an appropriate diet, etc. As a result, these changes can also cause various diseases typical of old age, for example, arthritis, hypertension, and hearing and sight deficiencies (Parnowski, 2013).

Sensory acuity changes

Vision and hearing—cumulatively referred to as “acuity”—problems occur in individuals of all ages. As with other biological changes, they may be influenced not only by the passage of time, but by environmental factors (Dawes et al., 2014). They can also result from a progressive, often undiagnosed, disease, making it difficult to ascribe sensory acuity changes to the aging process alone (Dawes et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the weakening of vision and hearing in older individuals statistically occurs most frequently, together affecting half of adults over age 60 (Jaroszewska, 2013a), which may be significant for specifying teaching methodologies, as well as the quality of the materials used in language courses.

As Stuart-Hamilton (2006) reported, apart from relatively simple disorders such as nearsightedness and farsightedness, about 1/3 of the population aged 65 and above suffers from eye diseases. The most common causes leading to impaired vision—not exclusively related to old age but typical for this age—include cataracts (clouding of the eye lenses), glaucoma (damage to nerves and receptor cells due to increased eye pressure), degeneration of the macula responsible for sharp vision, and diabetic retinopathy (damage to retinal blood vessels due to diabetes) (Zych, 2001).

In this age group too, a significant decrease in the flexibility of the eye lenses leads to a widespread reduction in visual accommodation ability (adjusting the sharpness of vision for objects at different distances), often leading to presbyopia (Jaroszewska, 2013a).¹⁵ Regressive changes in the lens system also negatively affect the ability to adapt to darkness, resulting in worsened vision in low-light conditions (Jaroszewska, 2013a). The threshold for recognizing colors decreases as well. For instance, older individuals may have difficulty recognizing colors with shorter wavelengths, such as shades of purple, blue, or green (Jaroszewska, 2013a). In the Polish population, the increase in frequency and degree of visual impairment with age is consistent with global trends (Klimek et al., 2012). These changes translate into an elongation of the reaction time to visual stimuli, which often slows reaction times of older adults more generally. Also, the conditions of exposure—here associated with the teaching process—should be adjusted accordingly to meet these needs. Of course, these deficiencies can be significantly corrected with glasses.

Hearing problems are also associated with advanced age, though in many cases, audiological changes can be traced to earlier life stages (Jaroszewska, 2013a). Presbycusis is the most common audiological impairment among this age group (Walling & Dickson, 2012). It can take various forms, commonly associated with a dulling of hearing, making it necessary, in proportion to its development, to increase the intensity of sound sources by decibels (Jaroszewska, 2013a). This problem is exacerbated by *loudness recruitment*, when higher-pitched sounds actually sound louder than they are. This greatly reduces older people's aural perception such that they may not hear some sounds or feel discomfort from others.

Hearing loss has been linked to cognitive decline and dementia (Wallhagen et al., 2008, Lin et al., 2004). Despite numerous discoveries and theories, the cause-and-effect relationship and underlying pathophysiological mechanisms between hearing loss and cognitive decline are unclear (Ciravalloti et al., 2019). According to the *cognitive load hypothesis*, hearing-impaired people utilize more mental resources in daily life, increasing cognitive demands. Thus, these individuals may score poorly in neuropsychological tests and have neural network modifications (Pichora-Fuller, 2015).

¹⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK423827/>

Additionally, hearing loss can interrupt social connections, leading to isolation and sadness. This may indirectly increase cognitive impairment. The common pathogenesis of hearing impairment and cognitive decline suggests that both are caused by a combination of factors such as age, vascular disease, oxidative stress, inflammatory reactions, and genes (Fortunato et al., 2016).

In addition to presbycusis, tinnitus is prevalent in older adulthood, although it can characterize other life stages too. Tinnitus is described as a source of general discomfort and a condition that can overshadow significant auditory signals (Jaroszewska 2013a, p. 53). Moreover, considerable importance should be attributed to the gradual loss of seniors' ability to distinguish complex speech sounds, which are perceived as challenging and incomprehensible, notably under noisy conditions. In this context, environmental noises or their absence may play a significant role (Janse & de Bree, 2015).

Since language learning primarily depends on speech perception and listening, hearing impairments are among the most common causes of anxiety (Kic-Drgas, 2010). Learning challenges may arise from the fact that older adults are more sensitive to background noise and have trouble perceiving high tones. Older adults depend more on top-down information processing to make up for their hearing loss (Ramírez Gómez, 2016a). This entails filling in the blanks and construing information that has not been perceived by applying context or general knowledge. Furthermore, in the research of Matusz & Rakowska (2018), listening turned out to be one of the abilities that older adults struggle with most when it comes to the discomfort they feel in the classroom.

The evidence presented in this section suggests that the success of older adults in speech recognition, particularly when listening under challenging conditions, may be affected by impairment in the area of vision and hearing, but can also be influenced by cognitive factors. These factors can have a positive impact, as they provide support from the linguistic context; alternatively, they can have a negative impact by reducing performance due to limitations in working memory and executive resources (e.g., van Rooij & Plomp, 1992; Pichora-Fuller, 2003). The next subsection takes up the most significant cognitive changes.

1.3.2. Cognitive changes

Age-related cognitive decline

Cognitive aging is a multifaceted process that encompasses a variety of distinct cognitive domains, such as attention, memory, executive functions, language, and visuospatial ability (Straś-Romanowska, 2005, p. 270; Lehr, 2007, p. 76; Boyd & Bee, 2008, p. 551). The central nervous system is responsible, among other things, for motor functions and the sphere of intellectual and cognitive activity. Consequently, the biological aging process will also produce changes in the cognitive potential and intellectual abilities of older people (Straś-Romanowska, 2005, p. 270; Boyd & Bee, 2008, p. 551). These changes are primarily individual in nature, dependent on many variables, and partly related to the internal and external factors mentioned earlier.

Presently, researchers focus significant attention on cognitive aging in relation to degenerative illnesses like Alzheimer's disease, as well as specific aspects of age-related cognitive decline (Pot et al., 2018). The issue has been well-researched, and commonly reported changes include a decline in processing speed (Salthouse, 2000) and working memory capacity (e.g., Engle & Kane, 2004), difficulties in learning and remembering new information (e.g., Lindenberger, 2014), a decrease in attention span (e.g., Park & Reuter-Lorenz, 2009), longer reaction times (e.g., Goral et al., 2007), difficulties in encoding contextual information in memory (e.g., Old & Naveh-Benjamin, 2008), and problems with inhibitory control (e.g., Verhaeghen & Cerella, 2008). Additionally, cognitive changes have been posited to underlie changes in speech production and perception (e.g., Wingfield & Grossmann, 2006).

It is important, however, to distinguish between normal symptoms of aging and those caused by diseases leading to dementia. According to Bacanoiu & Danoiu (2022), normal aging refers to the aging process that occurs in the absence of disease, disability, or pathological conditions. It is centered on the idea that aging can be healthy and graceful, even as individuals experience typical age-related changes (Bacanoiu & Danoiu, 2022). Some older adults can also experience subjective cognitive decline. Subjective Cognitive Decline (SCD) refers to an individual's self-reported perception of a decline in cognitive abilities, specifically increased confusion or memory loss (Jessen et al., 2014). Cognitive impairment is a type of mental decline that is often one of the

first signs of Alzheimer's disease and associated dementias (Jessen et al., 2014). Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) is defined as a state of cognitive decline that falls between the normal cognitive changes associated with aging and the more severe symptoms of dementia (Petersen & Negash, 2008, p. 46). An estimated ten to fifteen percent of individuals living with MCI develop dementia each year.¹⁶ Dementia is a clinical condition marked by the deterioration of cognitive abilities, leading to a loss of autonomous functioning; its symptoms occur gradually, persistently, and progressively (Sheehan, 2012; Chertkow et al., 2013). Dementia manifests itself with diverse clinical presentations, and its cognitive impairments encompass memory loss, communication and language deficits, agnosia (inability to recognize objects), apraxia (inability to perform previously learned tasks), and impaired executive function (reasoning, judgment, and planning) (Hildreth & Church, 2015). Prevalent forms of dementia¹⁷ include Alzheimer's disease (AD), vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, and frontotemporal dementia (Muangpaisan, 2007).¹⁸

The risk factors associated with cognitive decline and dementia are comparable. Biologists claim that our bodies and brains commence degeneration from the third decade of life (Peters, 2006). Over the last two decades, research has demonstrated the ability to detect Alzheimer's disease (AD) or pathological aging several years before even the mildest symptoms appear (Gosh et al., 2011). The estimated number of individuals with dementia in the European Union (EU27) is 7,853,705, whereas in European nations it is 9,780,678. This represents a substantial decrease from previous projections of 8,785,645 for the EU27 and 10,935,444 for the wider European region. Dementia disproportionately affects women, with 6,650,228 women and 3,130,449 men currently living with the condition in Europe. By 2050, projections indicate that the prevalence of dementia in Europe will nearly double, reaching 14,298,671 in the European Union and 18,846,286 in the broader European region.¹⁹ Hence, it is crucial

¹⁶ https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-dementia/related_conditions/mild-cognitive-impairment

¹⁷ More details on the types of dementia can be found in the literature on the subject (e.g., Duong et al., 2017; Zupancic et al. 2011). This is not elaborated on here, though, because of the dissertation's focus on applied linguistic's perspective.

¹⁸ www.alzheimer.ca/en/About-dementia/Dementias/Frontotemporal-Dementia-and-Pick-s-disease

¹⁹ More statistics on cognitive decline and dementia can be found here: https://www.alzheimer-europe.org/dementia/prevalence-dementia-europe?language_content_entity=en

to comprehend the influence of age on cognition, and to identify preventive or therapeutic approaches that can maintain cognitive function in older individuals (Murman, 2015).

The latest studies suggest a strong correlation between cognitive decline and later-life depression (LLD) (Marawi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, differentiating cognitive impairment caused by LLD from that caused by typical aging or mild Alzheimer's disease remains challenging. Research has demonstrated that LLD, a diverse mood disorder, negatively affects people's health-related quality of life (Kiosses et al., 2001). It refers to a major depressive episode that occurs in individuals aged 60 and older, regardless of when it first started (O'Hara et al., 2006; Bhalla & Butters, 2011; Koenig et al., 2014). Furthermore, research directly links LLD to a 100 percent increased risk of various dementias, including Alzheimer's and vascular dementia (Green et al., 2003; Diniz et al., 2013). Understanding the complex connection between depression and cognitive decline in older adults is crucial for creating comprehensive care approaches to improve the overall well-being of this age group.

Against the backdrop of these reported changes, however, neurocognitive aging research indicates that the brain maintains its ability to change and adapt (Bialystok & Poarch, 2014). This includes the ability to acquire new knowledge and skills later in life, including complex ones like language learning (Bialystok & Poarch, 2014). Understanding the impact of age on cognition is crucial due to the growing population of adults aged 65 and above, and the rising occurrence of age-related neurodegenerative dementias.

It is important to bear in mind that long-standing negative perceptions of aging were shaped by scientific research, which ignored crucial factors. As Jaroszewska pointed out (2013a), those factors included the subjects' unique characteristics and thus the need to modify measurement instruments according to psychophysical capacities and the historical/cultural contexts that inherently distinguish different generations or cohorts (Zimbardo, 1999, p. 212; Trempała, 2004, p. 14–18; Stuart-Hamilton, 2006, p. 46; Martin & Kliegel, 2008, p. 98). Current research paints an entirely different picture (Salthouse, 2016). Its results support the idea that changes in this area of human functioning do not necessarily need to occur as quickly as believed. Therefore, it should

come as no surprise that older adults today are participating in educational activities on a regular basis (see Chapter 2). Although this does not apply to all older adults and depends, among other things, on the degree of cognitive training, overtly noticeable—in behavioral terms—cognitive decline frequently does not occur until the ages of 75 to 80 (Boyd & Bee, 2008, p. 551).

Older adults' crystallized and fluid intelligence

Cognitive aging is not just characterized by cognitive decline, but includes changes in forms of intelligence (fluid and crystallized). The distinction between fluid and crystallized intelligence is a prominent theory in the field of psychology that seeks to explain different aspects of human intellect; it is called the Cattell, Horn, and Carroll (CHC) theory (Carroll, 1996). *Fluid intelligence* focuses on abstract reasoning and logical concepts, which are primarily affected by the aging process (Shakeel & Goghari, 2017). Conversely, culturally learned rules and factual knowledge make up *crystallized intelligence*, which often remains steady as people age (Postlethwaite, 2011).

The current literature presents various potential pathways for the reduction in fluid intelligence associated with aging (Manard et al., 2014). According to the most widely accepted research, age-related degenerative changes mostly occur in the frontal brain areas (Bugg et al., 2006). These changes negatively affect executive capacities and lead to a steady reduction in fluid intelligence as a function of normal non-pathological aging (Bugg et al., 2006). Additionally, it is widely recognized that individuals with Alzheimer's disease tend to have greater deterioration in their fluid intelligence than their crystallized intelligence. This reduction in fluid intelligence helps predict the rate at which AD progresses (McDonough & Pop, 2020), even before the onset of forgetfulness (Amieva et al., 2005).

The discrepancy in the (rate of) decline of *fluid vs. crystallized intelligence* in (pathological) aging is due to the fact that crystallized intelligence is commonly understood as knowledge that has accumulated over one's lifetime and is influenced by sociocultural factors, educational background, and professional abilities (Huepe et al. 2011). Fluid intelligence, on the other hand, is determined more by biological traits than life experiences. It is linked to applying general intellectual skills to creative problem

solving, identifying and analyzing patterns in data, recognizing and comparing data, classifying data, and coming to abstract conclusions (Huepe et al. 2011). There is no agreement, however, regarding the onset of the weakening mental abilities: it is accepted that a gradual decline in fluid intelligence begins in middle age and intensifies around age 50–60, whereas crystallized intelligence remains at the same level, or even increases, until around age 70 (Li et al., 2014).

Memory in older age

Memory is the cognitive process of encoding, storing, and retrieving information; it encompasses a collection of preserved knowledge, highlighting its dynamic and inventive characteristics (Squire, 2009). Memory functions through active processes of selection, reconstruction, and adaptation to pre-existing cognitive schema rather than the passive storage of information. Emotional-motivational processes are also considered to be of great significance (Reber & Reber, 2005, p. 503–507). The current understanding of memory, along with intellect and other aspects of human psychological activity, is characterized by a range of interpretations and complex theoretical frameworks (Kurcz, 1995; Nęcka, Orzechowski & Szymura, 2012). Hence, in order to assess the educational capacity of older individuals, specifically in relation to language learning, only the most significant statements will be outlined in this discussion. These fundamental concepts, developed through much research in this challenging field, have successfully withstood rigorous examination and are now firmly established. Their purpose is to determine the essential changes in human memory that result from the aging process.

Memory can be categorized into three types: short-term memory (STM), long-term memory (LTM), and working memory (WM) (Jaroszewska, 2013a). Short-term memory stores and retrieves information about events and things. Recall usually takes a few seconds to several minutes. The system has a limited capacity of about seven units of information, which includes letters, words, numbers, figures, and other random items. New knowledge is stored in STM, and after selective examination, which evaluates its utility, this information can be stored in LTM or deleted. In long-term memory, information is encoded, categorized, and systematized. This information can

be decoded at any time, depending on conditions. LTM encodes mostly visually, with auditory-verbal, semantic, temporal, and other sensory inputs like smell, taste, and touch (Jaroszewska, 2013a). Tulving (1985) postulated three distinct long-term memory stores: episodic memory, semantic memory, and procedural memory. Episodic memory refers to the ability to recall certain events or experiences from one's past. A long-term memory repository of personal experiences, such as a diary, preserves recollections of the timing of events and the individuals, items, locations, and actions associated with them. Semantic memory is a repository of our long-term information about the world, encompassing facts, the meanings of words, and the understanding of concepts. Procedural memory refers to our long-term storage of knowledge related to task performance and our recollection of acquired skills (Tulving, 1985).

Working memory mediates between short-term and long-term memory systems, enhancing memory and recall. Although it is only one part of the memory system, it affects learning, inference, and reasoning (Jaroszewska, 2013a). Working memory also plays a crucial role in language comprehension (Kurcz, 1995, p. 8; Maruszewski, 2004, p. 137). WM is considered to be a process responsible for temporarily manipulating and maintaining relevant information throughout cognitive operations (Singleton, 2018, p. 21).

Memory is a vital factor in human cognitive capacities. Older persons often self-report a decline in the memory compared to their youth (Zimbardo, 1999, p. 217). These perceived alterations to memory, also referred to as age-related forgetfulness, are frequently a natural aspect of aging (Craik, 1994). More severe memory issues, on the other hand, might result from dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, moderate cognitive impairment, or factors unrelated to aging (see Section 1.3.2). Indeed, the brain receives information through the senses, then encodes and stores it in short-term memory before transferring it to long-term memory for future retrieval and recognition. Advanced age impairs memory retrieval, not memorization. Older adults do not lose knowledge; they just have trouble remembering it. Older people often experience *tip-of-the-tongue*, caused by memory overload. Older individuals may not have trouble remembering basic facts, but they tend to struggle to remember names (Craik, 2023). The hierarchical structuring of knowledge makes information readily available at higher

levels, but as one explores deeper, it becomes more complex. As one ages, linking new information to established knowledge systems becomes harder. Thus, elderly persons may remember snippets of knowledge without a structure (Craik, 2023).

The differential rate of forgetting in older individuals, as compared to younger ones, can be attributed to their use of less efficient mnemonic strategies for information acquisition and retention, or to a general lack of knowledge in the area (Rivera-Lares et al., 2022). Customizing learning and teaching approaches to the distinct talents and requirements of older adults enables them to attain outcomes comparable to younger individuals. Studies indicate that older adults experience notable advantages from engaging in memory exercises, and the consistent application of mnemonic techniques can result in substantial enhancements in memory function (e.g., Kliegl, Smith & Bakes, 1989). Older adults with memory impairments instinctively use memory strategies and compensating measures. As part of their everyday routines, individuals may reach for various methods, such as utilizing basic external tools (e.g., lists, calendars), adopting personal mnemonic techniques (e.g., repetition), or simply exerting additional effort during memorization and/or recollection. It is crucial to tailor techniques to the specific needs and skills of older persons in education (Kilian, 2015). This approach should be founded on a comprehensive understanding of the biological, psychological, and social factors that affect functioning throughout the older adult period. This entails the suitable modification of the learning environment, methodologies, strategies, and materials (Kilian, 2015).

Contrary to popular assumptions that long-term memory is affected by aging, Jaroszewska (2013a) claimed that it remains intact throughout time. This is supported by Cadar and colleagues (2018), who asserted that, although storing and retrieving new information from memory is known to be affected by aging (Cadar et al., 2018), recalling previously acquired facts and information is not greatly impaired. This is presumably linked to the consistent level of crystallized intelligence, which is manifested through knowledge. Older individuals thus do not encounter considerable difficulties in remembering information that they frequently consult, are familiar with, or deem important (Cadar et al., 2018). Additionally, there is now ample data to demonstrate that memory is not a singular function, but rather may be defined by

multiple memory systems that exhibit varying impacts of aging (Ferbinteanu, 2018). However, not all memory systems are impacted by advanced age (Zimbardo, 1999, p. 217). So far, five primary systems, which decline at different rates depending on age, have been identified (Luo & Craik, 2008). Although STM and WM tend to show rapid deterioration, perceptual memory (retaining perceptual information) and semantic memory, which involves organizing similar information and accumulating general knowledge, often remain relatively unaffected (Luo & Craik, 2008).

The fact that aging affects memory systems differently is a function of the decreasing effectiveness of the brain's frontal lobe. This lobe is accountable for several cognitive processes, including language, attention, and memory (Collins & Koechlin, 2012). Impairments in working memory are an early sign of several age-related neuropsychological disorders, including moderate cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease (Belleville, Rouleau, van der Linden, & Collette, 2003; Belleville, Chertkow & Gauthier, 2007). Furthermore, studies have linked a decline in working memory (WM) to a decline in the independence and overall well being of older individuals (Klingberg, 2010; Williams & Kemper, 2010). From a cognitive standpoint, a crucial characteristic of working memory is its restricted capacity to store information and process it in real-time (Gruszka & Nęcka, 2017). Several theoretical approaches have thus concentrated on the storage aspect of working memory tasks in order to elucidate age-related impairments. The processing speed theory posits that age-related working memory problems result from a general slowing of computing processes, leading to challenges in information retention (Salthouse, 1996). Theories of cognitive aging commonly link age-related declines in working memory to a decrease in the underlying mechanisms of regulated attention, specifically executive functions and the corresponding patterns of brain activation (Kesek, 2008).

Later-life executive functioning

Executive functions refer to a set of cognitive processes like top-down attention. They are associated with goal-directed, non-routine behavior and the control of complex cognition (Banich, 2009). Executive functions formulate strategies, adjust to unfamiliar

circumstances, manage emotions, and resolve problems (e.g., Norman & Shallice, 1986; Zelazo, Carlson, & Kesek, 2008).

When evaluating the intellectual capacity of older individuals, it is crucial to consider other cognitive factors for measuring human intelligence and memory performance. Specifically, these are *attention* and *reaction time* (Kesek, 2008). *Attention* is the cognitive ability to concentrate on a specific task or stimulus, even in the presence of distractions. It also involves the capacity to shift focus when necessary, and to integrate information from various sources simultaneously (Findsen & Formosa, 2011, p. 67). *Attention* is employed not only during the reception of information, but also during the stages of processing and selection. It can possess consciousness or function outside the realm of consciousness (Findsen & Formosa, 2011).

Attention is ascribed four primary functions: selectivity, alertness, scanning, and management of concurrent tasks (Oberauer, 2019). The extent to which these processes are efficient determines an individual's learning capabilities (Nęcka, 2004, p. 77; Stuart-Hamilton, 2006, p. 73). *Attention* is multifaceted and influenced by such assorted internal and external factors that executive functioning and any age-related changes therein are highly individual (Friedman et al., 2008). Scientific investigations have consistently shown that, as individuals age, their attention and concentration capacities tend to decline (e.g., Murman, 2015; Brito et al., 2023). There is a notable decrease in attention efficiency, especially when carrying out difficult tasks or tasks that involve performing many activities at the same time (Moritz, 2002, p. 122–123). Age-related attention changes include difficulty with attention-demanding tasks, as well as selective or split attention. Selective attention is the cognitive ability to focus on specific information in a situation, while ignoring other information. Complex attentional tasks show age-related cognitive decline (Lezak et al., 2012).

As with *attention*, decline may be observed in *reaction time* (RT) (Cavanaugh, 1997, p. 114), which measures how long it takes to respond to a stimulus. The role of RT in our life is highly significant due to its practical implications and their consequences. Factors that influence the average human RT include age, gender, visual focus (central or peripheral), level of practice, exhaustion, hunger, breathing rhythm, personality traits, physical activity, and IQ (Jain et al., 2015). In terms of information processing, a decrease in the speed of neural transmission is connected to the general slowing hypothesis, which suggests that an increase in reaction time results from a

decline in the speed at which the nervous system of aging individuals processes information (Findsen & Formosa, 2011, p. 68). The diminished integrity of white matter, considered a possible cause of age-related decline in cognitive processing speed, may be linked to the reduced effectiveness of transmitting and reacting to information in old age (Park & Reuter-Lorenz, 2009). The primary issue with the general slowing theory is its correlation with the age-complexity effect, which is particularly evident in more complex tasks. However, extensive practice and automation of a particular task reduces the significance of age disparity (Rogers, 2000, as cited in Findsen & Formosa, 2011). Undoubtedly, the deceleration of response time to stimuli holds particular importance in the context of senior foreign language teaching. The need for adapting the exercise phase to the perceptual abilities of older learners is evident in both interpersonal communication and the overall learning process (Berndt, 2003, p. 146–147).

Cognitive reserve

Age-associated cognitive changes are inevitable for older adults, however, it should be borne in mind that the aging brain has the ability to adapt to external stimuli, and to make up for neuronal deficits (Park, 2009). The fact that mental training has the potential to significantly enhance the cognitive abilities of older adults is highly relevant in this context. The theory referred to here is often called *use-it-or-lose-it* (Salthouse, 2006), according to which the brain is comparable to a muscle. Engaging in physically and mentally challenging activities throughout one's life can thus help to maintain cognitive functioning and prevent the onset of dementia (Almond, 2014, p. 29). Cognitively demanding tasks are an essential aspect of *cognitive reserve* (CR) (e.g., Stuart-Hamilton, 2012), which is especially significant in today's world since it addresses the phenomenon of double aging of societies (Szepietowska, 2019, p. 66). This refers to a decline in the number of young individuals and a simultaneous increase in the proportion of older ones (aged 80 and above).

While cognitive reserve and related ideas are well researched, there is inconsistency in how the term is defined and applied among various studies and research teams. Stern et al. (2018, p. 1306) defined CR as “adaptability that helps to

explain differential susceptibility of cognitive abilities or day-to-day function to brain aging, pathology, or insult.” They proposed that the combination of lifetime experiences and genetics enhances the resilience of cognitive processes by increasing the efficiency, capacity, or flexibility of brain networks. This, in turn, enables individuals to better manage brain disease or aging (Stern et al., 2018). Furthermore, *cognitive reserve* asserts that brain damage can be addressed by employing compensatory mechanisms to activate pathways not regularly used during activities, or by leveraging pre-existing cognitive processes to enhance the efficiency of existing neural networks (Stern, 2013). CR is also understood as the correlation between brain injury or pathological severity and the strength or timing of its symptoms. These symptoms can be delayed or lessened by alterations in neurocognitive networks brought about by experiences (Stern, 2013).

The concept of cognitive reserve emerged from the recognition that there can be inconsistencies between the extent of neuropathology in the brain and the level of cognitive or functional decline in individuals (Morris et al., 1996; Negash et al., 2013). It is important to distinguish between cognitive reserve, as previously defined, and brain reserve. Brain reserve refers to the structural features of the brain at a specific time, such as pre-existing brain volume and white matter integrity (Pettigrew & Soldan, 2021). Brain reserve may provide protection against age and disease-related brain changes by influencing the point at which cognitive or functional decline becomes apparent. Brain maintenance refers to the process of preserving or potentially improving the brain through lifetime experiences and their interaction with genetic variables (Nyberg et al., 2012).

Due to its theoretical nature, cognitive reserve cannot be observed directly. Consequently, it is typically assessed using proxy variables that describe lifetime experiences (Richards & Deary, 2005). These include indicators of educational and occupational achievements, intelligence, involvement in lifestyle or leisure activities (such as socially, physically, and cognitively stimulating activities), socioeconomic status, and early life experiences (Richards & Deary, 2005). Studies have demonstrated that various aspects of lifestyle, such as educational attainment, can influence cognitive reserve (e.g., Cox & Sanz, 2015; Lee et al., 2018) and promote the brain’s neuroplasticity (Jones et al., 2006; Farfel et al., 2013; Pinto & Tandel, 2016). Third-

agers with a high education level are able to offset the reduction in neurological function that occurs with age, whereas those with lower levels of education are more prone to mental degeneration and dementia (Jones et al., 2006). Long-term study has also shown that the pursuit of higher education can mitigate the detrimental impact of aging on cognitive capacities. According to the compensation hypothesis, education and/or intellectual stimulation can slow the pace of cognitive decline. Indeed, Reuter-Lorenz & Cappell (2008), Alley et al., (2007), and Hultsch et al., (1999) all argued that people who have completed higher levels of schooling may already be dramatically decreasing their later cognitive decline. Higher education levels correlate directly with quicker cognitive processing throughout adulthood (Seeman et al., 2011). Well educated people may demonstrate performance levels comparable to those of individuals ten years younger when it comes to activities that require quick responses and effective cognitive control (Seeman et al., 2011). At this point, it is also worth acknowledging that some researchers challenge the traditional concept of the cognitive reserve and advocate for using the term "changes in cognitive performance" to emphasize the dynamic nature of cognitive abilities over time (see Lövdén et al., 2020). Lövdén's work emphasized how lifestyle factors, learning, and environmental enrichment actively shape and sustain cognitive function, stressing that cognitive performance is not merely a fixed trait but a malleable process influenced by ongoing brain changes and individual experiences.

In view of the above, cognitive aging can be understood as a complex process involving many physiological and cognitive mechanisms—diet, well-being, educational achievement, and physical health all play roles in the neural, psychophysiological, and anatomical changes that occur with aging. These factors also affect the extent of age-related decline observed among older individuals (e.g., MacPherson et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is widely recognized that individuals with higher levels of education, more prestigious jobs, and/or a better quality of life are more likely to preserve their cognitive skills for longer (Idowu & Szameitat, 2023). Studies by Barulli et al., (2013), Dubois et al., (2016), and Kaufman et al., (2016) attribute this to their possession of a greater cognitive reserve. Cognitive reserve may thus help to protect against dementia and other diseases associated with old age (Pettigrew & Soldan, 2021). In general, the

available data indicates that efforts to enhance economic, social, and educational possibilities may significantly impact long-term cognitive and brain health (Pettigrew & Soldan, 2021).

1.3.3. Psychosocial changes

As demonstrated in sections 1.3.1. and 1.3.2., the biological and cognitive processes of aging intertwine and influence social activity in the third and fourth age, including older adults' willingness to develop and learn in later life. Among psychosocial aspects of aging are emotions, changing social roles, the losses older adults must face and accept, the image of older people in society, stereotypes about older adults, and other forms of adaptive aging. This section delves into the psychosocial changes associated with aging, while chapter two provides a detailed presentation of these aspects in a Polish context.

A person develops throughout his/her entire life, including in the psychological domains of memory, intelligence, personality, emotions, and spirituality (Kilian, 2020). Older adults with sufficient stores of mental resources should be able to maintain their previous levels of functioning and even develop new psychological traits, disregarding pathologies. Current studies of older people's psychological capacities advocate finding developmental opportunities that guarantee a successful transition to old age, in addition to countering the progressive limitations that come with aging (Kucharewicz, 2015).

Emotions and personality

There are minimal alterations in emotional stability in the latter stages of adulthood. Positive emotions tend to remain stable, whereas negative feelings often decline in frequency and duration (Ong et al., 2011). Positive attitudes pertain to one's emotional state, focus, and ability to interpret and retrieve stored knowledge (Fredrickson, 2011), thereby interacting with cognition. Upon examining the eye movements of older adults in relation to displayed facial images, it has been observed that they actively avoid directing attention toward faces exhibiting anger, while increasingly focusing on happy images (Isaacowitz et al., 2006). In contrast, younger adults allocated greater focus to fearful facial expressions. What is more, older people

exhibit the phenomenon of selective memory, in which they more readily recall positive memories (Kilian, 2020). This tendency strengthens with age, and may play a role in how people regulate their emotional experiences by favoring certain memories. Older adults thus exhibit a greater capacity for retaining positive knowledge and experience a reduced intensity in the recollection of negative emotions compared to younger people (Kilian, 2020). Research on retrospective assessment of historical occurrences has revealed that older adults tend to have more favorable perceptions of their decisions than younger individuals (Mather & Johnson, 2000). They are also more likely to remember positive experiences when asked about the most impactful event in their moral growth (Quackenbush & Barnett, 2001).

Furthermore, some studies suggest that emotional experiences become increasingly multidimensional, mixed, bittersweet, and profound (Carstensen & Masupathi, 2000). Older individuals tend to avoid conflicts and approach them positively (Bereza & Fundowicz, 2013). It has even been shown that women tend to suppress anger and use escape mechanisms more than men, inclining toward excessive self-control and avoidance of conflict situations (Bereza & Fundowicz, 2013).

These findings are worth interpreting in the context of the so-called *the well-being paradox* (Swift et al., 2024)—that is, the phenomenon whereby subjective emotional well-being remains intact and may even improve in late adulthood, despite the prevalence of losses over gains at this life stage. This unexpected phenomenon can be attributed to the functioning of adaptive mechanisms. The act of enhancing happy emotions has been interpreted as an adaptation to the intensified stresses of deteriorating physiology (Kilian, 2020).

Apart from more general findings on the relationship between regulating emotions and advanced age, studies have examined fluctuations in personality across time. Over the human life cycle, there is both evidence for personality stability and alteration (Harris et al., 2016). The notion of personality is inherently intricate and difficult to quantify, particularly due to the problematic implementation of objective measurement instruments in this context.

Current empirical understandings of the formation of human personality indicate that there are indeed certain alterations in the composition and functioning of

personality as individuals age, albeit of a rather insignificant nature (Jaroszevska, 2013a). These alterations at later life stages have been associated with crucial events like the loss of a spouse, remarriage, or a decline in physical and mental well-being (Kilian, 2015). One group of researchers (Helson et al., 2002; Roberts & Delvecchio, 2000) have shown that personality traits, though generally stable in maturity, often undergo highly dynamic changes throughout a person's lifespan. This approach is consistent with assumptions about the continuity theory (Atchley, 1989), which acknowledges that personality changes with age, but that these changes are mostly quantitative rather than qualitative. Under the continuity notion, the unique life circumstances of each individual heavily influence the nature of these variations, making them more significant than belonging to a specific age cohort (Zajac, 2001).

In conclusion, the complex interplay between personality, emotions, and self-growth influences the aging process. The emotional state and personality features of individuals in later life can substantially influence their motivation, resilience, and general involvement in such things as learning new skills later in life. Positive emotional experiences and a resilient personality enhance the ability to acquire language effectively by promoting an adaptive attitude toward obstacles. Furthermore, as people experience personal growth in the latter stages of adulthood, they develop emotional intelligence and personality dynamics that influence the tactics used and the results achieved in language learning.

Life wisdom

Virtues are commonly and scientifically believed to be essential for individuals to thrive, considering the inherent constraints of human nature (Fowers et al., 2017). Indeed, wisdom is a universal virtue, a quality of character that encompasses love, courage, justice, and perseverance (Fowers et al., 2017). These virtues are evident across temporal and cultural contexts, and are not dictated by biology. Erikson (2002, p. 75) defined wisdom as a life-focused form of knowledge, immune to subjective feelings, even in the face of death. Accordingly, wisdom develops when people successfully navigate the challenges of old age, including the conflict between integrity and despair. Under specific circumstances, the ultimately attainable human virtue of

wisdom can develop at an earlier stage. Acquiring life wisdom is a crucial objective in human development (Erikson, 2002).

Although wisdom is typically associated with age, gaining it entails more than simply getting older. While life experience is a crucial basis for wisdom, not all extremely intelligent individuals are older and many older individuals are not notably wise (Glück, 2024). The area of psychological wisdom study is relatively new and has seen significant growth over the past decades. Earlier researchers used their own definitions and measurements of wisdom, resulting in conflictual empirical findings. More recently, researchers have released several comprehensive models of wisdom, demonstrating that these definitions share a distinct foundation (Grossmann et al., 2020). Wisdom, as an ideal, is inherently associated with human progress, and achieving it allows us to deal effectively with life problems (Steuden, 2011). There is now a consensus on wisdom's multidimensional nature that emphasizes such interconnected elements as cognition, social interaction, emotions, and motivation. The cognitive component pertains to advanced intellectual capabilities, extensive knowledge and expertise, proficiency in learning and applying new knowledge, and analytical reasoning. The socio-emotional component is linked to social aptitude, the ability to provide effective guidance, sensitivity, and the empathy an individual shows towards others.

Wisdom is thus a manifestation of maturity that arises with the accumulation of life experience and a deeper understanding of one's flaws. Possessing wisdom is evident in the capacity to address effectively crises and difficulties, offer sound counseling and direction, and make precise judgments and decisions (Steuden, 2011). Definitions of wisdom comprise three analytic models: cognitive; personality; and developmental (Glück & Weststrate, 2022). Cognition-focused wisdom models explain wise thinking as being aware of the uncertainty, unpredictability, and limitations of one's knowledge, and the presence and validity of various perspectives, influenced by differences in values and life circumstances (e.g., Baltes & Staudinger, 2021; Oakes et al., 2019). Alternatively, Sternberg's *balance theory of wisdom* posits that wisdom is the application of tacit knowledge, influenced by values, to attain a collective benefit. These solutions also consider both short- and long-term results that aim to achieve a common

good (Sternberg, 2019). Personality-focused models prioritize the examination of personality traits associated with wisdom, including emotional and motivational aspects. These traits may include a strong curiosity about life, a willingness to critically evaluate one's beliefs, and empathy (Ardelt, 2019).

Another important psychological aspect of wisdom is self-transcendence, which involves feeling connected to people, younger generations, and the natural world, as well as having a sense of purpose (Aldwin et al., 2019). Developmental models seek to explain wisdom development and the factors that contribute to some individuals being wiser than others throughout their lifespan. The development of wisdom, which refers to expertise in the fundamental aspects of human life, is more important than actual experiences and is influenced by such factors as general personality characteristics (openness, intelligence, and creativity), as well as expertise-specific elements like life experience, mentorship, and motivation (Baltes & Smith, 1990). Wisdom also develops via experiential contexts that provide opportunities for learning about life, such as parenthood, mentorship roles, or specific historical contexts (Kilian, 2015).

Contemporary developmental models prioritize personal resources that affect one's ability to learn from certain life situations. According to Jeffrey Dean Webster's HERO(E) model (2022), wisdom is the readiness and capability to utilize knowledge acquired from life events to promote the most favorable growth of oneself and others. There is also the MORE Life Experience Model (Glück & Bluck, 2013; Glück & Bluck, 2019), which explains how wisdom develops and its expression in challenging circumstances.

Studies that have investigated the relationship between wisdom and aging find that certain characteristics related to being open-minded and focused on personal improvement during young adulthood are predictors for the level of wisdom in old age (Glück, 2024). This supports the overall concept that psychological resources can either promote or impede the development of wisdom (Dorfman et al., 2022; Stauginder et al., 2018; Ardelt et al., 2018). Wisdom is also considered a psychological asset for managing life difficulties. Ardelt and colleagues conducted a series of studies showing that wisdom benefits individuals facing challenges throughout adulthood, with a particular emphasis on old age (Ardelt & Ferrari, 2019; Ardelt & Jeste, 2022). Wisdom

can assist older individuals in effectively handling challenging situations in their own lives as well as in the lives of others. It can also act as a protective barrier against the detrimental impact of stressful experiences on overall well-being and mental health (Ardelt & Ferrari, 2019; Ardelt & Jeste, 2022). Wisdom has been shown to safeguard against loneliness in later life (e.g. Lee et al., 2019).

Overall, the correlation between wisdom and age is intricate, as wisdom is an inherently complex construct. Aging produces wisdom, which stems from the accumulation of life experience. For older adults, acquiring wisdom may hold greater significance than mere intellectual knowledge. Gaining intellectual information informs one about current events and worldly matters, while wisdom-related knowledge enables one to anticipate and prepare for problems that come with old age. The acquisition of intellectual knowledge tends to diminish as one becomes older, though the correlation between wisdom and age is generally favorable (Ardelt, 2000). This link is quite encouraging, as wisdom is positively associated with enhanced subjective well-being and life satisfaction.

Social dimension of older age

As we have seen, older adults form a highly heterogeneous population, characterized not only by physiological and psychological changes, but also by diverse life experiences such as education, social status, attitudes, and roles assumed during earlier stages of life and in late adulthood. The social aspects of aging encompass a complex interplay of relationships, societal structures, and cultural dynamics that significantly influence the well-being and the experiences of older individuals. By exploring how social connections, community engagement, and cultural perceptions impact the aging process, we gain valuable insight into developing strategies for promoting positive and inclusive aging experiences in society.

Straś-Romanowska (2012, p. 330–333) highlighted three social aspects of aging: 1) Foremost is the challenge of adjusting to a life marked by declines in health, physical strength, attractiveness, professional position, social status, social/professional connections, relationships with loved ones, and the ability to fulfill goals in a limited

timeframe. Also, there are the difficulties of keeping up with societal, cultural, and technological changes.

2) Social roles in late adulthood encompass the responsibilities and expectations associated with being a retiree, the shifting dynamics of family roles, and the importance of friendships.

3) Styles of functioning in older individuals can be categorized as adaptive, active, passive, defensive, and maladaptive.

Identifying these styles gives rise to two theories of adaptation to old age: *the disengagement theory*, which posits aging as an unavoidable process characterized by a reciprocal withdrawal or disengagement, leading to reduced connections between the aging individual and others in their social system (see Cumming & Henry, 1961, as cited in Straś-Romanowska, 2012); and *the activity theory* (see Bee, 2004, cited in Straś-Romanowska, 2012), which holds that the aging process can be decelerated or postponed, and that overall well-being can be improved by maintaining an active social life. This involves participating in or organizing events or activities that foster social interaction among community members.

Given the current state of knowledge, one can assert that the aforementioned social elements typical of late adulthood can greatly influence decisions regarding education in older age, including foreign language education.

Building on Straś-Romanowska, Sienkiewicz-Wilowska (2013) stated that, as individuals age, they experience alterations in their social functioning, including declines in opportunities for social connections and in their social networks generally. Retirement, which may well deplete professional contacts, as well as the breakdown in intimate relations with spouses, siblings, and friends, all influence these changes. Older adults may have fewer social interactions and lower social status. In mature adulthood, certain social responsibilities lessen. Most older adults retire, reducing their life activities and professional relationships. As adult children leave home, mid-adulthood educational duties like being a student or parent diminish. Additional duties include retirement and grandparenthood (Sienkiewicz-Wilowska, 2013). In light of these changes, older adults must take on new social obligations, especially ones that offer

growth, involvement, and competence. Failure to accept these responsibilities can lead to social isolation, insignificance, unhappiness, and a decline in well-being.

1.3.4. Summary

It should be borne in mind that biological, cognitive, and psychosocial changes all influence older adult lives. These in turn influence language learning. From a biological perspective, aging frequently alters the neural system, decreasing brain plasticity and neural processing rates, and thus diminishing the capacity to learn and remember new linguistic information (Hedden & Gabrieli, 2004). Difficulties may arise when learning a new language due to cognitive changes, specifically a decrease in working memory and processing speed. These cognitive functions are essential for understanding, learning, and retaining new vocabulary and grammatical patterns (Salthouse, 1996; Bopp & Verhaeghen, 2005). Psychosocial issues also impact language learning. Older individuals often undergo changes in motivation and self-efficacy, which could impact their inclination and capacity to participate in language acquisition endeavors (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, the social environment in which learning takes place, including chances for social engagement and assistance from both peers and instructors, can either improve or impede language learning (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Depending on how these biological, cognitive, and psychosocial factors interact, older adults face unique challenges in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Fortunately, customized teaching methods that take these changes into account can help them to capitalize on their life experiences and existing knowledge such that successful language acquisition is possible (Singleton & Ryan, 2004).

1.4. Multidisciplinary perspective in later life language research

1.4.1. Andragogy and its principles

The term *andragogy* was coined in 1833 by a German teacher named Kapp, who combined the Greek roots *andr* (man) and *agogos* (learning) to describe elements of Plato's educational theory (Davenport & Davenport, 1985). After disappearing from mainstream educational discourse, the term reappeared in 1921, when American

educators Lindeman & Rosenstock-Hussey used it in a report arguing that “adult education requires special teachers, methods, and philosophy”. They categorized these requirements under the umbrella term *andragogy* (Knowles et al., 1998, p. 59).

The American educator Malcolm Knowles popularized *andragogy* in its current form (1984). He acknowledged the constraints of formal educational environments to earlier life stages, and endeavored to adopt a more all-encompassing approach to adult education. Knowles understood *andragogy* as “the art and science of facilitating adult learning” (1984, p. 6), and believed that content-driven classes, drills, quizzes, assessments, and rote memory were unproductive for adults. Knowles’s approach recognized adult learners’ pre-existing expertise and experience, and prioritized them in the learning process (1984). It was a noticeable change, because instruction had previously been central to that process. In collaboration with other researchers, Knowles expanded on this *andragogy* concept by introducing the four, and eventually six, *andragogic* principles (Knowles et al., 1998) presented below (originally, *andragogy* introduced four assumptions referenced by numbers 2–5; Knowles first proposed assumption 6, which pertained to incentive, in 1984, while he only included assumption 1, which emphasized the need to know, in 1989/1990).

1) *The need to know*: adult learners prefer to understand the purpose or reason behind learning something before they begin the learning process (Knowles et al., 1998, p. 64).

2) *Self-Concept*: As people develop, their self-concept progresses from reliance on others to self-direction and assuming accountability for their own learning.

3) *Adult Learner Experience*: As individuals age, they gather a wealth of experience that becomes increasingly valuable for learning purposes. In developing their instructional method, teachers should take into account the experiences and expertise of adult learners, allowing them to apply this to novel learning and means of acquiring new information. As a result, adult learners have the ability to assess their current knowledge or habits and, by engaging in learning activities, to develop a higher comprehension level for new information, beyond even what younger learners could achieve.

4) *Learning Readiness*: As people grow older, their readiness to acquire knowledge becomes more closely connected with the duties required by their social roles. The readiness to learn is sometimes derived from the tasks associated with transitioning between different stages of development, e.g. infant, child, adolescent, young adults (Chung, 2018).²⁰ The key lesson here is the importance of matching learning experiences with these developmental demands.

5) *Learning Orientation*: As individuals mature, their perception of time shifts from a tendency to delay the application of knowledge toward its more immediate application. As a result, their focus on learning shifts from specific subjects to solving problems. Adults' learning orientation is either life-centered or task-centered. This means that individuals are more likely to participate in learning when they believe that acquiring knowledge will help them to complete tasks or overcome problems in their daily living situations and routines.

6) *Intrinsic Motivation to Learn*: As individuals age, their motivation to learn changes from extrinsic (when people are motivated to perform a behavior or engage in an activity because they want to earn a reward or avoid punishment; see, e.g., Tranquillo & Stecker, 2016) into more intrinsic (when people engage in a behavior because they find it rewarding; see Lee et al., 2012). The intrinsic one prevails (Knowles, 1984, p. 80–81).

Table 1 compares the main principles of pedagogy and andragogy with reference to the learner, experience, readiness, orientation, and motivation source (Knowles, 1984, p. 812; developed by Findsen & Formosa in "Lifelong learning in later life," 2011).

²⁰ These stages of development described by Chung were based on Erikson's eight stages.

	Pedagogy	Andragogy
Learner	Dependent. Teacher directs what, when, how a subject is learned, and tests what has been learned.	Self-directing and independent. The teacher's task is to encourage and nurture learning.
Experience	Of little value. Teacher experience and texts is what matters. Hence, teaching methods are didactic.	A rich experience use as a resource. Teaching methods include discussion, problem-solving, etc.
Readiness	People learn what society expects them to. The curriculum is standardised.	People learn what they need to know. Learning programmes are organised around life application.
Orientation	Acquisition of subject matter. Curriculum organised by the subjects under focus.	Learning based on experiences. People are performance-centred in their learning.
Motivation	External factors. Examples include parents, fear of failure, etc.	Internal factors. Examples include self-esteem, quality of life, etc.

Table 1. The comparison of andragogy and pedagogy principles

In sum, *andragogy* is based on at least five fundamental assumptions regarding the attributes of learners that deviate from the belief that underlies traditional education: 1) their self-concept develops from reliance on others to becoming an independent individual; 2) they accumulate an expanding pool of experiences that becomes a valuable asset for learning; 3) their willingness to learn falls more in line with the developmental responsibilities of their social roles; 4) their time viewpoint shifts from delaying the use of knowledge to its immediate application, producing a change of focus from subject to performance in their approach to learning; and 5) their motivation is primarily driven by internal rather than external factors. The andragogical model for learning, as presented by Knowles (2020) and his colleagues, is widely acknowledged

as a process-oriented approach, in contrast to the content-oriented model used in traditional (pedagogical) education.

Researchers have not accepted *andragogy* uncritically. In particular, it has been critiqued from a philosophical perspective. Grace (1996), for instance, undermined the andragogical approach's narrow emphasis on the individual. The author argued that *andragogy* lacked a critical social perspective and neglected to consider the connection between adult education and contemporary society. Several authors (e.g., Mezirow, 1991) proposed broadening the scope of adult learning theory to include not only the teaching and learning processes, but also their goals. Two noteworthy viewpoints in this context are perspective transformation, as suggested by Mezirow (1991), and a critical paradigm of self-directed learning, as discussed by Brookfield (1984, 1988). Pratt (1993) also directed criticism at *andragogy* for its lack of acceptance of a critical framework for adult learning, asserting that: "Andragogy is clearly infused with the principles of individualism and entrepreneurial democracy. The transformation of society may result from individual transformation, but it is not the main objective of andragogy" (p. 21).

1.4.2. Geragogy and its critical trends

The critical approach to andragogy prompted the development of an alternative theory to address the unique learning needs of older individuals. In 1978, Jacques Lebel promoted *geragogy*, which recognized and attended to the specific learning traits, requirements, motivations, and obstacles encountered by older adults (Tam, 2014). Lebel contended that *geragogy* was particularly well-suited to handle the distinct elements of learning in older individuals, since their learning is primarily self-initiated and voluntary (Tam, 2014).

The term *geragogy* acquired prominence in the United States and the UK following its introduction in Lebel's (1978) paper. Sometimes used interchangeably with educational gerontology (Maderer & Skiba, 2006), *geragogy* refers to the study and practice of instructional efforts directed toward older and aging adults. The concept can be divided into three interconnected aspects: 1) educational activities that target individuals in their middle age or older; 2) educational activities aimed at informing the

general public or a specific audience about aging and older individuals; and 3) educational training for individuals who are currently or plan to be employed in professions or roles that serve older individuals, such as teaching or other support capacities (Peterson, 1976, p. 62).

Critical geragogy (CG)

In 2002, researchers proposed the critical geragogy framework in order to encourage reflection on older adult learning (Formosa, 2002) and stress the different perspectives of students and teachers. This framework also promoted consideration of the appropriateness of content, strategies, and the socio-political contexts in which older adult learning took place.

Formosa (2002) introduced a set of foundational principles for *critical geragogy*, emphasizing the need for older adult education to actively confront and dismantle ageist stereotypes. He argued that this form of education must acknowledge the diversity in the older population and not treat it as a monolith. *Critical geragogy* plays a crucial role in engaging older adults who might previously have seen education as irrelevant or unattainable. It challenges the traditional, passive model of education, where learners merely receive knowledge, and instead promotes a communicative and participatory approach. According to Formosa (2002), this method gives older adults a sense of control over their learning and combats feelings of isolation. Educators are encouraged to involve older adults in designing a relevant, liberating curriculum. This approach, deeply rooted in dialogue, reflection, and negotiation, closely aligns the learning process with the real-life experiences and concerns of older adults. Consequently, teaching and learning from a *critical geragogy* perspective empowers late life learners to own their experiences (Velaso & Guimarães, 2014). This is crucial, Tam (2014) argues, since older learners have different needs and goals for continuing education than do younger ones. These in turn are influenced by the changing circumstances and transitions associated with aging, because older learners may face barriers in their learning process that are directly linked to the evolving characteristics of their life circumstances and experiences connected with maturity (p. 3).

Critical Foreign Language Geragogy (CFLG)

In line with the principles of *critical geragogy*, Ramirez Gómez introduced *Critical Foreign Language Geragogy (CFLG)*, advocating a transformative approach to specifically foreign language education for older learners, and stating that “CFLG asserts that FL education should provide older learners with a context wherein they may identify sources of limitations on their learning process, challenge those limitations, transform them, and improve their learning experience.” (Ramírez Gómez, 2016a, p. 137–138). The framework was developed because language learning is specific enough to warrant its own set of principles (see, e.g., Brown, 2006). Moreover, language teachers often manifest a patronizing attitude toward older learners’ abilities, and tend to set rather non-demanding goals for them (Ramírez Gómez, 2016b, p. 107).

Ramirez Gómez (2016a, 2016b) argued that numerous factors necessitate a critical approach to foreign language teaching for older individuals. First, these language courses should arrange students by age or life-marking events like retirement in order to measure their progress. This distinction could improve learning for older people who experience psychological and cognitive changes as they age. What is more, as mentioned, many third-agers experience age-related bias from teachers who often doubt their students’ ability to learn a language or understate the course’s level in the belief that older adults only take it for social reasons. Instructors must be more positive about older individuals’ potential and let them explore it in class. Next, foreign language teaching approaches that do not account for older learners’ cognitive, social, and psychological traits will not produce satisfied students. Instead, they may cause frustration, inadequacy, and compliance. Ramirez Gómez criticized such an approach and proposed an empowering educational environment that helps students to understand their true abilities, overcome misconceptions, and achieve personal goals in the foreign language, as “only critical education is beneficial for older adults” (Ramirez Gómez 2016b, p. 11). These principles should inform this educational environment: third-age foreign language acquisition improves cognitive, social, and emotional well-being, and delays cognitive decline (Bialystok & Craik, 2010). Therefore, foreign language instruction should facilitate learning while allowing for student autonomy.

Ramírez Gómez (2016a) noted that, while CFLG's ideas are similar to Formosa's, foreign language education must be critically examined to address the social and psychological issues older learners face. The application of CFLG has the potential to "enhance the overall self-perception of older learners and empower them to engage in diverse activities and assume new roles in society," thereby fostering an age-friendly community that promotes learning in later life stages (Ramírez Gómez, 2016a, p. 142).

In order to investigate the implications of her proposal, Ramírez Gómez studied adults between ages 60 and 80 (mean age = 68.02) learning Spanish in Japan. The study explored vocabulary learning strategies, a crucial issue according to CFLG vocabulary learning stances, since memorizing and forgetting may influence the general language learning process and experience (Ramírez Gómez, 2016b). The researcher emphasized learner re-training among older adults, highlighting the necessity for reassessing various aspects of the learning process, including perceptions, attitudes toward foreign language learning, learning strategies, and needs (Ramírez Gómez, 2016b). She further suggested that a subject-based approach using historical/social themes and foreign language as a mediation tool was more likely to engage learners (Ramírez Gómez, 2016b). Finally, CFLG should empower senior citizens to engage actively in society and to bring about meaningful life changes.

Foreign language teaching differs by lesson-subject. Some approaches incorporate task-based activities, such as giving directions or making purchases; others focus on content-based activities like discussing a celebrity (Ramírez Gómez, 2016b). A critical approach to *foreign language geragogy* largely consists of content-based activities centered on subjects relevant to the experiences of older adults; however, it may include other types of activities. It is important to guide learners to recognize and debate pertinent concerns and preconceived notions at various levels of competency. Consequently, CFLG should promote and support older learners in taking control of their learning process and utilizing effective strategies (Ramírez Gómez, 2016b).

To conclude, *critical geragogy* ultimately led to the establishment of *critical foreign language geragogy*, which emphasizes foreign language instruction that is adaptable to students of an advanced age. CFLG aims to challenge and transform limitations, encourage an optimistic perspective on student potential, and offer an

empowering environment. It advocates inclusive, critical, and autonomous education, correcting misconceptions and equipping older learners with tools for self-direction. Finally, CFLG seeks to engage older adults and transform their surroundings, aligning with Formosa's principles while requiring a distinct approach for certain aspects of FL education. The implementation of CFLG is thus a means to improve the self-perception of older learners, empowering them for societal engagement and contributing to the creation of an age-friendly community.

Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that adult education is a highly diverse field with little consensus on its precise definition. According to Formosa (2011), what's more important than categorizing pedagogy, andragogy, and geragogy strictly as methods of learning for children, adults, and older individuals, is to view them as interconnected and overlapping domains. They represent a collection of assumptions and principles concerning human learning across various stages of the life course.

1.4.3. Foreign language geragogy

This section presents research results in the field of foreign language geragogy. However, because this dissertation focuses on the Polish context, both global and Polish perspectives will be discussed separately in sections 1.4.3.1 and 1.4.3.2, respectively. As there have been more studies conducted in other countries, the first section presents them.

1.4.3.1. Existing research areas – state of the art

Pervasive pessimism and ageist discrimination mark the study of language learning among older adults as a relatively new phenomenon (Ramirez-Gomez, 2016b). Widely acknowledged theories like the Critical Period Hypothesis and broader discussions on cognitive aging limitations entrench this pessimism (see, e.g., Lenneberg, 1967; Krashen, 1981).²¹ The lack of research in the field of language learning for older adults worsens the difficulties of challenging these assumptions. What is more, the belief that older adults are slower and less proficient at acquiring languages

²¹ The Critical Period Hypothesis proposed that there is a specific timeframe, from birth through puberty, when the human brain is highly flexible, allowing for the acquisition of a second language in a manner similar to acquiring a first language. If circumstances are favorable, a 12 to 13 year-old can attain proficiency in a second language comparable to that of a native speaker (Krashen, 1981).

compared to younger individuals has been prevalent (Penfield & Roberts, 1959; Lenneberg, 1967; Krashen, 1981). The greatest third-agers' difficulties—adapting to a new phonological system, assimilating syntactic rules, and memorizing words—are also confirmed (Singleton & Ryan, 2004; Muñoz, 2006).

In the last five decades, later-life learning research has progressed (Formosa, 2023). Since the 1980s, it has explored the beneficial effects of educational programs on overall well-being and the quality of life for older adults. Additionally, these studies have shed light on the political implications of social class, gender, ethnicity, age discrimination, and western biases for older learners. Some studies drew attention to the problem of ageism and how ageist stereotypes affect both society's perception of older adults and older adults themselves (Formosa, 2023, p. 92). Studies focusing on various aspects of later-life learning and teaching will be discussed below in three groups: cognitive, psychosocial, and methodological. While we are aware that these are varying areas of investigation, they were placed into the above groups to illustrate the main trends in foreign language geragogy research.

Cognitive effects on later life language learning and later-life bilingualism

Studies on lifelong multilingualism have largely focused on its cognitive effects. Specifically, they explored how these effects emerge in later-life language learning. The research departed from the idea that the cognitive benefits of later-life language acquisition might mirror those of lifelong multilingual experiences.

The literature has redefined “bilingualism” to encompass more than two options, acknowledging that each group possesses varying proficiency in two or more languages (Nickels et al., 2019). Bilinguals can be classified by the age at which second language acquisition (SLA) occurs, distinguishing between early and late bilinguals. Additionally, the timing of SLA differentiates simultaneous from sequential bilinguals. Other classifications include L2 proficiency and the frequency of L2 use, which distinguishes active from latent bilinguals. Bilingualism itself can arise spontaneously or through formal instruction (Stein et al., 2014). Furthermore, bilingual individuals may have an advantage over monolinguals in acquiring a second language (Paap, Johnson, & Sawi, 2015). Notably, bilingual adult learners engage a broader brain network than what is

typically involved in other cognitive activities, which contributes to enhanced brain plasticity (Calvo, 2016). Bilingual language learners' ability to manage and utilize two languages may suggest the possession of an enhanced inhibitory control mechanism that helps regulate and direct their attention when performing tasks (Pot, Keijzer, & de Bot, 2018). Evidence suggests that lifelong bilingualism affects cognitive performance, particularly working memory capacity (Yang, 2017). This competence includes monitoring and updating working memory, switching activities, and inhibiting dominant responses. Learning training was found to be stimulating working memory in language course participants, thus improving their cognitive functions (Bialystok et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2019). Researchers have also investigated whether language training can slow cognitive deterioration in the older adults. The trial examined how a three-month intensive language course improved cognitive functions in 66 older Dutch adults such that the onset of age-related diseases, including depression, was delayed.

It is crucial to point out that bilingualism has a beneficial effect on the brain's ability to adapt its structure, known as neuroplasticity (e.g., Cox, 2017). Antoniou et al. (2013) proposed that foreign language learning could be an advantageous measure of healthy cognitive functioning in older individuals, perhaps approximating effects that have been attested in lifelong multilingualism. Foreign language training that entails mentally demanding tasks should thus be seen as a form of cognitive therapy that enhances brain plasticity (e.g., Cabeza, 2002). This claim is supported by two independent experiments (Bağ, 2014). The first, conducted on a sample of 853 participants, demonstrated the positive impact of bilingualism, especially on the overall intelligence and reading abilities of older individuals, as well as their cognitive functions (Bağ et al., 2014, p. 962). The second study, conducted on a smaller sampling of 67 participants aged 18–78, showed that even a week-long intensive language course can improve the concentration and attention span of older individuals (2016, p. 8). Additionally, research has shown that bilingual individuals may possess a cognitive advantage compared to monolinguals when it comes to second language acquisition (e.g., Pfenninger & Polz, 2018, studied twelve older German-speaking adults, half of whom were German-Slovene bilinguals, in a longitudinal pilot study). Non-parametric statistical tests and qualitative assessments show that learning a new language in later

life can promote healthy and active aging. Specifically, it positively affects executive function, linguistic self-confidence, autonomy, communicative skills, and overall well-being (Pfenninger & Polz, 2018). Being bilingual in adult second language learning utilizes a wider brain network than other cognitive training, which promotes brain plasticity (Calvo, 2016).

Knowing more than one language may delay dementia symptoms and later-life depression (LLD) (Bağ, 2014, 2016; Woumans, 2015; Bialystok, Craik & Freedman, 2007; Broewer et al., 2020). Researchers discovered that older adults who spoke two languages had dementia symptoms more than four years later than those who spoke only one (bilingual research participants have used at least two languages frequently since early adulthood) (Bialystok, 2007). Some studies (Broewer et al., 2020; Kurdziel, 2017) claimed that Alzheimer's disease and later-life depression have similar underpinnings, and that both may be linked to cognitive reserve. Effectively improving or correcting cognitive impairment in LLD could delay or prevent additional cognitive loss, and studying a foreign language at an advanced age can prevent depression and cognitive decline (Kurdziel, 2017, p. 11).

Language training can also assist in healthy aging, as acquiring and using a foreign language is intrinsically social, particularly when undertaken in a classroom environment (Duay & Bryan, 2008). Classroom language instruction may offer the additional benefit of addressing the prevalent issues of loneliness and limited social networks experienced by LLD patients (Chang et al., 2016; Hays et al., 1998). Finally, bilingualism in late adulthood can aid in acquiring another foreign language (Kliesch et al., 2017, p. 66). Research on ten native German speakers aged 65–74, who participated in a three-week English language course, demonstrated that the age at which we begin learning is not always the determining factor for success (Kliesch et al., 2017). Other researchers concurred, asserting that individual differences among course participants and exposure to the language beyond the course hold greater significance (Keijzer et al., 2019).

Psychosocial effects of third-age language learning

Increasingly, scholars and educators recognize the intricate connection between late life language learning and such psychological conditions as well-being, quality of life, and motivation. As individuals embark on the journey of acquiring new languages in their late adulthood, the potential impacts on mental and emotional well-being become apparent. Exploring the dynamic relationship between language acquisition and psychological factors unveils the potential for enhancing not only cognitive abilities, but also the overall quality of life of older adults (Pfenninger & Polz, 2018, p. 11). The longitudinal study, which involved twelve bilingual participants aged 63–90 (Pfenninger & Polz, 2018), found that learning a language in old age can slow the brain's aging processes and positively impact the self-confidence of older individuals in language usage, not to mention their overall well-being.

There is substantial research on what drives individuals in the third stage of life to acquire foreign language skills. One intriguing study employed semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to understand motivation among six Chinese students (aged 55 to 75, mean age: 65) learning English (Chen, 2022). The research, which took into account the perspectives of teachers and students, revealed that both groups had strong intrinsic motivation and similar objectives: tourism-oriented English, which helped to sustain incentive and promote learning performance.

The motives and strategies of older adults learning English as a foreign language (Garcia, 2017) were the subjects of a study involving twenty-five older participants, 60 to 81 years old (mean age: 68.9; two men and twenty-three women from Brazil). It employed three data collection tools: 1) a placement test, 2) a background questionnaire, and 3) a translated version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford (1990). The results identified eleven learning strategies, most qualifying as metacognitive strategies. Findings also indicated that learning English, traveling, and socializing were motivational factors for this demographic. In another study, 64 healthy volunteers, aged 61 to 79 (mean age: 70), completed the LLAMA (Language Learning and Aptitude Measurement in Adults) and a probabilistic serial reaction time (SRT) task in order to evaluate the applicability of current aptitude measures for older adults, determine the relationship between aptitude

for explicit and implicit learning in such a population, and to investigate the role of other individual difference variables (Roehr-Brackin, Loaiza & Pavlekovic, 2023). The authors looked at the relationship between participants' performance on the aptitude tests and their age, occupation, degree of multilingualism, self-perception, emotional state, and leisure activities. Participants found the LLAMA and SRT challenging, but the empirical outcome confirmed the hypothesized differentiation between implicit and explicit aptitude. When compared to participants who were still employed, retired individuals performed worse on implicit aptitude tests. Age affected performance on the explicit aptitude measures, but level of multilingualism and a positive self-conception regarding memory and cognition correlated with performance on the implicit aptitude measures.

Learning a foreign language can aid in sustaining and developing social interactions, which may be an important aspect for older adults who often feel lonely after retirement. Studies have shown that, for older individuals, the main motivators for learning foreign languages are elements of fun and competition, new challenges, socialization, and escaping daily routines (Diaz-Orueta, 2012). It was also observed that participating in various forms of education throughout one's lifetime can improve sense of belonging to a particular community, thereby enhancing overall well-being (Narushima, 2018). Researchers conducted questionnaire-based studies on a sample of 416 Canadians over 60, noting that participating in various forms of activation helps older individuals develop a sense of belonging and to focus on others' lives, rather than on their own deteriorating health.

The experiences of (self)-ageism among older adults were also explored to see to what extent it can be a barrier to learning new skills such as a language (van Kampen et al., 2022). Using semi-structured interviews with ten third-agers (65–77), the researchers discovered that older adults tend to experience little or no (self)-ageism; they did not perceive of themselves as old, and the societal view did not hinder their learning new skills.

In sum, both the cognitive and psychosocial effects of later life language learning are crucial, and should be investigated further in no small part because the current research is so optimistic about how late life language learning enhances

cognitive functions like memory and attention, improves social engagement and emotional well-being, and, overall, contributes to life satisfaction and healthy aging.

Methodological considerations in later life language learning

In order to fully realize the potential in the cognitive and psychosocial health domain of third-age language learning, we need a research overview that stresses the methodological dimension. This includes factors that enhance the effectiveness of language acquisition in older age, and verifies which techniques work best with third-agers. This would allow for the creation of educational materials that meet the expectations and capabilities of third-age learners, thus adapting the language instructors' workshop to the specifics of working with individuals aged 60 and above. This is essential since older adults are an increasingly large group learning foreign languages, and there are no materials or methodological models that account for their needs (Ramirez Gómez, 2016a). Empirical studies of older adult teaching methodology are also limited.

The first such study investigated requests for assistance in an older adult (65+, mean age: 66.1) language classroom in the Netherlands, where seven individuals at the B1 level of English participated in a month-long English course (van Der Ploeg et al., 2022). The results, interpreted by conversation analysis, showed that requests for assistance identified in the data could be categorized into three groups: 1) production-oriented, referring to issues that arise during the creation of a spoken statement that must be answered to ensure the smooth progression of the task; 2) comprehension-oriented, pertaining to requests for help when the problem is not caused by the speaker asking the question, but rather arises from a previous interaction or statement made by another speaker (this is different from production-oriented questions, where the problem arises in the speaker's own utterance); 3) wonderment questions, in which an answer is not necessary for the progression of the activity. The prevalence of wonderment questions was an interesting observation, as the authors noted that these questions typically target the teacher, who then provides the necessary response.

Another study investigated participants' successful and/or failed learning experiences because, the authors claimed, older adults themselves may provide crucial

insight into what supports and impedes their learning (Duay & Bryan, 2008). The qualitative study examined the perspectives of 36 participants (26 women and 10 men) ranging in age from 65 to 88 (mean: 76.5). The data revealed three essential elements for effective learning: 1) engaging experiences; 2) the role of the teacher in the classroom; and 3) interesting, familiar subjects. Critical factors when creating and delivering online language education programs for older adults were also investigated (van der Ploeg & Blankship, 2022) with data from 73 third-age language learners in Scotland and the Netherlands. The findings, which were consistent with existing literature in the field (Djoub, 2013; Ware et al., 2017), indicated that an online language course for older adults could be enjoyable and feasible. The reflexive thematic analysis confirmed Djoub's recommendations that courses should employ basic programs that do not require quick processing.

Conclusions

Research on how foreign language learning in older age affects cognitive brain function is a global growth industry, involving specialists from countries including Canada (Narushima), the United Kingdom (Roehr-Brackin, Loaiza & Pavlekovic, 2023), France, the Czech Republic (Klimova), China (Chen), Brazil (Monticelli Garcia), and the Netherlands (van der Ploeg). Their overlapping results have inspired much optimism. The majority of experiments clearly indicate that bilingualism can reduce symptoms of later-life dementia by several years for third-agers without adverse health issues, and that memory training with language education can support the overall functioning of older adults in society. Researchers also observed an increasing interest in language courses among older adults, which presents a challenge for foreign language teaching strategies in terms of the methods and appropriate tools/teaching aids used for older adult learners. Some researchers also emphasized that the issue of aging and, most importantly, successful aging, requires an interdisciplinary approach (Keijzer et al., 2020). Therefore, at the current stage of research, fields such as gerontology, andragogy, geragogy and foreign language teaching focused on older adults intertwine.

Despite years of research in foreign language geragogy, there is a dearth of studies on the teacher's perspective and role, not to mention the need for training

instructors to work with a growing group of older adults. Furthermore, it is crucial for the research to consider stereotypical perceptions of third-agers (i.e., cultural context) and their past experiences (dependent, for example, on the linguistic education policy of the country in question) with learning foreign languages. Most older adults who learned a foreign language in their youth were taught with different methods than those used today—a natural result of the development and reform of language teaching methods. This could affect their perception of the effectiveness of language learning and the pleasure derived from it, all of which should be weighed in doing research and designing courses for older adults.

1.4.3.2. Foreign language geragogy in Poland

Regarding the Polish context for teaching and learning a foreign language in late adulthood, Jaroszewska (2011) introduced the term *glottogeragogika* (foreign language geragogy). In this respect, there are two dimensions of foreign language education: scientific interpretation, which pertains to the technique of teaching foreign languages; and practical interpretation, which concerns the implementation of these discoveries (Wilczyńska & Michońska-Stadnik, 2010, p. 42–46). While *glottodidactics* is mainly used in Polish and Greek educational contexts (in Greek, *glotta* means language, and *didascein* means teaching), English-speaking countries typically use the term *foreign language teaching methodology* (Róg, 2014). Similarly, *geragogy* (see Section 1.4.2.) encompasses the preparation for aging, learning in later stages of life, intergenerational education, and the education of individuals who will interact with older people in their professional roles (Szarota, 2014).

In Poland, a pioneer in the development of *geragogy* is Ewa Skibińska. She delineated the components of the learning journey for older adults, including defining objectives, selecting educational materials, employing teaching methods, determining instructional formats and resources, orchestrating and implementing the teaching process with an older individual, reinforcing learning outcomes, and upholding didactic principles (Skibińska, 2007). Numerous organizations, such as Universities of the Third Age (UTA), are actively engaged in researching and promoting geragogy (Zych, 2017, p. 528–529).

Foreign language teaching and geragogy have several similarities, including the aims of the teaching/learning process, its motivation, and foreign language teachers (Jaroszewska, 2013b). Furthermore, the two disciplines have established the groundwork for Polish *foreign language geragogy*, also known as *glottogeragogika*. *Foreign language geragogy* represents a sub-discipline that, in its theoretical and practical dimensions, strives to integrate existing knowledge and experiences about teaching/learning foreign languages acquired through research with the findings established in geragogy, specializing in the education of older adults (Jaroszewska, 2013b, 2018). Fusing these disciplines was an effort to address questions about foreign language education in old age, including its essence, optimal conditions, teacher competencies, effective methods, and suitable teaching materials for third-agers. This interdisciplinary approach sought to fill an unexplored research niche, essential in the context of contemporary socio-cultural transformations. The formal definition of foreign language geragogy was introduced quite recently by Zych (2017, p. 573–575). *Foreign language geragogy* endeavors to conduct research, provide descriptions, and offer explanations to formulate theories related to learning and teaching. Its objective is to discover and/or endorse approaches, methodologies, and strategies for instructing foreign languages that can be confirmed and applied in educational settings (Jaroszewska, 2011, 2013a).

The first studies on foreign language geragogy in Poland were published at the beginning of the twentieth century (Grotek, 2003). Yet a significant increase in interest in this issue was not observed until the early twenty-first century (Gębal 2019). Building on the conclusions drawn from the worldwide research on cognitive aspects of third-age language learning, Polish studies mostly focused on psycho-social aspects, the needs and abilities of older adults as learners, the role of the teacher, and other factors influencing the efficacy of teaching foreign languages to this age group. The main topics were teaching and learning foreign languages in late adulthood, characteristic features of older adults as learners, the role of Universities of the Third Age in Poland, the methodology of conducting research among older learners, and the future of foreign language geragogy (Jaroszewska, 2010, 2011, 2013a, 2013b). The expectations and needs of older adult language learners were also explored (on the basis of German) via

course books and other teaching materials available for this age group (Kic-Drgas, 2013). Researchers advised popularizing foreign language education among third-agers and enhancing its effectiveness by adapting educational materials to the needs and abilities of older individuals. This line of research was continued, among other ways, through the analysis of textbooks (for teaching Polish as a foreign language) used for older adults (Janowska & Fiema, 2017). In general, researchers advocated creating new instructional materials to support later-life foreign language learning, thus making it more effective and enjoyable (Janowska & Fiema, 2017).

Researchers are also exploring the needs and abilities of older adults in the context of foreign language learning. Słowik-Krogulec (2017, 2019, 2021), for example, studied their motivation and aspects of teaching them listening skills, which can be quite challenging for older learners. Among the most significant findings are, first, that older persons learn languages in order to communicate while traveling and with relatives living abroad, to socialize and learn about other cultures, and to retain cognitive capacities and intellectual development. Second, the instructor and classmates motivate older adults. Finally, aging and foreign language education prejudices must be overcome in order to create engaging language programs for this age group (Słowik-Krogulec, 2020). The author further suggested that teachers, teaching materials, and classroom atmosphere affect older adults' language learning efficiency (Słowik-Krogulec, 2019). One study revealed the following motives: to communicate in a foreign language, to participate in Anglophone culture, forge contacts with other older adults, and to exchange experiences via a new language (Grotek & Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2014). The study, which entailed a survey and interviews with 54 participants (aged 50–59) at the University of Warsaw Open University, showed that individuals in late adulthood often enroll in language courses to remain active, excepting the stressful tests and evaluations (Klimczak-Pawlak & Kossakowska-Pisarek, 2018). The studies by Borkowska (2022, 2024) shed light on the readiness of older individuals to speak English in the classroom. They also established a correspondence between this readiness, intrinsic motivation, the classroom atmosphere, and the teacher's proximity.

Derenowski (2018), Grotek (2018), Nizegorodcew (2018), and Słowik-Krogulec (2021) researched teachers and their role in the learning process. The authors

investigated pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English to older adults, as well the preferences of University of Third Age English course participants regarding foreign language teachers.

Researchers also looked into how affective factors influenced language learning among older adults (50+). One study of 87 participants in UTA courses found that older learners willingly share both positive and negative emotions. While problems with declining memory or language errors were a source of anxiety, participants tried to focus on the positive aspects of learning (Grotek & Kiljańska-Przybyło, 2012). In another study of the difficulties of learning foreign languages in the third-age group, Walczak (2015) highlighted the many obstacles older adults encounter. She categorized these into internal factors typical of old age (physiological and psychological) and external factors. The latter includes the absence of adapted programs and materials, as well as the teacher's ignorance regarding how to work with this age group. Her view was supported by Matusz & Rakowska (2019), who aimed to identify the challenges faced by students enrolled in English language courses at Polish third-age universities. The research questionnaire distributed to the seventy English students in their third grade year indicated that they primarily raised issues about their age, health, and overall attitudes toward learning a foreign language.

The strategies used by older adults were also investigated. The studies showed that older persons studying English as a foreign language at a Universities of the Third Age used indirect metacognitive, affective, and social strategies (Pawlak, Derenowski, & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2017). Results suggested pedagogical issues for teaching a foreign language to this age group. An open-ended questionnaire on metacognitive, affective, and social strategies found that participants were driven to learn English, treated the learning experience as a way to offset old age, understood planning as revising material, were afflicted by (mostly) negative emotions, lacked autonomy, and were overly reliant on their teacher. Another study of four third-agers learning a foreign language (Piechurska-Kuciel & Szyszka, 2018) emphasized how compensatory strategies helped seniors. Dörnyei and Scott's taxonomy was implemented to examine the communication strategies used by older persons studying German (Posiadała, 2017).

Another research field in Poland explored the development of teaching strategies and materials for foreign language education tailored to older adults. The planning of educational activities, goal setting, methods, content, knowledge acquisition, and assessment were investigated, and guidelines for working with older adults was proposed (Kilian, 2015). An analysis of the challenges of modern foreign language pedagogy concluded that its task is to create foreign language learning programs, textbooks, and teaching aids geared toward the requirements and preferences of older adults (Piechota, 2020). Some helpful strategies for enhancing adult memory performance were also investigated—via a survey among Italian teachers who worked with older adults (Ciszewska, 2014)—in order to propose optimally efficient exercises for this age group. Finally, a Polish study on teaching older adults in a heterogeneous group alongside younger adults (Chabros, 2019) described the problems encountered by older learners, shared reflections on their motivation, and proposed ideas for supporting foreign language learning in late adulthood.

To conclude, over the years 2013–2022, studies in the Polish context explored the needs and possibilities of third-agers regarding foreign language learning, as well as factors influencing the effectiveness of teaching foreign languages to this age group. Polish glottopedagogy, compared to global glottopedagogy, is still in its early stages of development, requiring intensified research efforts. Still, one can conclude that aging is associated with various economic, social, medical, and cultural factors, and that it is essential to support the independent living of older individuals, encourage them to re-engage in active social roles, and to promote their personal development. According to Halicki (2006), aging is both an individual and social process, thus requiring an interdisciplinary approach. Keijzer et al., (2020) agree, stressing the need to study various aspects of aging collectively. Examining cognition, competency, language learning requirements, and overall well-being will provide a more comprehensive understanding of language acquisition in older adults.

Chapter Two: Lifelong language learning in a positive aging perspective

Chapter two discusses lifelong learning in a European context, with a particular focus on Polish conditions. This approach is necessary because the European perspective is often crucial for understanding the Polish perspective, helping to better comprehend the phenomena presented. Therefore, these two perspectives frequently intersect. However, when it is not substantively necessary, specific topics are presented solely in relation to Polish realities (e.g., the status of Polish older adults).

As explained in the first chapter, the lifelong learning approach is an important element of the positive aging movement. The detailed discussion focuses first on the socio-economic status of Polish older adults, stereotypes in Polish society regarding older adults, as well as potential ageism attitudes toward this age group. The concept of lifelong learning and the effective use of foreign language learning as a strategy for successful aging is discussed as well. Next we examine, by means of a literature review, the correlation between the well-being of older individuals and their learning of a foreign language. Finally, characteristic features of Polish older adults as learners are presented, including their needs, motivations, and expectations regarding third-age foreign language education. While some tentative evidence suggests what these needs are in a broad context (see, e.g., Duay and Bryan, 2008), the majority of this work has been done in the realm of West European or North American populations. To our knowledge, this is the first study to focus on the Polish aging context.

2.1. Socioeconomic status of Polish older adults

The demographic shift toward an older population in European societies is a consequence of the progressive rise in life expectancy and the simultaneous decline in birth rates that started in the 1970s and has continued since (see Section 1.1.). Poland has been identified as a country where the demographic effects of this shift are particularly noticeable. According to a report by the Main Statistical Office,²² by the end of 2022, the Polish population had reached 37.8 million, with over 9.8 million

²² This situational information on older persons in Poland takes the year 2022 as its reference point. The entire report is called: "The situation of older people in Poland in 2022", Białystok, 2023.

individuals aged 60 and above, making up 25.9% of the total population. Almost a third of older adults appeared to live in cities. Women made up the majority of the older population, accounting for 58.1% in 2022. This seems to be the direct consequence of life expectancy: male neonates in Poland had an average life expectancy of 73.4 years in 2022, whereas females had an average life expectancy of 81.1 years. In 2022, married individuals made up the vast majority of older Polish adults. Population projections for the years 2014–2050 suggest that the aging process will only intensify, with a forecasted steady rise in the population aged 60 and older. By 2050, it is anticipated that the size of this demographic will reach 13.7 million in Poland, accounting for more than 40% of the entire population.²³

Based on the 2022 Household Budget Survey,²⁴ households consisting solely of older adults had an average monthly disposable income per person of 2,622.69 PLN (around 610 euros), which was 16.1% greater compared to homes with members under age 60. In 2022, pensions or benefits will be the main source of income for households consisting solely of older citizens, making up 80.2% of their total income. Wage labor contributed to 10.4% of total revenue, while self-employment in non-agricultural activities accounted for 2.7%. The income and expenditure situation exhibits substantial disparities depending on the household's geographical location, with urban households demonstrating higher levels of income and expenditures compared to their rural counterparts. Households only consisting of senior citizens were less likely to perceive their material condition as good (38.7% compared to 57.4% for households without older adults) and a higher frequency perceived it as average (52.9% compared to 38.1%) or terrible (8.4% compared to 4.5%). Among older individuals who live alone, particularly in remote regions, 17% expressed dissatisfaction with their financial circumstances, viewing them as either fairly poor or poor.

The BAEL survey²⁵ reported that, in 2022, 1,459,000 people between the ages of 60 and 89 were actively participating in economic activities. Out of the total number of respondents, 1,438,000 were employed, accounting for 98.6%. The proportion of individuals in the working-age senior population, which included those between the

²³ Based on: GUS, Population Forecast for the years 2014–2050, Warsaw 2014, p. 125.

²⁴ Household Budget Survey included data about Polish citizens from the report: “The European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions” (EU-SILC).

²⁵ BAEL – the Polish equivalent of the European survey on the labour force: Labour Force Survey.

ages of 15 and 89, was 8.5% of the total working-age population. Similarly, within this working-age senior population, the percentage of employed people was 8.6%. Men made up the majority of the working-age senior category, comprising 979,000 individuals, or 67.1% of the total. The economic activity rate for people between the ages of 60 and 89 was 15.7% in 2022, while the employment rate stood at 15.5%.

The socioeconomic status of older adults in Poland may significantly influence their quality of life, access to healthcare, and overall well-being. However, in addition to economic factors, societal perceptions and attitudes play critical roles. Stereotypes and ageist attitudes prevalent in society further complicate the challenges faced by older adults, often impacting their social inclusion and mental health.

2.2. Stereotyping and marginalization of older adults

Older individuals, similar to individuals of any other age group, are a heterogeneous population that should not be judged based on preconceptions. Paradoxically, despite scientific progress, the prevalence of preconceptions about older adults remains unchanged (Grotek, 2018; Świdorska & Kapszewicz, 2015). This phenomenon can be attributed to the prevailing values of modern society, which place excessive importance on the qualities of young, talented, and innovative individuals who prioritize their own objectives (referred to as the cult of youth and individualism) (Kołodziej, 2006). Youth is highly valued in Western countries due to its energy, physical and psychological well-being, and high activity level, which leads to success and financial prosperity (Kołodziej, 2006). A popular stereotype of an aged person contradicts this picture and presents older adults as connected by frailty, sorrow, and mortality (Tomaszewska-Hołub, 2019).

The definitions of stereotypes vary. A stereotype is widely understood as a rigid mental representation that is simplistic, biased, and often unyielding to modification (Tomaszewska-Hołub, 2019). What is more, typical preconceptions about older adults include their inability to learn new things, reluctance to accept aging changes, intolerance and strictness, feelings of loneliness and isolation, and memory issues (Escuder-Mollon et al., 2014). However, these stereotypes can be overcome through proper education (Escuder-Mollon et al., 2014). Stereotyping may also entail viewing

an individual as representative of a particular group and assigning characteristics to him/her that are associated with that category (Nelson, 2009). It results from a cognitive process in which individuals tend to form and generalize specific beliefs, typically based on a single attribute (Nelson, 2009).

Presently, despite the fact that the senior population in Poland is diverse in terms of age, health, physical and mental abilities, and economic circumstances, it is often seen as homogeneous (Grotek, 2018). Consequently, stereotyping fails to acknowledge the (growing) diversity among older individuals, creating a uniform and ultimately false perception in which seniors are seen as alike, average, and lacking uniqueness, even though, as Szukalski (2012) argued, there is no greater variation in any life stage as in old age. Additionally, the media frequently perpetuate stereotypes about third-agers (Palska, 2004). Until recently, older adults were almost absent from the media, including the press, radio, television, and the Internet. Currently, when they are present on TV, they are portrayed in stereotypical fashion. Consequently, when the media address older adults, they typically focus on their personal challenges and hardships, as well as the societal problems to which they may contribute. Older citizens are primarily depicted as reliant individuals facing adverse economic and health circumstances, grappling with familial issues, and frequently fragile, necessitating continuous aid and care (Palska, 2004). These days, the position of third-agers in Poland is heavily conditioned through the lens of stereotypes—most young people (irrespective of where they live in Poland) generally see older individuals via unfavorable stereotypes (Rybowska, 2017). Quite often, adolescents and young adults perceive an average person aged 60 and above as having a low socioeconomic status, being deficient in energy, solitary and avoiding social contact, uninterested in social activities, and marginalized (Trempała, 2014). Rybowska presents a number of characteristics that are often ascribed to the contemporary Polish third-age generation in the literature (2017, p. 279). These characteristics are displayed below:

CHARACTERISTICS	FEATURES
passive	they have worked all their lives; currently they need rest, relatively inactive
dependent on others	they need help from other people and institutions
isolated, not socially engaged	having retired, they withdraw from social engagements
weak people	slow, passive, and forgetful
vulnerable	poor, bashful people of modest means
lonely	distrustful, conservative, backward
ailing, ill	ill, needing medical help, clients of pharmacies
discouraged	people find them sympathetic, waiting for death, hypochondriacs

Table 2. Stereotypes about older adults in Poland

Source: Rybowska 2017, p. 239 (my own translation)

On the other hand, in Polish society, there are assumptions that convey a perception of old age that remain dominant (Makara-Studzińska & Kryś-Noszczyk, 2012). These assumptions are expressed through the obligations and duties one has to one's family. It is important to note, however, that this picture of older adults, despite being favorable, may portray them primarily as those who are responsible for cooking and caring for their grandchildren (Szukalski, 2006). As a result, this image would be considered positive in the eyes of younger generations. Retirement is the moment when Polish seniors who have children find themselves in a position to provide financial assistance to their children and grandchildren, with whom they wish to maintain a strong connection (Kubicki & Olcoń-Kubicka, 2010). Investing time to meet the requirements of younger generations and providing financial assistance to them may be good for seniors because of the chance to bond with family; however, it prevents them from engaging in activities that could contribute to their positive aging. What is more, research by the Central Statistical Office shows that Polish women devote substantial time to caregiving responsibilities, including raising grandchildren and caring for aging parents (Adamczyk, 2017). A survey conducted by the Central Statistical Office (GUS,

2012) of the extent and categories of unpaid labor suggested that women, on average, allocated 46 hours per month to these tasks, almost double the amount contributed by men in the same age group.

Undoubtedly, pervasive and detrimental prejudices about old age have a significant impact on multiple aspects of an individual's social life, including that of third-agers. Furthermore, they can serve as a catalyst for age discrimination. Palmore's (2009) research confirmed that ageism arises when there is prejudice and distorted stereotyping towards a specific group of people. *Ageism*, the term introduced by Butler (1980), is most commonly defined as one of the forms of discrimination that involves treating a person unfairly based on age. What is more, ageism is defined as stereotypes, prejudices, or discrimination against (but also in favor of) people because of their chronological age (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018, p. 1).

In addition to the stereotyping of old age, major factors influencing the emergence of ageism include gerontophobia (the fear of old people, including the fear of death) and changes in family structure, leading to a weakening of emotional bonds and an increase in intergenerational distance, itself resulting in growing cognitive separation between generations (Tomaszewska-Hołub, 2019). Such harmful associations may have a negative impact on older adults' well-being. A study conducted by Nowakowska (2017) confirmed lower self-effectiveness, self-perception, and self-confidence among older individuals who experienced ageism. Additionally, when surrounded by ageist stereotypes, older adults may start believing such prejudices themselves, which is referred to as self-ageism (van Kampen et al., 2023).

Elderly marginalization refers to the condition or situation in which individuals or groups are excluded or not actively involved in the established social order or institutions (Kwaśniewski, 1997, 197–198). It manifests itself in individuals' attitudes, beliefs, evaluation of life circumstances, opportunities, and potential for engagement in social activities. Frequently, older adults face the denial of their rights, which hampers their capacity to execute and stand up for their social rights, and imposes limitations on the social tasks they fulfill. Social marginalization can be caused by factors such as poverty, inadequate self-organization, economic challenges like low pensions, socio-cultural conditions, limited social activity, restricted access to information, low social

status of older adults, negative stereotypes about old age, and insufficient preparation for this stage of life (Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2005).

Third-age marginalization is a slow and ongoing process. It begins by discontinuing social roles and cutting off connections with individuals, resulting in the restricted availability of goods and services, as well as educational, social, and cultural establishments (Rudnik, 2017). Over time, this process also leads to the absence of older individuals in certain social groups. Occasionally, these older individuals exacerbate their circumstances by adopting a passive attitude, displaying apathy, downplaying their requirements, relinquishing their efforts to advocate for their rights, and failing to keep up with swiftly evolving societal transformations. Extended marginalization results in a state of being marginalized, which is synonymous with exclusion (Rudnik, 2017). Marginality refers to the disadvantaged social status of individuals, whereas marginalization is the process that results from such a disadvantageous situation (Rudnik, 2017). Social marginality is a state where an individual has limited involvement in a particular social structure and faces restricted entry to fundamental institutions such as the job market, consumption market, and judicial systems (Szarfenberg, 2006; Nowak, 2012). This condition also entails being excluded, e.g., from the educational system (Frieske, 1999).

Age is the most commonly cited factor connected with the marginalization of older adults by some researchers. This treatment may be based on their age itself and the unique characteristics that emerge during this stage of life (Szukalski, 2009; Szatur-Jaworska, 2005; Halicki, 1997). An examination of the obstacles faced by older adults reveals that marginalization is influenced by many concurrent causes and conditions, including declining health, disability, limited education, social isolation, and inadequate financial means (Pikuła, 2015). The prevailing unfavorable stereotype associated with old age and older people holds considerable importance in the collective awareness of society. Within the realm of societal consciousness, the phase of old age is often regarded as unproductive and superfluous, with older adults seen as passive, hypersensitive, demanding, and lacking interest in any topic (Rudnik, 2017).

As societies age, it is crucial to establish a positive perception of old age that is rooted in understanding the physical and mental changes that occur throughout this

phase of life (Straś-Romanowska, 2011). This is essential for preserving the dignity of older individuals: not only can it help to debunk detrimental and insufficient misconceptions about them, but also to alleviate apprehension about the inherent process of aging and one's own personal aging journey (Straś-Romanowska, 2011). As fear and prejudices resulting from lack of knowledge increase, stereotypes are likely to become the primary sources of information and the deciding factors in people's behavior. Hence, it is vital to invest effort in altering deeply rooted yet false convictions, employing precise understanding of the aging process.

2.3. Education in late adulthood

Presently, with rapid changes occurring in all aspects of human life, education holds great importance: it promotes holistic growth, offers guidance in the dynamic social landscape, and enhances opportunities for achievement in several areas of life (Kojs & Urban-Kojs, 2010). During maturity, learning is no longer limited to formal education—instead, it is seen as the process of gaining information and abilities from various experiences and life circumstances (Kojs & Urban-Kojs, 2010). Adults typically acquire knowledge unintentionally, while carrying out their daily responsibilities and engaging in various life activities (Dubas, 2010). Changes and personal growth necessitate frequent adjustments and continuous improvement (Dziegielewska, 2008). As shown in Chapter 1, learning (including learning a foreign language) in later life may provide many benefits, like maintaining or improving cognitive functions, fostering contact with other older adults, or finding a new goal in life. What is more, in a fast-changing world, continuing education in later life is essential, and may also help older adults to adjust to changes connected with aging and finishing professional activities (that is, upon retirement). It is therefore vital to continue education into late adulthood, as it is an important component of healthy aging. Yet it is also crucial to do so in an age-appropriate way, so that all the related benefits can accompany later-life education.

2.3.1. Later-life education – determinants and chances

As seen in Chapter 1, the geriatric stage is characterized by numerous psychophysical changes that lead to a decrease in essential energy and capacities. Nevertheless, this does not indicate a return to a previous state or a lack of progress in life. Old age, while accompanied by unavoidable and indisputable deterioration, also offers opportunities for growth, the accumulation of information, and the cultivation of new abilities and expertise. Therefore, education is deemed essential by gerontologists since it not only mitigates negative changes, but also promotes the attainment of optimal psycho-physical well-being, eventually boosting the overall quality of the aging process (Kawińska, 2018).

The importance of educational activity lies in its ability to alleviate the challenges that arise throughout the older adult lifespan (Czerniawska, 1996; Trafiałek, 2000; Dzięgielewska, 2006, 2008; Stopińska-Pająk, 2009; Dubas, 2010). Later-life education provides older individuals with a chance to enhance their skills, stimulate their cognitive abilities, adapt to a dynamic social environment, and establish and maintain social connections. It facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and the formation of new social connections, leading to a fulfilling elderly life and continued participation in social events (Trafiałek, 2000). The period of older age offers opportunities for self-improvement, provided that individuals actively participate in certain activities and remain receptive to educational processes that foster holistic growth. It is reported that educational pursuits in late adulthood should prioritize the following: facilitating autonomy and flexibility, addressing and reducing societal biases and stereotypes towards aging and older individuals, promoting comprehensive individual growth through diverse endeavors, gaining additional expertise, honing professional abilities, promoting the involvement of older adults in activities that contribute to the well-being of others, fostering a sense of purpose and social validation, and enhancing the overall well-being of elderly individuals (Halicki, 2000). Moreover, later-life education, when delivered through formal and non-formal channels in institutions and workplaces that incorporate personal experiences, emotions, and daily living, enhances individuals' knowledge and facilitates deeper self-awareness (Białożył, 2017).

Despite increasing awareness of the aforementioned benefits, later-life education is still not free of stereotypes. Researchers have pointed out the following three stereotyped assumptions about the education of older individuals:

1) education is age-dependent; it should occur at a specific time and location, and learning is most effective when one is young;

2) students should possess the intellectual traits of young individuals, such as strong cognitive functions, good memory, and attentiveness;

3) student control of the learning process might be hard because of older adults' hearing, motor, or vision impairments (Hill, 2005).

Additionally, the education of older adults should not be equated with that of other age groups, as aging is a dynamic process of actively adjusting to a shifting world (Czerniawska, 2009). Consequently, knowledge acquisition in the latter stages of life typically lacks a formal and organized nature, instead taking the form of independent work by individual students (Dubas, 2009). Dzięgielewska (2008) thus proposed to call the education of older adults “everyday education,” due to its regular occurrence in such forms as travel, sports, self-help work, and other routine activities designed for older adults. These activities promote development in specific areas and facilitate the acquisition and enhancement of social skills. They also meet the needs of older individuals, foster a sense of purpose, encourage integration with different age groups, and offer an opportunity for the self-discovery and understanding of one's abilities and limitations. Educational activities are behaviors that facilitate self-acceptance, promote positive thinking, and, ultimately, enhance the quality of life for third-agers (Halicki, 2009, 211–212). Also, education in old age helps to acclimate older adults to contemporary culture (Pikuła, 2016).

When researching Polish seniors, it is vital to take into account their distinct educational experiences, which are deeply rooted in a socio-cultural reality that was significantly different from that of today. Specifically, the current Polish older adult generation was educated (beginning with elementary school and continuing through high school) in communist Poland (mostly in the 1960s and 1970s) (Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024a). Moreover, most Polish seniors were only exposed to one foreign language—mainly Russian, which was taught in the form of ideological

indoctrination (Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024a). As pupils, seniors were accustomed to the so-called teacher-administered model of the classroom, which was usually combined with the grammar-translation teaching method (Seretny, 2006). This model was tailored specifically for the style of language instruction prevalent in Poland from the 1960s to 1980s, placing the teacher, or “knowledge dispenser” (Villar et al., 2010, p. 963), at the center of the linguistic process. Teachers primarily focused their lessons on Soviet culture and related issues. Because of the students’ peripheral classroom roles, they were rather passive and did not take responsibility for their own language learning (Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024a). This contrasts with the teaching models commonly used in current language pedagogy, which typically place students at the center of the learning process, thus affording them the opportunity to participate actively in the lessons and to take responsibility for their own learning (Gębal 2019, p. 180).

The turn of the twenty-first century marked a significant educational shift, characterized by the emancipation of older adults through increased educational opportunities and a broader recognition of their potential beyond traditional roles (Piechota, 2020). This period saw a growing emphasis on lifelong learning and the establishment of institutions like Universities of the Third Age (UTAs), which cater to the educational and social needs of older adults. These changes highlight a transformative era, when the focus shifted from mere utility to enhancing the quality of life and promoting active aging through continuous education (Piechota, 2020). Polish sociologists believe that, in the twenty-first century, Polish older adults will finally become independent and emancipated; in the first place, they have a significantly more optimistic and engaged outlook on their generation than do younger generations (Piechota, 2020). The economic data demonstrates that the lifestyle of older Poles has shifted toward a larger degree of mobility and financial security (Rybowska, 2017). It has been observed that older adults in Poland are increasingly interested in enrolling in clubs, which are located in both urban and rural areas.²⁶ The Rural Housewives Clubs organize a wide range of classes and activities for third-agers. On the other hand, senior

²⁶ Data provided by the Polish Ministry of Family and Social Policy, as the governmental institution financing the creation of such facilities under the Senior+: <https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/mamy-ju-z-500-domow-i-klubow-senior>

citizens in urban areas typically opt for sports programs or leisure activities. Researchers found that language courses were the most popular classes offered to older adults; in 2020, about 3,300 later-life learners chose to take up a foreign language (GUS, 2022). The Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS, 2022) reported that there were also a significant number of older adult students who graduated from computer courses (2,600 in total).

In line with the figures above, as well as the growing interest in university classes catering to older adults, one may predict a change in the long-standing perception of older Polish citizens primarily caring for their grandchildren. This, in turn, may motivate further research in this field.

2.3.2. Positive education and well-being of older adults

The concept of Positive Psychology (PP)

The concept of “positive psychology” was first proposed in 2000 by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi. It focuses on the positive events in life. These include joy, happiness, inspiration, and love; positive states and characteristics like gratitude, resilience, and compassion; and positive institutions (i.e., the application of positive principles within entire organizations and institutions). Seligman chose five elements that people desire because they are intrinsically motivating, improve well-being, are pursued for one’s own purposes, and are defined and evaluated independently of one another (Seligman, 2013, 2018). These are: positive feeling, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. Seligman’s model for positive psychology thus became known by the acronym PERMA (2013).

Positive psychology is centered around achieving a fulfilling and satisfying existence (Seligman, 2013). Trzebińska (2008) underlined that the concept of the *good life* can be variously interpreted. The most prevalent understandings of the terms are as quality of life (often used to assess the overall standard of living and functioning in different domains of life) and, more subjectively, well-being, which refers to an individual’s personal experience and satisfaction with life, and includes such factors as happiness, fulfillment, and positive emotions (Huppert, 2009).

Yet, in order to measure well-being, it is necessary to define it, and that is not easy due to the lack of consensus in the research community regarding even whether to spell the term with a hyphen (Leiter & Cooper, 2017, p. 1). One frequently used definition is thus “subjective well-being” (SWB), a broad notion that refers to the “cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life as a whole.” (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2009, p. 187). It is commonly characterized as encompassing life satisfaction, a relatively low level of negative emotions, and the presence of good emotions (Kahneman & al., 1999). The fact that this definition of well-being does not exclude negative emotions should also be considered. However, in an ideal scenario, the ratio of positive to negative emotions should be higher. According to Diener et al. (2009), the assumption underpinning the definitions of “subjective well-being” is that, in order to have a “good life,” one must have a positive appreciation for both oneself and one’s life. The psychological well-being of older adults is intricately linked to the concepts of *positive aging* and *successful aging*, the latter defined by Ryff (1982, p. 209–214) as “a state of human functioning that leads to optimal growth during an individual’s lifespan.” Additionally, Palmore (1995) highlighted that well-being entails the ability to survive well, maintain excellent health, and to achieve life satisfaction.

Researchers widely recognize that well-being can be enhanced through the use of various interventions, including educational activities (e.g., Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2014). Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) refer to deliberate programs, practices, treatment approaches, or activities designed to foster positive emotions, positive behaviors, or good thoughts (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009, p. 467). In addition, it was discovered that PPIs “can be effective in the enhancement of subjective and psychological well-being, as well as in helping to reduce negative symptoms associated with depression” (Bolier et al., 2013, p. 17). Layous & Lyubomirsky (2013) constructed a model based on their examination of theoretical and empirical research to demonstrate that PPIs are influenced by factors related to the activities themselves (such as length, dosage, and diversity), the individual’s attributes (such as drive and exertion), and the compatibility between the person and the activity, referred to as person-activity fit.

Over the years, “positive psychology” has gained popularity not only in the field of psychological research, but also in the social sciences generally, and, later, in

education. Applying positive psychology in school settings has become popular because it promotes the development of a positive self-concept and increased well-being among students and staff (Seligman, 2011). The general shift from a focus on negative to positive aspects can be observed, also when researching elements of the learning process (Seligman, 2018). Additionally, the goal of positive psychology was to produce practical interventions that facilitate personal development (Peterson, 2006).

The thriving of positive psychology research

The research on positive psychology in education might be divided into two stages: the early period, from 2012 to 2015, and the current era, which began in 2016 and witnessed the flourishing of positive psychology (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012, 2019). The potential application of positive psychology in the context of foreign language learning and teaching was proposed by MacIntyre & Gregersen (2012). The postulates were founded on the notion that teachers can influence both the positive and negative emotions of their students through various strategies and activities (for example, cultivating imagination and creativity, as well as practicing relaxation techniques). Mercer & Gregersen (2014) demonstrated that the presence of pleasant emotions and a favorable atmosphere can facilitate language acquisition.

Rebecca Oxford (2016) modified Seligman's PERMA model of well-being into the EMPHATICS model, considering its implications for language learning and teaching. Her concept brought many topics investigated in previous studies together into one modern positive psychology theoretical framework, which elucidated why certain students faced difficulties in the same educational environment in which others thrived. This model contributed to the existing body of literature on positive psychology, as well as to the Second Language Acquisition (Oxford, 2016).

As a teaching methodology, EMPHATICS encompasses the following: empathy, meaning and motivation, perseverance, agency and autonomy, time, hardiness and habits of mind, intelligence, character strength and self-efficacy, self-concept, self-esteem, and self-verification (Oxford, 2016). These emotional components form a complex and evolving system of sophisticated mental qualities and functions (Dörnyei, 2009). Cognition and emotion are intrinsically interconnected, as learners' emotions,

whether positive or negative, influence their attention and perception. Furthermore, it is important to recognize learners' negative emotions, like dread, insecurity, or perplexity, while also promoting positive emotions.

Another aspect of the model takes into account “meaning” as a fundamental guideline for interpreting and organizing human experience. It defines meaning “as the personal relevance and significance that provides purpose to life” (Oxford, 2016, p. 18). Well-designed language learning activities should stimulate reflection, enabling learners to observe their progress and thus fostering their own perception and exploration of significance and motivation derived from the work (Byrd & Abrams, 2022). Next, Oxford (2016) described perseverance as a “continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition.” While it entails hope and optimism, one of the most salient components of perseverance is resilience (p. 29).

The concept of agency serves as an initial step for learners to take action. It involves the combination of capacity (ability) and will (intentional choice), and sometimes includes intention, belief, knowledge, taking charge through action, and utilizing strategies (Oxford, 2016, p. 76). Agency is based on learners' understanding of their experiences, as well as how they make sense of and engage with the opportunities they perceive in their environment (Mercer, 2015).

The consideration of time in the presented model stems from the fact that language learning usually takes more time than learners think or consider (Oxford, 2016). Similarly, Oxford provided several suggestions for L2 learners to cultivate productive mental habits. Her ideas encompass both individual, cognitively focused elements of behavior, such as devising plans for accomplishing a job and identifying efficient techniques for executing those plans (e.g., cooperating with a peer, seeking advice on how to tackle language learning-related issues); as well as various types of intelligence, character traits, and self-factors. Implementing those components may help learners to find enjoyment in learning a foreign language, even in late adulthood (Oxford, 2016).

There is a high probability that positive psychology traits like perseverance, strength, hope, optimism, and courage will play significant roles in the process of language education. This stems from the fact that language learning typically takes

time, occurs in a variety of settings, and necessitates motivation, and identity. This underscores the need for the development of positive psychology-based interventions at various levels (McIntyre, Gregersen & Mercer, 2019). What is more, the application of positive psychology principles in foreign language learning and teaching can be observed in alternative methods, such as the silent way and suggestopedia (Michońska-Stadnik, 2020). Lately, there has been a shift in FL pedagogy towards researching learning strategies, promoting learner autonomy, and redefining the teacher's role (Michońska-Stadnik, 2020), all of which are related to positive psychology principles.

Positive education (PE)

The term “positive education”, defined as “bringing together the science of positive psychology with best practices in teaching, with the goal of encouraging and supporting schools and individuals to flourish,” emerged as a result of incorporating positive psychology into foreign language education (Norish, 2015, p. 148). Its researchers contended that it is necessary to create and apply a validated framework of positive language education based on empirical evidence in various cultural and language contexts (Mercer et al., 2018, p. 11). The goal of language education is no longer limited to linguistic competence, as Mercer et al. (2018) rightly pointed out. It should rather focus on combining teaching linguistics skills with general life skills, crucial for the modern world (Mercer et al., 2018). When compared to other fundamental life skills, teaching for well-being is one that has received relatively little attention. Nevertheless, in the twenty-first century, teaching for well-being is possibly one of the most important abilities that individuals need in order to manage their lives properly (Mercer et al., 2018). This holds particular significance in the context of later-life language learning, serving as an additional intervention strategy. It could complement established and well-documented methods such as playing musical instruments, participating in community activities, and pursuing lifelong learning in various forms to improve the quality of life and well-being of older adults (Niewczas, 2023). The connection between positive psychology interventions, well-being, and SLA

is well-established these days, but has only recently been explored in terms of older adults and foreign language teaching and learning as “positive aging”.²⁷

Positive psychology interventions recently started to be used in later-life language learning in the European context (Pikhart & Klimova, 2020). At its current stage of research, one can affirm that later-life language learning has the potential to provide older persons with fresh opportunities to enhance their overall subjective well-being (Klimova et al., 2021; Klimova & Pikhart, 2020; Pikhart & Klimova, 2020; Pot, Porkert & Keizer, 2019; Valis et al., 2019; Pfenninger & Polz, 2018). The studies found that the language courses significantly impacted the subjective overall well-being of later-life L2 learners, regardless of their objective progress in language proficiency. Therefore, we can view later-life language education as a strategy to maintain the well-being of older learners. Another two independent studies (Słowik-Krogulec, 2023; Niewczas, 2023) investigated the level of subjective well-being among older adults attending language courses at the UTAs in Poland. Both showed that Polish older adults associate the increase in their level of subjective well-being with the fact they have been learning English in late adulthood. The first study comprised 31 Polish learners of English (29 females and two males aged 61–84, mean age: 72.5) at the beginner and pre-intermediate levels. The findings suggested that FL courses influence the subjective well-being of older individuals (e.g., by creating an informal learning environment). What is more, such courses should not only concentrate on enhancing linguistic skills, but also provide chances for social interaction and promote emotional and social well-being. The primary responsibility of teachers is to enhance the foreign language skills of older learners, while fostering their independence and ability to take action (Słowik-Krogulec, 2023).

The other study used an online questionnaire to investigate the subjective well-being of 46 Polish older adults (aged 60–81, mean age: 70.5) (Niewczas, 2023). The findings demonstrated that foreign language education may have an important role in enhancing older adults’ well-being and overall quality of life. Four areas of beneficial influence were characteristic of later-life language learning: 1) positive emotions and learning pleasure; 2) social aspects of meeting new people; 3) help with traveling; and

²⁷ The positive aging concept is presented in section 1.2.3.

4) motivation to learn (both the language and new knowledge generally). Thus, the findings suggested that foreign language learning fosters an environment that can augment the quality of life of older individuals.

Based on the findings of previous studies, it can be contended that the natural aging process, which brings about several adverse effects, does not necessarily have to impact detrimentally the quality of life for older individuals. A well-maintained perceived quality of life may be achieved by providing assistance for and facilitating various activities, such as foreign language learning.

2.4. The lifelong learning concept

2.4.1. Global and European background

The European Union education policy and older learners

The initial policy framework by WHO (2002) centered active aging on three fundamental aspects: health, participation, and security. Essentially, if individuals maintain low risk factors for long-term illnesses and functional decline, they can anticipate experiencing longer lifespans with better overall health. This means they will be able to manage their lives independently as they age, resulting in fewer older adults requiring expensive medical treatment and care services.

Lifelong learning later became the fourth pillar of active aging (Findsen & Formosa, 2016b). The inclusion of lifelong learning in discussions about active aging served to protect individuals' rights to age positively. This is because scholars and policymakers have long acknowledged the role of learning in enhancing quality of life and well-being in older age (Findsen & Formosa, 2016a). Education performs four primary purposes during this period of life: regular, substitute, social, and psychological (Richert-Kaźmierska & Forkiewicz, 2013).

Researchers and policymakers commonly use the widely accepted definition of lifelong learning that the European Commission (2000) provided: that is, lifelong learning refers to any intentional learning activity that occurs throughout one's life, with

the goal of enhancing knowledge, skills, and competencies in personal, civic, social, and/or employment-related contexts.²⁸

Learning is typically categorized into three distinct types: formal, non-formal, and informal.²⁹ Formal education/learning is “the institutionalized, chronologically graded, and hierarchically structured...system, spanning lower primary school and the upper reaches of the university” (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974, p. 8). Non-formal learning takes place outside formal learning environments, but within an organizational framework, whereas informal learning takes place outside of schools and colleges and arises from the learner’s involvement in activities not undertaken with a learning purpose in mind (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). The concepts of formal, non-formal, and informal learning illustrate both the longitudinal aspect of learning (learning throughout one’s life) and its latitudinal aspect (learning that occurs in many contexts and settings).

Older individuals mostly engage in non-formal and informal learning, which enables them to gain new knowledge and skills through hands-on experiences (Villar, 2013). Methods employed in non-formal and informal education include seeking assistance from family members, friends, and colleagues, such as looking for advice, observing someone perform a task, consulting individuals, and soliciting their opinions. Additionally, using printed materials, specifically literature published in traditional printed formats (books, textbooks, specialist journals), serves to expand one’s knowledge. Learners autonomously use such resources—outside of any formal educational curriculum, course recommendations, teacher instructions, or assignments—by employing computer programs and accessing the Internet, gathering information from diverse web sources, books, specialized publications, language classes, and other educational materials (Villar, 2013). They also engage in educational programs aired on radio and television, and participate in guided visits to museums, libraries, and other educational institutions in order to access informational resources (GUS, 2009, p. 18).

Lifelong learning in later life pertains to the active participation of older adults, either individually or in groups, in various experiences followed by deliberate

²⁸ European Commission; European Education and Culture Executive Agency; Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Eurydice, Plevnik, T., Gabršček, S. (2000). *Lifelong learning: the contribution of education systems in the Member States of the European Union: results of the Eurydice survey* (T. Plevnik, editor, S. Gabršček, translator) Eurydice.

²⁹ More about the three types of learning can be found here: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/formal-non-formal-and-informal-learning>.

reflection, validation, transformation, personal interpretation, and integration of knowledge (Mercken, 2010). Despite limited statistical research on the participation rates of older individuals in learning activities, a thorough examination of the existing literature consistently reveals three key findings (Findsen & Formosa, 2016b). First, there is a lower percentage of older learners compared to younger individuals. Secondly, there is a significant decrease in participation as individuals reach their seventies. Lastly, the typical learners in this context are middle-class women (Higgs and Formosa, 2015). It should also be noted that lifelong learning can be both a method and a goal in the course of human existence (Findsen & Formosa, 2016b). Each individual acquires talents as a way to keep up with the ever-changing world. Enhancing current talents, or obtaining new ones, allows for a heightened and deliberate understanding of the surrounding reality. Acquiring knowledge in the later stages of life is also an objective. Participating in such activities provides the pleasure that comes from exploring and comprehending life via one's personal experiences and accumulated years (Findsen & Formosa, 2016b).

Later-life learning

Later-life learning is not a new concept; however, with greater longevity and more elderly people in societies, it is becoming increasingly important for governments and institutions to organize educational activities for older individuals. As Formosa (2014a) pointed out: "(...) older adult learning provides the opportunity to explore learning goals that people at earlier stages of the life course are often too busy to pursue, such as [the] development [of] a reflective mode of thinking, contemplating the meaning of life, coming to terms with one's past as a preparation for death, and the quest for self-fulfillment and spiritual advancement (p. 11–12)."

Furthermore, learning can assist individuals in the third age in adapting to these changes by enabling them to remain informed about technology, scientific advancements, and equipment, as well as facilitating the exploration and achievement of learning objectives they may have aspired to earlier in life (Ardelt, 2000). Third-agers find motivation in learning solely for its own sake. They desire to keep their minds

active, exercise their brains, stay mentally stimulated, grow, achieve goals, continuously learn, and never stop (Boulton-Lewis, 2010).

The combination of active aging and lifelong learning concepts acknowledges that learning occurs in a variety of settings and intergenerational environments. This integration has the potential to yield three primary benefits:

- psychological well-being; as discussed in Chapter 1, the transition from midlife to older adulthood might entail various changes. Engaging in learning activities later in life can reduce the impact of significant life changes and empower older individuals to experience greater levels of happiness, self-assurance, self-worth, contentment, and diverse methods of dealing with challenges (von Humboldt, 2016, as cited in Formosa, 2018);
- inclusion in society; aging universally increases the likelihood of social exclusion for all seniors, particularly those most vulnerable. However, older adult education has the potential to enhance levels of social support, social networking, and social solidarity among older adults (Findsen & Formosa, 2011);
- general empowerment; later-life learning enables seniors to (re)take control over their lives—it empowers third-agers by exposing them to the dynamics of everyday life (Formosa, 2012).

Universities of the Third Age are the institutional realization of the lifelong learning concept, providing a significant space for its development. The UTA movement arose from Pierre Vellas's concepts, which recognized the collective energy and extended lifespan of older adults in France (Vellas, 2019). Vellas advocated for universities to facilitate a blend of older adult educational programs and gerontological research to enhance well-being (Vellas, 2019). Four primary purposes guided this educational enterprise: 1) enhancing the well-being of older individuals; 2) establishing a continuous educational initiative for older adults in collaboration with younger counterparts; 3) coordinating research in gerontology; and 4) implementing ongoing educational programs in the field of gerontology.

UTAs were established by law, enacted by the French government in 1968, which mandated that universities be responsible for offering lifelong education. The first University of the Third Age opened in Toulouse in 1973. The Toulouse initiative

quickly led to the establishment of UTAs in Belgium, Switzerland, Poland, Italy, Spain, and Quebec, Canada, a mere three years later (Formosa, 2014b). The instructional framework was specifically designed for older individuals and retirees, and was initially named the Free Time University. The French model introduced alternative organizational frameworks for UTAs in the late 1970s, including the establishment of institutions connected to local government instead of universities (Swindell & Thompson, 1995). The University of Manchester developed the British model of UTA in 1981, incorporating certain elements of the French model. In this context, older individuals assumed the dual function of instructors for certain sessions of the curriculum and students educated by their peers during others (Swindell & Thompson, 1995). This concept is founded on the notion that retired individuals possess expertise in a specific sector and, with the guidance of university educators in information transfer techniques and pedagogy, are capable of instructing others. Another innovation involved expanding classes beyond the university premises. This included utilizing community educational institutions, community centers, libraries, and like venues (Swindell & Thompson, 1995). The syllabus became more adaptable, and, subsequently, the faculty consisted of academics, college students, and community workers eager to impart their expertise.

Global lifelong education policy – past achievements

Current arrangements for lifelong learning policy have a solid foundation in the global cooperation of previous generations. International organizations and institutions such as UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), and the European Commission have had significant roles in establishing the perception of lifelong education. Several reports they commissioned provide a comprehensive analysis of the current condition of global, including European, educational systems (Pólturzycki, 2005, p. 16). Among the documents of paramount significance are the following (as collected by Jaroszewska, 2013a):

- The paper “Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow,” by Edgar Faure (1972), in which the concept of a novel social contract offered a

political structure for reestablishing the connection between education and society based on the conviction that, in an educated democracy, citizens are genuine catalysts for transformation.

- Club of Rome reports from 1972 to 1981, which were generally intended to help better understand major global issues and to foster a greater sense of civic responsibility.
- The 1973 OECD report “Recurrent Education: A Strategy for Lifelong Learning,” which aimed to provide a clear explanation of the concept, characteristics, and goals of “recurrent education”. Additionally, it sought to outline the potential consequences this method will have on educational and socio-economic policy development. Acceptance of the recurrent education plan not only signifies a critical shift in educational policies, but it carries significant implications for social and economic policies.
- The 1991 Club of Rome report, “The First Global Revolution: How to Survive?,” presented the authors’ vision of a worldwide societal revolution marked by significant social, economic, technological, and cultural disruptions, which began to propel humanity into uncharted territory. The report aimed to delineate a plan for galvanizing global governments towards environmental stability and sustainable energy.
- The European Commission’s 1995 “White Paper on Education and Training. Education and Acquiring Knowledge. Towards the Society of Lifelong Learning,” which offered a vision of European society that prioritized the acquisition of information and expertise, with a focus on lifelong teaching and learning.
- Report prepared by French politician Jacques Delors in 1996, entitled “Learning: The Treasure Within,” which advocated a comprehensive and unified approach to education that was grounded in the principles of lifelong learning and encompassed the four fundamental aspects of learning: acquiring knowledge, developing skills, fostering social cohesion, and cultivating personal growth.

The recommendations made in those documents contributed to the advancement of political strategies and programs to enhance the quality of educational systems at the

regional, national, and European levels in the context of changing circumstances (Eurydice, 2000, p. 7).³⁰

2.4.2. Later-life (language) learning in Poland

Educational attainment levels are widely regarded as highly influential in predicting socioeconomic transformations within a specific culture (OECD, 2020). Indeed, education is pivotal in bringing about beneficial social changes by facilitating the transformation of a group through the influence of individuals. This has not only been generally accepted as a political and educational assumption, but has also been progressively implemented in the field of education. Social capital refers to the idea that social networks are valuable resources, and the process of learning can play a role in developing these connections (Adamczyk, 2021). This, in turn, can help to decrease social disparities and favorably effect marginalized populations such as older adults (Tung-Yuang & Nai-Ying, 2009).

The end of the 1980s in Poland was an era of late demographic transition (Adamczyk, 2018). During this period, people's lifestyles across all age groups underwent rapid social and economic transformations (Okólski, 2005). These changes also brought attention to the delayed progress in other areas of civilization, such as language education. Over time, there was a growing recognition of the importance of FL education in all areas of life—social, political, and economic (Adamczyk, 2018). Education continues to be increasingly recognized as a crucial domain, not only for children, young people, and working adults, but also for those in the post-working age.

In recent years, the Polish government has implemented several aging policy programs. These include the Government Programs for Social Participation of Senior Citizens for the periods 2012–2013 and 2014–2020, which supplement the Long-Term Senior Policy in Poland for the period 2014–2020.³¹ Additionally, the strategic study

³⁰ More about the documents can be found in: European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Eurydice, *Lifelong learning: the contribution of education systems in the Member States of the European Union – Results of the Eurydice survey*, Eurydice, 2000.

³¹ More about senior policy can be found here: <https://www.gov.pl/web/family/engagement-and-care-the-senior-citizen-policy-in-2018>

“The Perspective of Lifelong Learning”³² (Ministry of Education, 2013) has been introduced. While first two documents primarily addressed activities in four priority areas that promoted learning among older adults, the strategic study focused on enabling formal, non-formal, and informal education throughout all stages of life. This highlights the significance of education for older individuals, including those 80 and older, from both middle-class and working-class backgrounds. This education is critical for preserving and improving their essential skills at everyday tasks. The “Perspective of Lifelong Learning” also focused on information and communication technology with the goal of improving the digital skills of older people in Poland. The Polish senior policy is founded on the principle that helping third-agers to participate in learning activities is the primary factor influencing their social engagement and, consequently, for maintaining a high quality of life and well-being (Ministerstwo pracy i Polityki Społecznej [Ministry of Labor and Social Policy], 2014). Life-long learning enables students to acquire and integrate diverse sets of knowledge and skills in order to comprehend, progress, and even to create new knowledge and abilities (Ouane, 2009; Szatur-Jaworska, 2006).

Orzechowska (1999) proposed categorizing the activities of the elderly into six areas:

1. Household/family activity—i.e., managing a household and participating in family matters;
2. Cultural activity—behaviors related to cultural pursuits;
3. Professional activity—the least favored among the older adults in Poland;
4. Social/educational activity—i.e., participating in social and educational events;
5. Religious activity—quite prevalent due to the specific nature of Polish society;
6. Sport and tourist/recreational activity—i.e., engaging in sports and recreational activities (28–29).

These domains of engagement are crucial not only for the process of acclimating to old age, but also for fostering social inclusion following the transition in societal responsibilities, such as retirement. There is a strong correlation between engaging in activities during old age and experiencing a good quality of life. Successful aging is

³² For more about lifelong learning strategies for Poland, see: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/poland/lifelong-learning-strategy>

determined by the condition, element, and impact of pursuing one's interests and enjoying one's hobbies (Czapiński & Błędowski, 2014; Marchewka & Jungiewicz, 2008; Adamczyk & Budny, 2016).

The European Statistical Office (Eurostat)³³ reported that adult Poles have consistently had lower participation rates in adult education and training compared to the EU average over a significant time period. In 2022, 7.6% of adult Poles aged 25–64 engaged in Adult Education and Training (AET). This is a considerable rise compared to prior years.³⁴ The infographic below presents participation rate in education and training throughout Europe for the year 2022.

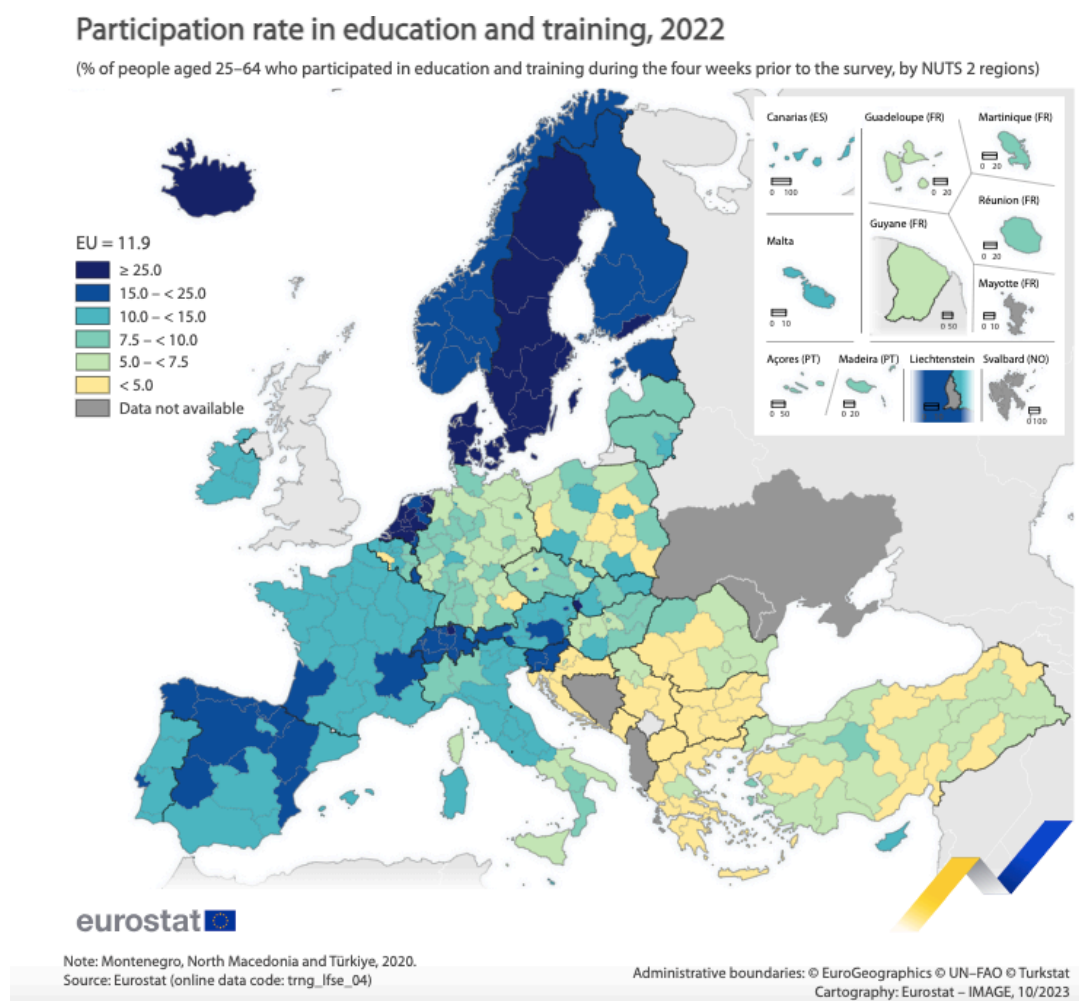


Figure 4. The participation rate in education and training throughout Europe

³³ More about Eurostat and its tasks can be found here: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>.

³⁴ More details about the participation rate in the education of adults can be found under the following link: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_learning_statistics&oldid=568260.

Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20231016-2>

As in other European countries, one place in Poland where older adults can take part in educational activities are the Universities of the Third Age. The Polish UTAs operate according to the French model (Czerniawska, 2009). The first UTA was established in Warsaw (Jakubaszek, 2014). Currently, Poland has a total of 552 UTAs with a student population about 90,000 (GUS, 2023). It was pointed out that a typical student at a UTA is a female between the ages of 60 and 79; she has completed at least secondary education and resides in a city of significant or moderate size (GUS, 2023). The profile of Polish UTAs resembles that of UTA institutions throughout Europe and other parts of the world (Patterson et al., 2016; Williamson, 2000). The proportion of men at Polish UTAs is estimated at 15% (Gołdys et al., 2012; GUS, 2023). This feminization of the UTA has several causes. First, men's age of death tends to be earlier than women's, which becomes noticeable from the age of 35 and is even more noticeable among those who have recently retired. Secondly, Polish women have a lower retirement age³⁵, averaging five years earlier than men (see section 1.4.3.2.). Additionally, women tend to show more interest in education and view the UTA as an opportunity for self-realization and personal development (GUS, 2023). In an average UTA, only 15% of the students are men; in as many as nine out of ten UTAs, the ratio of men among the students does not exceed 20% (Gołdys et al., 2012). Most Polish UTAs have a policy of admitting individuals who are retired and aged 60 or older. However, due to poor health, a significant number of these individuals choose to withdraw once they reach age 70 (Gołdys et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the institutions are equipped to accommodate individuals in their eighties and above, sometimes referred to as the fourth age (Klimczuk, 2013).

The feminization of the UTAs is paradoxical because—as mentioned in subsection 2.2—Polish women in the third age are still expected to help their family members, e.g., taking care of grandchildren. The conventional categorization of social roles into male and female has noteworthy consequences for aging (Jurek, 2012). The ramifications of assigning women the responsibility of caring for dependent family

³⁵ Currently, due to socio-economic reasons, the discussion in Poland about raising the retirement age and potentially equalizing it for men and women has resurfaced.

members, such as older family members, the sick, and children, are readily apparent in Polish society. Polish women allocate a substantial amount of time to caregiving responsibilities, including the upbringing of grandchildren and the care of elderly parents. This pattern is not exclusive to Poland; according to data from the United Nations, women globally continue to engage in unpaid domestic work at a rate that is more than two and a half times that of men (Domagała-Szymonek, 2022).

However, on a societal level, it is important to recognize that, in general, there is a strong inclination among Poles towards continuous education, which is perceived to have a substantial influence on the quality of life and well-being in later stages of life (Czapiński & Błędowski, 2013). Education is presumed to function as a preventive tool against aging and premature old age, particularly when considering long-term demographic transitions. It has already been proven, also in Polish studies, that this leads to a major improvement in the quality of aging, including not only the acquisition of skills, but, more significantly, the development of networks and interpersonal connections that remedy feelings of loneliness and isolation (Kościńska, 2017). The positive impact on the overall quality of Polish UTA members' involvement has been shown as well (Mackowicz & Wnęk-Gozdek, 2016). UTA classes serve as a means to combat exclusion and bring about beneficial changes on both an individual and societal level, leading to long-lasting advantages. Polish third-agers seek to expand their knowledge and range of interests using a vast array of opportunities; they frequently rediscover their hobbies and potential (Mackowicz & Wnęk-Gozdek, 2016). The advantages brought about by UTA participants' engagement are invaluable, particularly in the context of society's aging. Therefore, it is recommended that the UTA movement in Poland allocate some of its efforts toward reaching out to older individuals who are not typical members, particularly those residing in small towns and villages, who are more likely to face social isolation and marginalization. This could be done, for example, by organizing online courses for older adults (Fabiś & Konieczna-Woźniak, 2022).

2.5. Older adults as language learners

As previously stated, third-age learners comprise a highly heterogeneous cohort characterized by their wide-ranging life experiences, including their educational background and social status, as well as the extent to which they are affected by the aging process. Ensuring a fulfilling educational experience for these learners may challenge educators, and thus make it harder for older learners to integrate into and actively participate in a learning community (Grotek & Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2014). Since subsection 1.3 characterized various types of changes typical for the older age population that may influence the educational potential of third agers (and thus shape their profile as language learners), this aspect will not be addressed in this section. Here, we focus on older learners' motivations, needs, and expectations regarding foreign language education. The findings to date on these aspects of foreign language pedagogy will enable us to gather basic information on the individual's requirements, talents, learning preferences, interests, and strategic knowledge, which includes learning techniques and metacognitive tactics (Berndt, 2003, p. 232).

2.5.1. Third-agers' motivations

Numerous research studies, such as Derenowski (2019), Pawlak et al. (2018), Pfenninger & Polz (2018), and Słowik-Krogulec (2020), have explored why later-life learners choose to acquire a foreign language. In terms of motivation, it is undeniable that older adults constitute a distinct group when it comes to language education. This is primarily due to the fact that, in most cases, their professional journeys conclude with the start of retirement (Gabryś-Barker, 2018). It was pointed out as well that retirement is both a tremendous change in lifestyle for older adults and opens up educational opportunities for self-accomplishment that may not have been available to them earlier in their lives (Jakubaszek, 2014). Regardless of the subject matter they are studying, older adults generally attend the classroom with a high level of motivation (Derenowski, 2017).

Psychologists define motivation as a theoretical notion that explains why individuals or animals choose to participate in specific behaviors at specific times (Beck, 2000, p. 3). In the area of language learning, Gardner et al. (1985) defined

motivation as the degree to which an individual strives to learn a language due to their desire to do so and the satisfaction they derive from it (p. 7). We can divide the motivation of older learners into two categories: learning for enjoyment or leisure, like an interest in foreign languages or social involvement; and learning for purpose or relevance, like improving one's physical or cognitive well-being, accessing technology, volunteering, or caring for others (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2016). Furthermore, there are two factors that influence the motivations of third-agers independent of the learners' age (Grotek & Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2012). Those affective variables are the incentive to study a foreign language in general (and, for example, English in particular), and the value of mastering a foreign language when traveling (Grotek and Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2012). Hungarian older adults studying English as a foreign language in a traditional classroom setting participated in a study of the factors affecting motivation. It revealed that the attitude of older students toward learning and the specificity of their goals significantly influenced their willingness to learn a new language (Schiller & Dorner, 2022).

Jaroszewska (2013a, p. 257–261, 286) provided a comprehensive list of what drives older adults to learn foreign languages, ranking them in descending order of importance:

- Maintaining or developing one's intellectual skills;
- Communicating while traveling abroad;
- Having language skills is essential in today's modern, multicultural, and multilingual world;
- Because family and/or friends live abroad;
- Eagerness to meet people from different cultures;
- Maintaining contact with people;
- The experience gained from learning foreign languages;
- Occupying one's free time;
- Maintaining one's previously acquired language proficiency level;
- Learning foreign languages as a hobby;
- No specific reason;
- Positive memories of the past that are connected to language learning.

Słowik-Krogulec's findings (2017, 2020) revealed a slightly different selection:

- The desire to communicate with their grandchildren and their children's foreign partners, if they are living in other countries;
- The desire to participate in their [family's] activities;
- The need to interact with others, socialize, and to meet new people and cultures;
- The desire to maintain communication with friends who are currently residing in a different country;
- The desire to engage in activities that are both challenging and beneficial to mental health;
- Communication when traveling abroad;
- Maintaining intellectual abilities;
- Continuing cognitive development

A final set of determinants for older adults taking up a language course was indicated by Klimczak-Pawlak & Kossakowska-Pisarek (2018). These included a willingness to participate in communicative activities during vacations and with family members residing outside Poland; a desire to maintain cognitive activity; a desire to prevent exclusion due to the prevalence of English in Polish films, songs, and public places; and a desire to develop self-confidence, though not necessarily for employment purposes. Similar observations seemed to be present in the works of Ware et al. (2017) and Kuklewicz and King (2018), while others claimed that the most compelling reason to acquire a foreign language during the senior years is that it benefits memory and mental skills (Grotek & Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2012; Nizęgorodcew, 2016; Derenowski, 2021). Social motivations for joining language courses in late adulthood were further investigated by Jaroszewska (2013b). Older adults, who often have more time upon retirement, tend to avoid feeling redundant, isolated, or marginalized (Jaroszewska, 2013b). As a result, they value opportunities to socialize with individuals of a similar age (Nizęgorodcew, 2016). The process of socialization, as well as the development of mental capacities, were also mentioned. In addition, the author found that 50% of the participants were willing to acquire information about English-speaking societies, which was corroborated by Jaroszewska's research (2013b).

Third-agers have been claimed to be acutely aware of diversity, which may assist them in developing a tolerant attitude toward a range of lifestyles (Fiema, 2016). As a result, they pay appropriate attention to the cultures of those who speak the foreign language. It has been claimed that Polish older adults enroll in language classes to fulfill their dreams (Gabryś-Barker, 2018), particularly because studying English was often not a formal option for them. Rather, they were mostly taught Russian for political reasons (Jaroszewska, 2009). Older adults in Poland are likely to favor learning English due to their belief that familiarity with the language prevalent in the modern world is essential. This viewpoint suggests that the selection of English appears to satisfy both the internal and the pragmatic needs of the individual (Derenowski, 2019).

The variety of learning strategies used by some older adults reflects their high level of motivation (Kuklewicz & King, 2018). Among the popular strategies, the most effective appeared to be flashcard use, frequent and regular revisions, listening to English songs, completing extra homework, and browsing the Internet in English. Furthermore, it is worth noting that many third-agers are familiar with a variety of learning strategies, the most popular being the metacognitive strategy (Mora et al., 2017). Later-life L2 learners also try to employ compensatory strategies, which are intelligent guesses that utilize extensive linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge (Piechurska-Kuciel & Szyszka, 2018). These strategies include making associations, utilizing competences from other languages, obtaining meanings from context, and making use of prior world knowledge and intuition. It was also pointed out that the planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation learning strategies used by older learners were not always successful (Pawlak et al., 2018). There are only a few cognitive techniques that they employ, such as practicing and reviewing on a daily basis, as well as social strategies like consulting members of their immediate family. It is clear that their self-evaluation is not very successful, and there is a significant demand for appropriate procedures that can effectively remove unpleasant emotions (Pawlak et al., 2018). Considering all these factors, we conclude that teaching third-agers requires implementing strategy-based instruction. Additionally, teachers should not only teach strategies for acquiring specific language skills, but also consider the experience older

learners have gained from employing strategies from learning other languages in the past (Jaroszewska, 2013a).

In sum, the most important reasons for third-agers to learn a foreign language are integrative rather than instrumental. Older adult learners are willing to undertake the challenges of learning a foreign language in order to accomplish their personal goals and aspirations (Nizegorodcew, 2016). Furthermore, it is commonly believed that they are the most diligent and well-prepared age group with which to collaborate (Derenowski, 2021), since the level of autonomy possessed by older learners is positively influenced by the high level of internal motivation associated with foreign language learning.

2.5.2. Later-life L2 learners' needs and expectations

This section outlines the educational needs, preferences, and expectations of third-agers, who have received the most attention in the context of FL learning thus far. These include the following: the development of communicative skills and the emphasis on language production (e.g., Grotek & Kilianska-Przybyło, 2012; Pfenninger & Polz, 2018); a slow pace of lessons (e.g., Jaroszewska, 2013b; Grotek, 2018; Słowik-Krogulec, 2019); frequent repetition and revision of the covered material (Ramirez Gomez, 2016b); creating a non-threatening classroom environment and the teacher's role in general (Derenowski, 2018; Słowik-Krogulec, 2019; Borkowska, 2022).

The need for speaking

As previously mentioned, the primary concern of later-life learners is improving their communication skills, which is why language courses for older adults should prioritize speaking. It is not surprising, then, that older adults tend to strongly desire to practice their communicative skills in the classroom (see, for example, Gabryś-Barker, 2018). Some older adults also expressed the need to improve their communication skills, mostly wanting to be able to talk in a foreign language and ask for and answer directions when travelling or conversing (Klimczak-Pawlak & Kossakowska-Pisarek, 2018).

A study at UTA in Katowice, one of Poland's largest cities, gathered the personal opinions and experiences of older adults regarding the effectiveness of teaching foreign languages to this age group (Grotek, 2018). The participants acknowledged that FL teachers should give adequate attention to ensuring the enhancement of the most critical skills and components for improving their foreign language communication abilities. These include their ability to talk, listen, and to pronounce words correctly. It is crucial to bear in mind that when FL teachers working with older adults focus on communication/fluency rather than accuracy, it is much easier for third-agers to overcome their speaking barriers (Grotek & Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2012). It was also pointed out that older individuals may encounter obstacles while speaking a foreign language (Posiadała, 2017). Later-life learners face communication difficulties due to limited linguistic resources in a foreign language, such as vocabulary and grammar, as well as time constraints and improper usage of the target language in specific communicative contexts. What is more, older adults may experience weakened attention selectivity and reduced ability for prolonged concentration and memorization, leading to memory gaps. Therefore, when preparing older adults for foreign language communication, it is essential to develop strategies that aid communication (Posiadała, 2017). That is also why researchers are increasingly interested in how third-agers use learning strategies.

In focusing on speaking and the development of communicative skills, one must emphasize that the selection of conversation themes is pertinent (Kacelt & Klímová, 2021). Practical and helpful issues related to everyday activities hold great interest for older individuals, as they can prepare them for real-life interactions (refer to Oxford, 2018). It is commonly known that senior learners discuss a variety of topics, including family life, everyday life, and practical difficulties (Derenowski, 2021). The following are the most popular themes that could interest older adults:

- Connection with the past – narrating one's life, achievements, difficulties; allowing the recollection of past events, reflecting on them, integrating them, giving them timeless significance, and discovering the meaning of life.
- Understanding the modern world – adapting to life in a world that has changed radically since childhood and youth.

- Illness and disability – fear of losing one’s independence.
- Death – the loss of family members and friends pertains to the broader concept of loss appropriate to older age.
- Family – stories about spouses, children, and grandchildren; focusing on the family may result from the loss of other social and professional roles.
- Loneliness – the need to stay in relationships with others and to make new acquaintances.
- Finances – issues of living costs, medical treatment.
- Religious beliefs, matters relating to the meaning of life.
- Leisure time activities and areas of interest (Kilian 2015, p. 173).

Furthermore, the need to use a thematic approach when developing foreign language education programs for third-agers is generally stressed (Piechota, 2020). Older adults can learn a specialized language for a variety of scenarios, including travel, airports, and cafes, with a focus on terminology suitable for their age group, excluding topics like school, games, and play. It is also underlined that, when selecting topics for classes with third-agers, teachers should focus on building a positive image of old age and older adults, who are active, open to various cultures, and focused on self-development in late-adulthood (Piechota, 2020).

Preferences for the classroom atmosphere

A pleasant and comfortable classroom atmosphere is crucial for promoting communication among students in the third-age group (Borkowska, 2020). Learning a foreign language in a safe atmosphere facilitates exposure to new linguistic experiences. This also applies to testing knowledge, as older adults seem unwilling to take formal tests, finding them extremely stressful (e.g., Słowik-Krogulec, 2017, 2019; Kossakowska-Pisarek, 2018). What is more, the pressure of tests and assignments may have a detrimental effect on learners’ motivation (Kim & Kim, 2015). Testing should rather be done informally, while maintaining a pleasant atmosphere. Furthermore, a pleasant and tranquil classroom environment significantly boosts the self-confidence of older learners, motivating them to participate actively in the learning process (Derenowski, 2019). Positive reinforcement and consistent support from the teacher

could help achieve this, thus leading to the higher engagement and improved well-being of older adult learners. Fostering an environment in which learners are actively encouraged to openly articulate their viewpoints is crucial, as their extensive experience and profound understanding of the external world undeniably transcend that of previous age cohorts (Derenowski, 2019).

As we already know, for many third-agers learning a foreign language is most importantly a social experience. Social factors shape relationships within the student group attending UTA language courses, creating a safe and enjoyable community where individuals can establish new connections with their peers (Grotek & Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2014). Older adults value group selection based on similar language levels, age, small class size, friendly relationships with other students, mutual assistance, joint reviews of material between classes, and a stress-free classroom atmosphere (Grotek & Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2014). The teacher plays a crucial role, as he/she can facilitate the development of new relationships among older individuals. This is because they may feel safe and confident enough to collaborate in a variety of interactions (see, for example, Grotek, 2018). Furthermore, we should view second language learning as a tool to foster social interaction and integration, not as a final objective (Pot et al., 2018). This is extremely important, as interactions among peers in foreign language lessons might lower feelings of isolation and enhance overall well-being (Kic-Drgas, 2010; Escuder-Mollon & Esteller-Curto, 2014).

The last commonly identified determinant of a good classroom atmosphere is the pace of the lesson. When the pace is too fast, it can increase the learner's anxiety (Kuklewicz & King, 2018). Proper pacing is easier to achieve in groups, which are organized according to participants' ages. As older adults are at a similar level and face similar problems, it is more feasible to adjust the pace so that it suits more group members (Kuklewicz & King, 2018). Older individuals tend to understand that they require additional time to digest the material they are learning, and, as a result, they tend to pay full attention to classes that are conducted at a slower speed (Grotek, 2018). Indeed, one of the most detrimental factors in the language classroom for older individuals was an excessively quick delivery tempo. In late adulthood, learners require

more time to complete speaking tasks, as their responses become slower due to increased reaction times (Jaroszewska, 2010).

The need for frequent repetition

Because of the changes connected with aging in terms of memory, students may have problems memorizing vocabulary (see e.g. Jaroszewska, 2013a; or refer to chapter one for more details on age-associated changes to memory). What might be helpful here is the retrieval practice strategy. Retrieval practice (RP) is a cognitive process that includes retrieving information that is not already in front of us in order to recall it (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). This is a method that involves recalling information to improve and enhance learning. Worksheets, quizzes, concept maps, writing prompts, and flashcards are the most common types of retrieval practice exercises (Karpicke & Blunt, 2011). Language learners (not only later-life L2 students) are able to make more active use of the content they are studying through RP. In a study conducted among Polish teachers of older adults, the vast majority of participants (94%) admitted to adjusting their teaching and testing methods when teaching foreign languages to older learners (Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024b). In addition, 50% of participants acknowledged that reviewing content was an effective strategy for assessing their knowledge and progress. They considered it superior to formal testing, which is frequently anxiety-inducing for older individuals and hence does not effectively serve its purpose (cf. “I do not assess my pupils through tests; revisions provide me with valuable insights into their progress”). Teachers found that small chat related to the previous class, revision mind maps, and regular quizzes and language games were beneficial and novel (Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024 b).

Moreover, it might be beneficial for third-agers to obtain instructions about effective memory strategies (Singleton & Ryan, 2004). Vocabulary should be taught in contexts to foster learning by older individuals, bearing in mind their fluid abilities (Kuklewicz & King, 2018). Later-life learners understand that to retain new language information, they must revise it regularly and dedicate time to practicing at home, in addition to classroom sessions (Grotek, 2018). It might also be problematic for them to memorize new information and later retain it (Ramirez Gómez, 2016a). This is because

older adults may be less aware of how to learn effectively and therefore unable to use effective methods, e.g., mnemotechnics (Kilian, 2015).

Expectations toward the teacher

It has been shown that older learners place great importance on the language teacher, whose abilities and personality are crucial in the FL process (e.g., Jaroszewska, 2013b; Eguz, 2019; Matusz & Rakowska, 2019; Słowik-Krogulec, 2020;). It is therefore important to examine the teacher's roles in third-age language development, and the expectations older adults have toward their FL instructors.

Third-agers mostly choose to learn a foreign language of their own accord, for reasons of mental stimulation, security, maintaining dignity, social interaction, intellectual engagement, validation, retaining cognitive abilities, and fostering inclusivity (Jaroszewska, 2010). Successful foreign language learning in late adulthood, requires the program to be tailored to the linguistic and non-linguistic abilities and requirements of older individuals, which include the teacher's attributes.

Above all, an instructor for older adults should be an expert in his/her field (Zawadzka-Bartnik, 2004). In the context of education in late adulthood, a teaching expert should not only be a skilled educator sharing knowledge, but also fully equipped to excel in intellectual, professional, social, moral, and psychophysical aspects of their career (Zawadzka-Bartnik, 2004). It is, of course, indisputable that a foreign language instructor should exhibit advanced philological knowledge and linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic abilities (Council of Europe, 2003 p. 99). Older individuals often encounter learning through outdated instructional techniques that prioritize grammar and linguistic accuracy (Smole-Wawrzuszyń & Niewczas, 2024a). A teacher with shortcomings in this area might expect a decrease in authority and expert standing. Therefore, older adult students value well-prepared instructors (Derenowski, 2019). Professionalism is linked to strong methodological skills and linguistic proficiency (Jaroszewska, 2009). Language instructors should address the demands of older learners and have a thorough understanding of the cognitive and emotional elements of foreign language learning in late adulthood (Grotek, 2018; Zawadzka-Bartnik, 2004). Implementing this knowledge necessitates a preliminary diagnosis and

classification of learners, which should be preceded by comprehensive observation. The teacher uses knowledge of developmental psychology and language teaching methodology to set educational goals, select a teaching approach, and design the course. Understanding psychology aids in establishing appropriate educational objectives, while recognizing individual variations. The psychology of learning supports collaboration with a heterogeneous group of third-agers with varied intellectual capacities and distinct cognitive preferences (Zawadzka-Bartnik, 2004).

In terms of the teacher's age, a youthful instructor could positively impact learning a foreign language in adulthood (Jaroszevska, 2013a). Yet a younger teacher may be perceived as less professional and dependable (Derenowski, 2018). It was also found that older adults considered a teacher's experience and skills to be crucial, and they perceived older educators as more qualified due to their age proximity (Pawlak et al., 2018). What is more, third-agers often regarded the instructor as the most significant component in their language skill development (Słowik-Krogulec, 2019). In this environment, it is anticipated that teachers would have supportive attitudes toward their students, and the characteristics of educators' personalities should reflect a positive approach to learning in late adulthood (Sigelman & Rider, 2015).

Research has proven (Matusz & Rakowska, 2019; Pfenninger & Polz, 2018) that teachers view patience as their most desired personality trait. Given the students' specific needs, including a reduced speech rate, slower lesson pace, and assignment revision, it is plausible that patience is associated with an ongoing and adaptable modification of the teaching methodology and overall approach to language learning (Ramrez Gómez, 2016b). Third-agers attend language classes at an advanced age primarily due to the expectations of a patient teacher (Jaroszevska, 2013b). The study (Derenowski, 2018), which collected data from fifteen later-life learners in order to determine the characteristics of an excellent instructor, suggested that a language instructor working with later-life learners should primarily possess compassion, empathy, and amiability. While empathy and compassion may hinder one's ability to learn a foreign language as individuals mature, friendliness is crucial for creating a secure and pleasant classroom atmosphere (Derenowski, 2018).

Due to the psychological state of third-agers, the instructor is expected to enhance classroom communication and to remove obstacles stemming from the linguistic anxiety prevalent in this age group (Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024a). Older adults may refrain from participating in class discussions due to concerns about potential embarrassment stemming from inaccurate articulation, limited vocabulary, or misconceptions of particular concepts (Jaroszevska, 2009). Third-agers need significant support from their instructors in the classroom (Matusz & Rakowska, 2019). They struggle to learn English at an older age due to low self-esteem and the belief that they cannot learn as well as younger people. A study of Dutch students of English in a third-age language classroom revealed that they were interested in asking questions about their learning. This showed how important teacher help was, and how much the students felt like they owned their learning process (van der Ploeg et al., 2022).

The cognitive functions and sensory abilities of older individuals should also be considered when choosing teaching materials, including a textbook with appropriate typography (clear design, balanced content layout, and subtle color scheme) and high-quality recordings. However, many teachers working with older adults do not have a foreign language pedagogy background (e.g., Jaroszevska, 2013a; Słowik-Krogulec, 2017, 2019; Ciepiewska-Janoschka, 2021). Unfortunately, it is still rare at Polish universities to offer courses that aid teachers in preparing to work with this age group (Jaroszevska, 2013a; Słowik-Krogulec, 2017, 2019; Ciepiewska-Janoschka, 2021).

Teachers working with older people need different attributes and must fulfill many roles (Jaroszevska, 2013a; Grotek, 2018; Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024a). They should function as a partner, aiding older adults in self-improvement and acknowledging their constraints, while helping their students to overcome them. In this context, expertise in social psychology, particularly interpersonal relationships and the psychology of learning and teaching, can be beneficial. A teacher for elders helps them to succeed by enhancing their intellectual and psychological growth. Expertise in social psychology, particularly in interpersonal relationships and the psychology of learning and teaching, can also be beneficial. Studying the older adults' daily environment can

provide insight into their personality, motives, and attitudes towards others, including course participants and the teacher, which can impact the learning process.

A foreign language teacher dealing with older adults should acquaint them with learning strategies and assist them in identifying and comprehending their learning preferences, all in order to consistently encourage learners in their independence. The teacher collaborates with older adults in organizing and controlling the learning and teaching processes of the foreign language. While third-agers are often assumed to possess a high level of cultural competence due to their well-established and stable personalities, the truth is that some older individuals may lack knowledge about other countries and cultures, hold prejudices against other nations, rely on stereotypes, and struggle to critically evaluate cultural influences. One of the main responsibilities of the teacher for older adults is to provide up-to-date cultural and contextual information, highlight the changing nature of cultural conditions, and to promote reflection on cultural diversity in order to cultivate an attitude of openness, acceptance, and tolerance toward others (Jaroszewska, 2013a).

2.5.3. Summary

It is important to consider the needs, motivations, and preferences of late L2 learners when designing educational activities for third-agers, and to adjust the foreign language education accordingly. In earlier stages of education, classification into FL groups is usually based on age (primary and secondary school) or language proficiency (college/university). This is both natural and related to legal regulations in the educational system. Clearly, we cannot fully implement this model in adult education, particularly for late adult students who receive their education in an informal context through their voluntary enrollment in various courses (Jaroszewska, 2013a). The most effective approach would involve considering the motivations for learning, as well as the relevant requirements and interests of senior learners, their psychological and physical capabilities, and their economic situation as the primary factors for categorizing individuals in the education of older adults. We can infer that the learner's age is not the most important factor in determining his/her learning potential, given the diverse ways in which people experience aging and the unique nature of the aging

process for each individual. Instead, we should consider their personality type, shaped over a lifetime of various influences, including social competencies.

Chapter Three: Research project design

The literature review conducted in chapters one and two has demonstrated that older adults constitute a significant and a growing group of students who are interested in learning a foreign language throughout their later years. The increasing prevalence of the lifelong learning concept in Europe, including Poland, enables seniors to participate in a range of language courses. However, for these courses to be successful, they must be tailored to meet the specific needs, abilities, and expectations of this age group. In the current dissertation, multiple facets of language learning in the third age were examined, with the aim of adapting the process to the needs and preferences of later-life language learners.

The methodology section of this dissertation provides a comprehensive explanation of the study design, data collection methods, and analytical methodologies that were utilized in order to investigate the primary research questions. First, the study's objectives and research questions are presented, then the description of the participants, materials, and methodologies, and lastly, the processes for data collection and analysis are discussed.

3.1. Aim of the project and research questions

The subject of the research presented in this dissertation is the teaching and learning of English by Polish seniors, with particular emphasis on the concept of positive aging. Several key factors influenced the choice of this topic from a linguistic and language teaching perspective. Firstly, the author's personal experience of working for several years as an English language teacher for seniors, coupled with interests focused on educational gerontology, directed attention to the issues of teaching foreign languages to third-agers. Observations from working with later-life L2 learners also led to a better understanding of the specificity of teaching this group and the identification of the research gaps in this area.

Another argument for tackling the issue is the lack of a theoretical model of teaching languages to older adults and the lack of educational background in foreign language pedagogy among the Polish teachers. As has already been mentioned, so far no language teaching method has been developed specifically for third-age language

learning that would suit this cohort's needs and preferences. The results of this study will help prepare guidelines regarding the best ways to teach various skills to this age group (e.g. speaking, listening, but also grammar or vocabulary). It will also provide information about the need (or lack of it) for testing and assessment or giving feedback by the teachers.

The next reason for investigating this matter is the scarce number of studies related to teaching languages to older adults and the need to advance the field of applied linguistics in this area. As it has already been stated, Polish foreign language geragogy („glottogeragogika” in Polish) is still only at an emerging stage, which is why it still requires intense research. So far, some studies have shown, that age does not have to be a crucial factor when it comes to learning languages. Taking into consideration beneficial aspects of learning languages in the later years, the project is going to offer results of a needs analysis of later-life learners with regard to language education process. What is more, the majority of previous studies involving older adults learning languages are quantitative. The present study does also rely on quantitative data, but its main foundation is formed by qualitative methods of observation and focus group interviews. The qualitative approach is important for this project, as it allows for the observation of attitudes and gaining insight into the important aspects of the language learning process from the perspective of students in the third-age language classroom. The qualitative research methods chosen for this study should help explain and put into context the quantitative data and provide a rich and comprehensive understanding of the third-agers' language learning process, which is unlikely to have occurred using quantitative research methods alone. As such, it can advance the field by adding more context to the emerging field of foreign language geragogy.

The main research goal of the project was the evaluation of the present status of English teaching methods among Polish older adults and the analysis of various aspects of their language learning process, so that it can be facilitated and adjusted to the third-agers' needs, preferences, and abilities. By conducting a needs analysis among later-life learners in terms of their preferences, needs, and cognitive abilities connected to learning a foreign language, the most suitable techniques and strategies of working with this age group can be identified.

The field of applied linguistics examines the effectiveness of teaching methods, but it has primarily focused on younger learners. The principles developed so far urgently need to be supplemented with data from a more diverse group of learners, reflecting the broader range of language learners that exists today. In order to do so, the most efficient language teaching methods and strategies must be identified. One of the most important specific goals of the project is therefore a multi-faceted needs analysis that would allow for the identification of specific strategies and techniques of working with seniors. The project also addresses the issue of the influence of past language education experiences on the current language learning process as well as barriers to learning that older adults need to face.

As mentioned, the main goal of this dissertation was to evaluate and analyze various aspects of later-life language learning processes, so that language teaching methods and approaches can be facilitated and adjusted to the needs, preferences, and abilities of Polish older adults. The focus was placed specifically on the Polish context, because 1), as chapter 2 has shown, Poland is one of the most rapidly aging societies in Europe, and 2) Polish educational perspectives and ideologies have greatly shifted in recent years, also against the backdrop of the changed social, political, and cultural practices and values. In accordance with the specified empirical goal and the literature review, the following research questions guided the current project – they were grouped into 3 areas of investigation (I label them with Roman numerals, while the specific research questions are numbered consecutively with Arabic numerals):

I. Self-perceived language learning needs and preferences:

1. What are the preferences, needs, and motivations of older adults in terms of language learning?

2. What are their preferences in terms of ways of working and collaboration in the classroom(e.g., individual, group work, pair work etc.)?

a) Which are the easiest and the most difficult language skills in the eyes of later-life learners?

b) Which are the most useful language skills from the perspective of older adults?

II. (Past) influences to help or hinder late life language learning:

3. What helps and what can hinder third-age language learning in the eyes of third-age learners?

4. Do past language education experiences influence the current language learning process and if so, to what extent?

III. Teaching methods and material adaptations for older adults:

5a) Which methods and techniques of teaching are used during language courses for third-agers?

5b) Which methods and techniques of teaching facilitate the third-age language learning process?

6. What preferences do older adults have in terms of teaching materials ?

7 a) Do later-life learners need/want testing and assessment?

7b) What methods or techniques of testing and assessment should be used when working with this age group?

The research questions were closely related to the specific objectives, which were adopted for the project:

- 1) to analyze the current course books specifically aimed at older adults that are available on the market as well as course books for adults that are used by teachers working with third-age learners, but are not specifically designed for the older adult learner in terms of their suitability to this age group;
- 2) to investigate third-agers preferences, needs, and motivations in terms of learning a foreign language;
- 3) to explore what helps and what can hinder third-age language learning in the eyes of third-age learners;
- 4) to see if past language education experiences influences the current language learning process of later-life L2 learners;
- 5) to assess older adults' preferred way of working and collaboration in class,
- 6) to compare which language skills seem to be the most problematic and most useful for third-agers to learn;
- 7) to investigate later-life learners' preferences in terms of teaching materials and methods used by language teachers;
- 8) to examine older adults' attitude towards testing and (self-/peer-)assessment.

3.2. Participants

One hundred and thirty-four students of English took part in the research; they were all aged between 60 and 81 (mean age: 70.5). In this research, older adults were considered to be 60 and more (see sections 1.4.3.2. and 2.4.2.)³⁶. We did not impose an upper age limit to be included in the study. Altogether 120 women took part in the study, and 14 men. They all agreed to having their information processed, and informed written consent was collected. The participants were selected by contacting teachers working at the Universities of Third Age (also the ones who took part in the study conducted by Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024a) and by contacting the Universities of the Third Age directly.

Table 3. The frequencies and percent of the age of participants

	Frequency	Percent
Male	120	89.6
Female	14	10.4
Total	134	100

Table 4. Participants' place of residence

	Frequency	Percent
City with more than 50 000 inhabitants	108	80.6
City up to 50 000 inhabitants	18	13.4
Village	8	6
Total	134	100

³⁶ The retirement age in Poland was officially established by the Pension Act on 1 October 2017. See: <https://www.zus.info.pl/wiek-emerytalny/> (retrieved on November 4, 2023). Additionally, it is noteworthy that the World Health Organization (WHO) designates the age of 60 as the commencement of old age.

Table 5. Age of the participants

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
60	3	2.2	2.2	2.2
61	2	1.5	1.5	3.7
62	2	1.5	1.5	5.2
63	6	4.5	4.5	9.7
64	8	6.0	6.0	15.7
65	11	8.2	8.2	23.9
66	6	4.5	4.5	28.4
67	11	8.2	8.2	36.6
68	15	11.2	11.2	47.8
69	20	14.9	14.9	62.7
70	13	9.7	9.7	72.4
71	10	7.5	7.5	79.9
72	9	6.7	6.7	86.6
73	8	6.0	6.0	92.5
74	4	3.0	3.0	95.5
75	3	2.2	2.2	97.8
76	1	.7	.7	98.5
77	1	.7	.7	99.3
81	1	.7	.7	100
Total	134	100	100	

At the time of testing, all participants had been learning English at Universities of Third Age in Poland in cities that are capitals of 4 provinces in Poland (Warsaw — Masovian Province, Wrocław — Lower Silesian Province, Lublin — Lublin Province, Katowice – Silesian Province, etc.) for 1–3 semesters. Most of them had previously graduated from universities (79%), and 21% had completed secondary education. Various former professions were represented, including teachers, engineers, economists, accountants, managers, and psychologists. They mostly resided in larger cities (inhabitants above 500 000 (81%), or towns up to 50 000 inhabitants (13%), and only six people indicated village as their place of residence. This comes as no surprise, as in Poland later life language learning is still more accessible for people in cities, where Universities of the Third Age are usually based. Details about previous language education experiences of current seniors in Poland are presented in detail in section 2.3.1. of the dissertation.

In terms of ways participants have learned languages apart from their school education, 3 types prevailed: private language school courses (50%), work (22%) and learning at home (on their own – 43%). They were, however, allowed to indicate more than one answer in this question, so the total number does not add up to 100%.

Among the participants, 25 older adult students aged between 63 and 76 years old (mean age: 69.5), four men and 21 women also took part in four focus group interviews. They had all been learning English at a University of the Third Age in one of the Polish cities (with a population of 200 000 inhabitants) for a duration of 1–3 semesters. They all had basic proficiency in English. 19 of them graduated from universities; 6 had secondary education.

3.3. Materials and procedures

The research project designed for this thesis used a mixed-methods approach, which has the potential of providing a comprehensive picture of later-life language learning in Poland (Riazi & Candlin, 2014). Within the preliminary research, after the literature review, a content analysis of course books for teaching English to older adults in Poland was conducted, followed by the qualitative part of the research (20 lesson

observations at UTAs in Poland and four focus group interviews with 25 participants in total). As the last stage, a survey was conducted on the sample of 134 participants.

The approach seemed reasonable also because of the interdisciplinary character of the research and of the later-life language learning in general. According to Brown (2009) and Long (2005), combining a few research tools is recommended when conducting a needs analysis. They also indicated surveys, observations, and interviews as the most suitable to conduct a multi-faceted needs analysis.

To ensure the research undertaken had the highest level of reliability and objectivity, the principle of triangulation was employed in this study. This is a research approach that involves using multiple data gathering techniques to study the same issue (Patton, 1999; Wilczyńska & Michońska-Stadnik, 2010, p. 292). Triangulation was classified into four categories (Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999): (a) technique triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) data source triangulation. The first type of triangulation is known as method triangulation. This form of triangulation, commonly employed in qualitative research, involves the utilization of interviews, observations, and field notes. Investigator triangulation is a research method that requires the involvement of two or more researchers in the same study to gather multiple observations and draw multiple conclusions.

As for theory triangulation, it entails the use of many hypotheses to examine and elucidate evidence. By employing this form of triangulation, many theories or hypotheses might aid the researcher in corroborating or disproving their findings. And finally, data source triangulation is the process of gathering data from several sources, such as individuals, groups, families, and communities, in order to obtain multiple views and validate the data.

In the current study, technique triangulation was chosen to increase the validity of the study. Importantly, according to Johnson (1992), triangulation is valuable, because it decreases bias from observers or interviewers and improves the validity and reliability (accuracy) of the information (p. 146). The researcher mitigates certain issues associated with different qualitative data collection methodologies by gathering data through diverse means. Relying on a single method is considered to be insufficient to offer enough support for the data collected (Gass & Mackey, 2005, p. 181).

The mixed-methods approach was also adopted for the study, because the project aimed at collecting both factual data (e.g., information about the percentage of older adults preferring a certain way of learning) and also to answer questions about experience and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the participant. Such data is usually not amenable to counting or measuring. What is more, according to Dörnyei, „we can gain a better understanding of a complex phenomenon by converging numeric trends from quantitative data and specific details from qualitative data” (2007, p. 45). Apart from that, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can improve the validity of the research as well as the generalization of the results (that is, the external validity) (Plonsky, 2013). As for testing the validity and reliability of the research, pilot testing was conducted both for the survey as well as focus group interview questions. The pilot testing for the interview questions and survey was organized with a group of eight individuals who were students of the researcher. The researcher conducted a focus group interview with them, focusing on the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the interview questions. Feedback from the interview was used to refine and adjust the questions to ensure they effectively captured the desired information. Following the interview, the survey was distributed to the same group of participants. They were instructed to complete the survey independently and provide feedback on the clarity of the questions, the ease of understanding, and any suggestions for improvement. The researcher collected the responses and analyzed them to identify any areas of confusion or ambiguity in the survey questions.

After the pilot testing, some alterations were introduced, especially in the survey and questions for the focus group interview, to make sure that all the questions and instructions are clear and free of bias. The pilot testing of the survey showed that some questions used quite a specialist vocabulary, and it hindered the understanding among the participants. Therefore, it was decided to change some words to more general ones to make sure older adults would understand them correctly. Those changes mostly pertained to question four (about various skills) of the survey³⁷. Additionally, the survey adopted a randomized question order to avoid bias or suggestions. All the research tools — the lesson observations sheet, survey, and focus group interview questions — were

³⁷ For example, the phrase „sprawności językowe” was changed into „działania językowe” to avoid highly specialist vocabulary.

also independently assessed by two other researchers in the field (the supervisors of this project) before the data collection.

Altogether, the following methods were used in this research:

- 1) content analysis of course books used during English courses for older adults at various UTAs;
- 2) lesson observations;
- 3) focus group interviews with older adults;
- 4) a survey for older adults.

As already mentioned, the project was designed with the use of a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative research with quantitative. In order to explore existing issues in foreign language learning and before preparing the surveys, the qualitative part was conducted, starting with lesson observations and followed by focus group interviews. This was an important contribution and springboard to the quantitative research with the use of a survey whose aim was to test the relationship between certain variables involved in or characteristic of third-age language learning.

Prior to the commencement of the research, participants were required to sign an informed consent letter that included detailed information regarding the goal of the study and the management of data. The study received approval from the ethical committee of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (reference number: 1/2020-2021/2).

Each of the mentioned methods is discussed in detail in the subsections below.

3.3.1. Content analysis of course books

Within preliminary research, after the literature review in the field, teaching materials were analyzed in terms of their suitability to the assumed older adults' needs. The assumed needs were taken into consideration based on earlier studies from the area of Polish foreign language geragogy (e.g., Kiljan, 2015; Grotek, 2018; Słowik-Krogulec, 2017, 2019), as well as the results of the previous research conducted by the author of this study among the teachers of foreign languages to Polish seniors (Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024a). It was decided to conduct an analysis of course books used at various UTAs and available on the market. The study then revealed that

course books used during courses for third-agers were simply popular didactic publications that were equally used in high schools and at many universities with younger adults. However, it seems justified to conduct such analyses, because the instructors involved in the research emphasized the need to create their own materials and supplement textbooks that were not thematically and technically adapted to the capabilities and interests of later-life L2 learners. Even though teaching materials, including textbooks, constitute the fundamental linguistic basis of language learning systems and processes (Pfeiffer, 2001; Gębal, 2013), prior studies have not prioritized the examination of textbooks utilized in language courses for older individuals as a means of teaching English. Janowska & Fiema (2017) were the only ones to assess textbooks for teaching Polish as a foreign language in the setting of older adults' education. The analyses undertaken by them provided justification for the need to develop resources for teaching Polish as a foreign language, as the ones the authors analyzed did not respond to late L2 learners' needs – e.g., too small a font, too many items on one page, topics not pertaining to the lives and interests of older adults (Janowska & Fiema, 2017). However, they did seem to effectively support the development of linguistic communicative competence among course participants. Additionally, the authors postulated that teaching materials for late life learners should consider the distinctive conditions and expectations of older learners, particularly in terms of themes and vocabulary units taught at such courses.

From the interviews conducted in other studies by the author with instructors working with third-agers, it emerged that among the textbooks used in courses with seniors, the most popular ones are undoubtedly: 'English File' by Oxford University Press and 'Speak out' by Pearson; mostly at beginner, elementary, or sometimes pre-intermediate levels. As the next step, the author examined the offer of the so-called 'self-study' books for learning English available on the market. In this category, two publications have been released so far: 'Angielski dla seniorów' [English for Seniors] by Edgard Publishing and 'Angielski dla seniora' [English for the Senior Learner] by Lingo. It was decided to analyze these four titles in this project.

The evaluation of teaching materials is mainly done with quantitative tools or evaluation based on predefined criteria, or by elaborate lists of criteria. In the Polish

subject literature, such criteria were formulated by, e.g., Pfeiffer (2001) and Komorowska (2009) and other authors analyzing chosen aspects of course books. The textbook, often being one of the primary tools for both students and teachers, should contain information that the student is able to master, but also serve as a source of motivation, encouraging the learning of a foreign language. Based on a detailed analysis of the physical and psychosocial needs of learners in late adulthood (see Chapter 1 for more details), as well as relying on the classification and set of functions of teaching materials (see Pfeiffer, 2001, p. 161-176), six main criteria for evaluating textbooks for learning foreign languages in the context of older adults' specific needs were identified and adopted. These criteria are as follows:

1) criterion of addressee

The first criterion is the addressee criterion, which determines the purpose of the textbook, thus establishing for which group of learners it has been developed, what is the initial and target level of language proficiency of the learners, and whether the content of the textbook meets the needs or interests of the recipients. It is worth remembering that both the student and the teacher are the recipients of the textbook. Teaching aids should facilitate the teacher in preparing and conducting classes and provide guidance on organizing the teaching process. In this regard, the availability of a methodological guide proves to be very useful.

2) criterion of material coherence

This criterion serves to determine whether other teaching aids have been included in the textbook, such as exercise books, answer keys, recordings transcripts, audio and audiovisual materials, dictionaries, grammatical tables, etc. The coherence criterion also indicates the degree of integration of other materials with the main textbook. The task of auxiliary materials is largely to consolidate and develop the same competencies or skills that the textbook serves to develop, as well as to motivate further learning. In the case of teaching seniors, the completeness and coherence of teaching materials are extremely important. All educational materials intended for older adults, especially textbooks, should include references informing learners where they can access materials to consolidate or expand their knowledge, skills, make up for deficiencies, or where to find explanations for difficult issues, especially when undertaking independent activities. An

important element of a textbook for older adults may be the presence of the author's commentary, instructing on how to effectively use the textbook.

3) typographic criterion

Another guideline is the typographic criterion, determining the structure and graphic design of the textbook. These are the two elements that should significantly distinguish textbooks for teaching foreign languages to seniors. The significant majority of specific conditions for older individuals stem from physiological changes that progress with age, such as declining visual or auditory organ capabilities. Therefore, the structure and graphic design of the textbook, as well as the quality of audiovisual materials, should compensate for these physical limitations. When analyzing the typography of a given textbook, attention should be paid to elements such as: content presentation, including the type of language progression used, the structure of individual chapters, language of instructions, book format, material labeling and layout, paper type, font size, color scheme, and weight, as well as the functions and degree of integration of audiovisual materials with the textbook content.

4) criterion of price

It is not substantive, but usually the purchase of learning materials lies with the course participant, which, in the case of third-agers, does not leave the decision to undertake learning unaffected. It should be taken into consideration by both the publishing houses, as well as course organizers and teachers. The price should be reasonable, but the course book should grant access to, e.g., recordings within the price of the book, so that the older adult does not have to spend an additional amount on them.

5) criterion of purpose and teaching level

The fifth criterion concerns substantive issues (merit-based criterion), thus checking the degree of alignment between the goals set by the textbook and the teaching content of the text book in accordance with curriculum documents, such as the European Framework of Reference for Languages. This pertains to the development of language communicative competence (linguistic, sociolinguistic, sociocultural, intercultural), engaging in language activities, adjusting thematic catalogs, introducing learning strategies, and providing information about the culture and life realities of the target language users.

6) methodological criterion

The last of the adopted criteria determines the way in which the didactic process is organized, shaping its course and often its outcomes as well. When selecting a textbook, attention should be paid to the method it allows to be implemented, the consistency, coherence, adequacy of assumptions, goals, and teaching content. Regardless of the age group targeted by teaching materials, they should employ as many diverse forms and teaching techniques as possible, fostering student activation and teaching individualization. Among the key tasks of a textbook are:

- a) developing learner autonomy, which has a strictly pragmatic dimension, preparing the learner to apply language knowledge and skills acquired during the course outside the classroom, in natural contexts, in situations that are not entirely predictable;
- b) implementing language progression – a spiral arrangement of content seems the most suitable in this regard, as it provides flexibility in deciding the sequence of topics proposed by textbook authors or increasing the frequency of repetitions, thereby reinforcing the concepts learned;
- c) providing means for self-monitoring and self-assessment, prepared based on standardized requirements found, for example, in curriculum documents. Systematic self-assessment and evaluation of one's own skills, especially among older learners, build a sense of language progress and allow for reflection on the material learned or any gaps. Evaluation tools should appear with regularity, for example, after each methodological unit, and in the case of materials intended for older adults, additionally after each subsection.

The chosen course book were analyzed with reference to the above-mentioned criteria provided by CEFR and also with regard to the characteristic features and requirements of the older adults cohort, which had been already described in previous chapters.

3.3.2. Lesson observations

Observation is defined as a research activity that is "a purposeful and planned perception of a fact, phenomenon, or event in a systematic manner, and sometimes also occasional and with the use of various technical means" (Łobocki, 2004, p. 46). Lesson

observations have become a popular way to, first of all, assess the teachers' performance in the classroom and to see what generally happens during lessons (Dignath & Veenman, 2020; Lowe, 2007; Wilcox & Gray, 1996). To better understand how teachers support students' acquisition of knowledge and skills lesson observations may be used as well.

The purpose of the observations in this project was, of course, not to assess the teacher's performance, but to get insight into the teaching methods used and the way they were perceived by older adults. Another goal was to learn more about the teacher – student rapport and its importance, as well as about crucial aspects of classroom management and lesson structure.

Classroom observations, however, are also subject to certain limitations. For example, observations only capture the overt behavior, but not the underlying mental processes (Veenman & van Cleef, 2019). As a result, instructors may have teaching intentions that differ from what is explicitly shown in their teaching conduct, and these intentions cannot be fully understood by observations alone (Dignath van Ewijk et al., 2013). However, empirical evidence reveals the actual instructional practices employed by teachers during their lessons. Therefore, classroom observation appears to be an appropriate approach for observing teachers' performance in terms of various strategies or methods they choose.

A total of twenty lesson observations were carried out between February 2022 and October 2022 at several UTA locations in Poland, such as Kielce and Warsaw. Lesson observations were a good start to the next steps of the research (namely, focus group interviews and surveys), as they allowed for the assessment whether the prepared tools adequately addressed all necessary components of the language learning and teaching process and to ensure that no important concerns arising during the research were overlooked. Additionally, the author of the study had a valuable chance to acquaint herself with the research participants, present her study, and create a rapport prior to conducting interviews and distributing surveys.

The most important aspects of the teaching process that could be observed in the classroom were chosen. It should be mentioned here that the observations were conducted in the post-pandemic year, when a lot of restrictions were still in force in

Poland. That is why, I was the only external person, who was allowed to enter, and I was the only observer of the chosen groups. What is more, the observations were qualitative in nature, based on the notes made during the classes. Nevertheless, a lesson observation sheet was designed to guide the observations and facilitate the process. The observation sheet prepared was based on the literature review in the field of foreign language learning and teaching (Brown, 2006; Harmer, 2007; Scrivener, 2011; Komorowska, 2009) and after the study conducted among teachers working with older adults (Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024). It focused on and was structured around the following eight topics (see Appendix 1 for the observation sheet attached):

1. Lesson planning and later realization of it including stating the lesson objectives and the assessment of the pace of the lesson.
2. Lesson structure including stages of the lesson and the way new material was presented in class.
3. Teaching methods section focused on methods of revising material from previous classes, types of activities used during the class, skills practiced, the use of L1 in the classroom (Polish), types of work in the classroom (individual, group work, pair work), building on the knowledge already mastered by the students, clear and short instructions and the use of games and new technologies.
4. Teacher – student rapport investigated teacher’s feedback, praising students, creating atmosphere of trust and respect, encouraging all students to participate in the lesson.
5. Error correction section dealt with ways of correcting the mistakes, teacher’s reaction to students’ errors and students’ reactions to their own errors;
6. Classroom management part paid attention to issues such as discipline problems, classroom arrangement, individualization of approach towards the students and monitoring students’ work.
7. Learner autonomy section focused on the learner’s autonomy in aspects such as: students’ deciding about certain aspects of the lessons, the use of self-evaluation tools during the class and if the teacher encouraged students to work outside of the classroom.

8. Learners' attitude section included following the teacher's instructions, showing interest in the lesson, using the foreign language, being prepared for class, and being tolerant of others' work styles and pace in the group.

All observations were announced in advance, and none were recorded to avoid adding extra stress to the course participants. They relied mainly on notes taken based on the observation sheet. It is also important to note that the observed lessons were conducted by three different teachers, so it might be assumed that three different teaching styles could be seen. It was generally interesting to see that one group was taught with the use of the Direct Method, where they had a lot of speaking exercises, drills, and question-answer exchanges. Another one, on the other hand, worked very closely with the course book 'English File Elementary' and they basically followed the order of the lessons in the book. However, regardless of the differences in teaching styles, the analysis was conducted holistically with the use of the same observation sheet.

3.3.3. Focus group interviews with older adults

Four focus group interviews were conducted as part of this study and a total of 25 people took part in them.

	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview
Number of participants	7	6	6	6

Table 6. Participants of the focus group interviews

Source: author's own work

The interviews were conducted in May and June 2022. Participants were asked the following nine open-ended questions connected to their language learning in late adulthood:

1. What is your motivation to learn English in your senior years?
2. From your perspective, which language skills are most important in language learning?
3. What do you find most challenging in learning English?

4. What is the role of the teacher in a language course for older adults? Does it differ from the role of a teacher working with other age groups?
5. Do your previous experiences in learning foreign languages affect your current learning?
6. Which forms of work during classes suit you the most? Do you prefer individual or group activities?
7. What materials do you like to work with and how?
8. What form of knowledge testing/ (self-/peer-) assessment during classes do you find most suitable? Is testing stressful for you?
9. What is most important for you in a foreign language course?

However, during the pilot interview that was conducted with eight participants earlier in the year (2022), it could be noticed that some of them posed difficulty to older adults. They were not sure what certain formulations meant and after posing some questions I had to specify what I meant or simply provide examples to guide the participants and help them understand better. Therefore, after the pilot interview, it was decided to add supplementary phrases to the questions, so that they can be used during the interview (by the interviewer) to facilitate the understanding and answering among older adults. The corrected version (for the interviewer) is presented below:

1. What made you decide to learn English in your senior years?
2. From your perspective, which language skills (writing, speaking, reading, listening) are most important in language learning?
3. What do you find most challenging in learning English?
4. What is the role of the teacher in a language course for older adults? Does it differ from the role of a teacher working with other age groups (children, youth, younger adults)?
5. Do your previous experiences in learning foreign languages affect your current learning?
6. Which forms of work during classes suit you the most? (individual work, pairs, groups). Do you prefer individual or group activities?
7. What materials do you like to work with and how? (textbooks, songs, films, audio materials, interactive materials - apps, games, etc.)

8. What form of knowledge testing/ (self-/peer) assessment during classes do you find most suitable? Is testing stressful for you?
9. What is most important for you in a foreign language course? (e.g., interaction with other seniors, learning new things, the teacher's approach, etc.).

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. During the interviews, the author of this dissertation took notes, adding comments related to older adults reactions to questions and their general behavior. The decision was made to refrain from recording interviews due to the fact that the same participants were observed and filled out the questionnaire. Students seemed somewhat nervous about the presence of a stranger during the classroom observations, so they could behave unnaturally, feel annoyed, stressed, and this could affect the answers they provided during the interviews.

An advantage of employing focus group methodology is that, similar to individual interviews, it empowers participants to contribute to the direction of the research (Bennett, 2002; George & Bennett, 2005). However, what sets focus groups apart from one-on-one interviews, is their capacity to bring to light discrepancies, inconsistencies, distinct experiences, perspectives, and attitudes expressed by various members within the group (Bennett, 2002; Hyden & Burlow, 2003). This facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. What is more, Morgan described focus groups as a research method that gathers data through group discussions about a topic chosen by the researcher (1996, p. 130).

Focus groups have been utilized in various scientific fields, including sociology and gerontology. This was a consequence of, among other things, an appreciation of the fact that "an important theme that reappears in many of these uses of focus groups is their ability to 'give a voice' to marginalized groups" (Morgan, 1996, p. 133). Therefore, focus group interviews seem to be the right choice for conducting research among older adults in Poland. The interviews enable researchers to examine phenomena that are not readily observable in classroom settings, such as learners' self-reported perceptions or attitudes (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Furthermore, due to the interactive nature of interviews, researchers have the ability to extract supplementary information in cases where the first responses are ambiguous, lacking in detail, irrelevant, or insufficiently precise (Gruszczyński, 2001, as cited in Wysocka, 2019). One additional benefit of

interviews is that they can be utilized to collect information from learners who are not at ease when other methods are employed. As Wilczyńska & Michońska-Stadnik (2010, p.172) noticed, while replying to open-ended questions, "the respondent essentially decides not only on the specificity and scope of the given answer but also on its form." In the study, participants provided answers of varying lengths, emphasizing different aspects of the issues raised in the questions.

On the other hand, the potential disadvantages of interviews should also be considered. For instance, interviews might be influenced by factors such as selective recall, self-deception, distorted perception, respondent's memory loss, and subjectivity in the researcher's data collection and interpretation (Hall & Rist, 1999, p. 297- 298). Additionally, it might happen that some answers will not be related to the issues within the scope of research questions (Gruszczyński, 2001, as cited in Wysocka, 2019). However, it should be borne in mind that information, which initially may seem irrelevant, can turn out to be helpful in the holistic analysis of the interview responses in general.

3.3.4. Questionnaires for older adults

While the word *questionnaire* is commonly known, giving an exact explanation of its meaning might be challenging. It is important to note that the phrase itself is somewhat inaccurate, as numerous questionnaires do not actually include any, or a significant number of, genuine questions that conclude with a question mark.

For the purpose of the current project, two most frequently accepted definitions in the literature of the field were chosen. According to Brown, "Questionnaires are any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers." (2001, p. 6) In turn, in the understanding of Wilczyńska & Michońska-Stadnik (2010, p. 279), „a questionnaire is a commonly used method of collecting data that involves a written questionnaire with open, semi-open, and/or closed questions". Questionnaires are particularly useful in research that involves a large number of participants and focuses on their attitudes and opinions. Dörnyei (2010, p. 5) highlighted that surveys have the potential to provide three distinct categories of

data: factual, behavioral, and attitudinal. What is more, the use of this method for gathering data holds significant value, particularly when investigating perspectives, sentiments, and inclinations.

It was decided to include two types of questions in the questionnaire adopted in the current study: multiple-answer and open-ended questions, to gain a deeper insight into the participants' responses. Multiple-answer questions invited respondents to check all that apply rather than forcing a single-choice, as the focus on the study was to find out older adults' preferences. The open-ended questions allowed greater insights into their experience of learning a language in late adulthood and gave respondents the freedom and space to answer in as much detail as they liked. The closed-ended questions are a bit easier to code as they provide straightforward categories for coding and help avoid bias. As Dörnyei pointed out (2010, p. 33), "closed-ended questions are more „reader-friendly” as the response options can be rather short". On the other hand, open-ended questions are items that do not provide response options for the respondent to pick from. Instead, they provide vacant space, such as dotted lines, for the respondent to fill in. Thanks to the fact that they allow the respondents to share their views and experiences, they „provide a greater richness than fully quantitative data" (Dörnyei, 2010, p. 36).

The aspects that were planned to be investigated as part of the survey comprised demographic data items (pertaining to age, sex, place of residence, education, occupation), followed by questions concerning what languages older adults had learned in their lives and the methods with which they had learned them. Then, there were 14 multiple-answer questions concerning older adults' expectations, preferred homework, the way they wished to receive feedback, attitudes towards testing, what they felt helps and what disturbs third-age learning, what materials were used in their language course, and whether they preferred to learn in group or individually. The last group of questions were open-ended questions. This section contained questions about various skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing, pronunciation, vocabulary) and third-agers' perspective on them in terms of their difficulty and usefulness. Altogether, there were 30 questions, and it took approximately half an hour to 40 minutes for older adults to fill out the questionnaires (the full questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1).

Regarding the length of questionnaires, the subject literature also provides guidelines for researchers: a questionnaire should not exceed 4-6 pages, and it should take up to 30 minutes to fill it out (Dörnyei (2010, p. 12-13). The survey designed for the current research did exceed the recommended number of pages. However, it has to be borne in mind that the respondents were later-life learners, so in order to make it comfortable for them to work with the questionnaire, the font was enlarged. What is more, there were additional spaces in the text, so that it was comfortable for them to write down their answers.

The questionnaire was anonymous, and in terms of layout, it followed the recommended order (Dörnyei, 2010):

1. the title „Nauka języków obcych w wieku senioralnym – perspektywa uczących się” [Learning foreign languages in late adulthood- the learners’ perspective], which should „provide the reader with initial orientation, and to activate relevant background knowledge and content expectations” (Dörnyei, p. 18);
2. greeting and instructions for the task;
3. questionnaire items (including both open-ended and multiple-choice questions);
4. a „thank you”;

After constructing the questionnaire, it was pilot tested with the help of the group of eight older adults. The pilot testing helped to get a more accurate estimation of the time needed for filling out the questionnaire as well as the general structure, comprehensibility of instructions, and understanding of questions. A couple of questions were also rephrased after the pilot testing to facilitate their full understanding. The data was collected between January 2023 and May 2023 with the use of a questionnaire that was distributed both online (via Google Forms) and in person. In-person research took place in two Polish cities: Kielce (around 200 000 inhabitants) and Lublin (around 340 000 inhabitants). Altogether, 53 respondents filled out the pen and paper printed questionnaire. The responses from the other 81 respondents were collected online by sending out the link to the questionnaire to this cohort’s teachers in the professional network of the author of the study. The teachers had taken part in another research study conducted by the same research group at an earlier stage (Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024).

3.4. Data analysis

3.4.1. Qualitative data

At this point, I would like to remind once again that most data in this project was analyzed in a qualitative way, and so the qualitative methods are prevailing. This is because the main focus of the project was on the student's perspective, and its aim was to show students' point of view, thoughts, motivations, preferences, and feelings. Such research utilizes an inductive method of interference, with the main objective being to understand the phenomena under investigation and interpret them (Palka, 2006, p. 54-55; Łobodzki, 2007, p. 92-93; Jaroszevska, 2010, p. 260). As for the qualitative data, it was mainly collected with the use of lesson observations and focus-group interviews; however, the questionnaire that was distributed online and in person was constructed in such a way, that it also allowed for gathering qualitative data from the participants.

The data collected in the course book analyses were analyzed according to the criteria explained in section 3.3.1.

Based on the qualitative characteristics of the data from the questionnaires and interviews, a method known as reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) was chosen for the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). The same was decided for the data from lesson observations (taking into account the criteria described in section 3.3.2.). According to Braun and Clarke (2020, 2021), the purpose of reflexive TA is to investigate patterns of meaning that are present in a number of different examples (Braun & Clarke, 2020, 2021). In particular, this inductive method is well-suited for addressing concerns involving the experiences, perspectives, and perceptions of individuals, which ultimately results in themes that present their opinions. Reflexive thematic analysis was conducted with the use of the MAXQDA software. The textual data was imported into the software and facilitated coding and interpretation of the dataset. Through repeated engagement with the data, the themes were developed and refined, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' perspectives.

Thematic Analysis is not a single approach that adheres to a set of predetermined procedures; rather, it can be understood as a collection of different methodologies. This means there are ways that emphasize the inherent subjectivity in

interpreting data, such as reflexive approaches, which highlight the importance of coding accuracy and reliability, and there are approaches that prioritize coding accuracy and reliability. Here's a revised version of the sentence, broken down into shorter, more manageable sentences:

Under the umbrella of reflexive thematic analysis (TA), themes are identified by shared meanings that revolve around a central organizing concept. These themes emerge across cases through a recursive process. This process consists of six phases, each providing a systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data. The phases include becoming familiar with the data, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing and refining themes, giving shape and identity to themes, and finally, composing the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 39).

In the context of this research to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the interview data, these stages were meticulously followed in the order presented below:

1. The initial stage involved immersing in the data by reading and re-reading the interview notes. This immersion allowed for a deep understanding of the content and context, facilitating the identification of preliminary patterns and potential themes.
2. In the second phase, the data was systematically coded to highlight significant features. Codes were generated to capture the essence of the raw data and to begin organizing it into meaningful groups. This step was crucial for breaking down the data into manageable and interpretable segments.
3. Once initial codes were established, the next step was to collate these codes into potential themes. This involved examining the codes to identify patterns and broader themes that captured the data's overarching meanings and issues. Themes were developed based on their relevance and recurrence within the data.
4. The themes identified were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data. This process included checking the coherence of each theme and ensuring that they worked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset. Themes were refined by merging, splitting, or discarding them based on their alignment with the research objectives.

5. In the fifth stage, themes were further refined to define the specificity of each theme and determine the narrative each theme tells.
6. The final stage involved gathering together the themes into a cohesive narrative to produce the analysis.

3.4.2. Quantitative data

A quantitative research approach is highly beneficial in enhancing our comprehension of second language acquisition (King & Mackey, 2016). It was chosen for this study because of the greater objectivity and generalizability of the results and the possibility to use statistical analysis to provide precise and reliable results that can identify patterns, relationships, and trends in language acquisition. The decision was also made to use quantitative analysis only as a supportive method, because of the size of the sample. One hundred and thirty-four respondents of the survey was quite a small sample to perform more complex statistical analyses. The findings from the questionnaire consist of quantitative data that were handled using MS Excel and displayed using descriptive statistics, specifically in the form of percentages.

In this research, the following steps were taken to perform the statistical analysis:

1. Data collection: the survey was prepared and the responses were collected, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. The data was collected in two ways: a) in person by visiting UTAs in Poland, introducing the research and then distributing the printed surveys, and b) online, with the use of Google Forms that was sent out to older adults with the help of English teachers from the professional network of the author of the study.
2. Data preparation: the responses were then exported to a spreadsheet format (MS Excel). Data cleaning was also done by removing incomplete responses and removing double entries and other incorrectly recorded responses.
3. Coding: coding of the responses was performed by converting the multiple-choice responses into a binary format where each option was represented as a separate variable (column).
4. Calculating descriptive statistics: frequency and percentages were calculated for each option selected in the survey, and the results were interpreted.

5. Visualization of the data: the data was visualized with the use of bar charts or tables.
6. Data interpretation: The meaning and implications of the descriptive statistics were interpreted and summarized (to be presented in Chapter 4).

Chapter Four: Results and discussion

This chapter demonstrates the outcomes of the different sub-studies conducted as part of this project. Starting with the course book analysis as the preliminary study of the project, the results of the analysis are described according to pre-formulated criteria specified in the previous chapter. Then, the findings of the following research are discussed: twenty lesson observations, focus-group interviews conducted with later-life L2 learners, and the survey for third-agers, which was the last stage of the research. The discussion summarizing the results of all the studies is a separate section of this chapter, in which I synthesize the exploratory nature of the conducted research and point to the direction of further potential, in-depth analyses of the addressed issues (e.g., by applying Principal Component Analysis to interpret the questionnaire data). I also present the practical implications, meaning conclusions from my own research that are worth considering by educators/instructors in the field of foreign language teaching to seniors, as well as the limitations of the presented research.

4.1. Course book analysis

The analyzed course books are, according to their publishers, all at A1—A2 level (see Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEFR). Level A1 (beginner) works on the basis of the premise that learners have the capacity to understand and utilize basic sentences and words that are designed to fulfill certain requests and specific purposes. Most notably, they can inquire about and provide responses regarding personal information, including someone's place of residence, acquaintances, and possessions. They are able to effectively and effortlessly engage in communication with other people, provided that their interlocutors are prepared to offer their assistance and speak at a slower pace. Then, level A2 learners can understand terms and expressions related to urgent issues, such as fundamental personal and family information, shopping, local geography, and matters related to their professional lives (e.g., in relation to their jobs). Students are proficient in basic communication as part of uncomplicated tasks, including the direct exchange of information on typical, everyday

subjects. They should effectively convey aspects of their personal history, present surroundings, and challenges related to their requirements.³⁸

The table below presents the assumed skills of language learners at A1 and A2 levels according to CEFR in terms of skills and grammar points covered at the mentioned levels:

³⁸ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>

Students at A1 level can:	Students at A2 level can:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduce themselves simply and use basic greetings • tell where they are from and give a basic description of the place • talk simply about their family and colleagues, describing their appearance and personalities • discuss clothing at a basic level and ask salesclerks simple questions about it • talk about favorite foods and make simple orders • talk about daily activities and arrange meetings with friends and colleagues • describe current weather conditions and suggest activities according to the weather forecast • talk in general terms about their health and describe common medical symptoms to a doctor • describe the location of their home and give simple directions • talk about their hobbies and interests and make plans for fun activities with friends or colleagues • complete basic transactions at a hotel, including checking-in and checking-out • discuss common products, make basic purchases and return faulty items. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate coworkers' performance in the workplace • relate events from their past, including weekend activities and interesting stories • describe their past life, giving details about important milestones • entertain someone in their home or visit a friend or colleague in their home. • discuss vacation plans and tell friends and colleagues about their vacation afterward • talk about the natural world and travels to see animals and natural areas in their country • talk about movies that they like and choose a movie to see with friends • discuss clothing and what kind of clothes they like to wear • engage in basic communication at work, including attending meetings on familiar topics • describe an accident or injury, get medical help from a doctor and fill a prescription for medicine • engage in basic business socializing, welcoming guests and attending networking events • understand and make basic business proposals in your area of expertise • talk about and explain the rules of games.
60-80 hours of instruction	100-150 hours of instruction

<p>Grammar points at A1 level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjectives: common and demonstrative • Adverbs of frequency • Comparatives and superlatives • Going to • How much/how many and very common uncountable nouns • I'd like • Imperatives (+/-) • Intensifiers - very basic • Modals: can/can't/could/couldn't • Past simple of "to be" • Past Simple • Possessive adjectives • Possessive „s" • Prepositions, common Prepositions of place Prepositions of time, including in/on/at • Present continuous • Present simple • Pronouns: simple, personal • Questions • There is/are • To be, including question+negatives • Verb + ing: like/hate/love 	<p>Grammar points at A2 level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjectives – comparative, – use of than and definite article • Adjectives – superlative – use of definite article • Adverbial phrases of time, place and frequency – including word order • Adverbs of frequency • Articles – with countable and uncountable nouns • Countables and Uncountables: much/many • Future Time (will and going to) • Gerunds • Going to • Imperatives • Modals – can/could, have to, should • Past continuous • Past simple • Phrasal verbs – common • Possessives – use of 's, s' • Prepositional phrases (place, time and movement) • Prepositions of time: on/in/at • Present continuous • Present continuous for future • Present perfect • Questions • Verb + ing/infinitive: like/ want-would like -Wh-questions • Zero and 1st conditional
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Table 7. The assumed skills of language learners at A1 and A2 levels according to CEFR

Source: EAQUALS_British_Council_Core_Curriculum_April 2011

A textbook meeting the needs of older individuals is still rare on the publishing market in Poland. Therefore, a language teacher conducting classes with Polish older adults faces the problem of choosing suitable teaching materials tailored to the needs of this group of learners, in the absence of textbooks specifically targeted at older adults.

This pivots the need for a careful analysis of the textbooks that are available as to their suitability to be used in later-life language classes.

After previous interviews conducted among language teachers working with older adults (Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas, 2024), it was decided to analyze two popular self-study books used in the context of older adult language classes and another two course books, which seem to be the most popular ones at courses for older adults organized by various UTAs in Poland, judging by many UTAs using them. The above-mentioned books were *English File* by Oxford University Press and *Speak out* by Pearson (elementary and beginner levels). As the next step, the so-called 'self-study' books for learning English available on the market were examined. In this category, two publications have been released so far: *Angielski dla seniorów* [English for Seniors] by Edgard Publishing and *Angielski dla seniora* [English for the Senior Learner] by Lingo. The main findings of the analysis are presented in the table (Table 7) below:

Criteria	Angielski dla seniora „Lingo”	Angielski dla seniorów „Edgard”	English File Elementary	Speakout Elementary
1. Criterion of addressee / target audience	For older adults, no age specified, no level specified, Self-study book, vocabulary topics seem to be adjusted to seniors (UTA, bank, sanatorium, sending e-mail, nordic walking, health issues); the grammar, however, is more advanced than A1-A2, it includes conditionals 2, 3, question tags, translation tasks, not enough grammar exercises to precise all the grammar points	For older adults (age 50+), A1-A2, also a Self-study book; English phonetics introduction, not that much grammar, grammar better suited to the level, more exercises, dialogues that can be listened to, there is also translation at the end of the book and key, a lot of useful vocabulary and , czy wiesz, że/ do you know that-cultural information, topics typical at elementary level e.g. introducing yourself, countries, telling the time, appearance, personality, family, house, lifestyles, bank account, e-mails, online shopping, hobby, hotels, sanatorium, holidays, physical activity, cooking, doctors and illnesses.	Adults (age not specified ,therefore 18+), level A1-A2 (as provided on the cover)	Older teenagers, young adults and adults (not specified age), level A1-A2 In terms of vocabulary topics typical for elementary level: introductions, countries and nationalities, daily routine, jobs, travelling, appearance, films, plans, body, houses, rooms, places in town, food, restaurant, Grammar points: suitable for a1-a2 however quite a lot of grammar points so it might be hard for older adults to keep up

2. Criterion of material coherence	A book with audio, no auto-evaluation option, but key is included	A book with audio mp3, no auto-evaluation, key and translation of dialogues included at the end of the book	Various options, but mostly a students book, additional online practice lub workbook, teacher's book, audio separately, DVD with the book with additional videos	DVD accompanying the course book, audio separately, there are many additional components but they have to be purchased separately
3 Typographic criterion	Bigger font, slower pace of recordings, printed on matte paper that does not reflect light, clear, simple layout, few colors, few pictures, few exercises on one page. It is mostly black and white, not really encouraging to work with	Bigger font, simple graphic design (in black, blue and white), not too many pictures, some space to write down notes and add your own vocabulary items	Standard font, glossy paper, many tasks on one page, quite colorful with a lot of pictures, the book is not very intuitive and easy to follow to it suits for classroom practice which is guided by the teacher	Standard font, glossy paper, a lot of tasks on one page, each unit has one main color
4. Criterion of price	25-30 PLN	25-35 PLN	Around 150 PLN	100-150 PLN

5. Criterion of purpose and teaching level	The level is not clearly stated	Level A1-A2, more or less it covers structures and vocabulary for this level, however the dialogues at the beginning of each unit include a lot of complex grammar structures, which can be discouraging for older adults and may affect the pace of the lesson in general	The book is well- suited for elementary level, it does include grammar and vocal exercises, but there is a lot of pronunciation practice, speaking exercises, listening and reading, revisions and cultural elements, it also included practical English part covering English in various situations, every two units there is revision with some auto-evaluation questions at the end	The book is well- suited for elementary level, it does include grammar and vocal exercises, but there is a lot of pronunciation practice, speaking exercises, listening and reading, revisions and cultural elements (BBC videos introducing e.g. famous tv shows), revision after each unit
6 Methodological criterion	Limited variety of tasks, work techniques, primarily focusing on grammar and vocabulary exercises, optional listening to dialogues from the chapters, lack of speaking exercises, limited self-assessment opportunities.	Limited variety of tasks, mostly grammar and vocabulary oriented, no auto-evaluation options, no revisions, no speaking tasks,	Big variety of tasks, developing various skills, focus on pronunciation (for older adults it's quite often problematic), regular self-evaluation	Diverse tasks focusing on all skills, a lot of speaking exercises, auto-evaluation after each unit

Table 8. Results of the course book analysis

As the analysis of *Angielski dla Seniora* [English for a senior learner] has shown, even though the course book is targeted at older adults (although no age is specified), it did not meet many of the criteria stipulated to provide an optimal learning

experience for older adults. The topics were chosen to relate to the interests of older adults; however, by including mostly topics such as health, UTAs, and nordic walking, they can reproduce a stereotypical image of older adults in the society. When it comes to grammar points, it covers a very wide range of topics, which even reach up to B2 level, while not providing a lot of exercises. Grammar is mostly explained in an explicit way with rules followed by examples and a Polish translation³⁹. The scarcity of exercises might be difficult for older adults, who need a lot of repetition and practicing new material (Kilian, 2015). Likewise, there is an absence of unit revisions or self-evaluation tasks, which would be very useful for older adults and it would promote their autonomy in language learning (Ramirez Gómez, 2016a; Jaroszevska, 2013a). Specific adjustments seem to have been made, however, in terms of graphic design, and this has mostly resulted in very simple text, a specific type of paper (which is matte), and a bigger than usual font size. The MP3s accompanying the book include dialogues from each unit, and the pace of the recordings is much slower, which again might be helpful for older adults, with hearing acuity problems being prevalent. The limited number of images and amount of visual material may have a detrimental impact on the authenticity of the content provided. No speaking tasks are included either, which is a major flaw as many older adults are learning English mostly for oral communication. The book is deficient in components that enable students to learn a language efficiently and effectively. Nevertheless, located at the conclusion of the textbook, there is an answer key for the exercises, which, to a limited degree, can assist learners in developing their learning autonomy by offering self-assessment opportunities.

Another self-study book, *Angielski dla seniorów* [English for seniors], according to the publisher, is devoted to older adults 50+, at A1–A2 levels. The content of the book seems to be well-suited to the suggested levels, both in terms of the vocabulary range and grammar points. Similarly to the previous book, grammar is typically taught explicitly by presenting rules, followed by illustrative examples and their corresponding translations into Polish. Generally grammar and vocabulary exercises prevail, but there are also pronunciation exercises, and the book contains „Did you know that...?”

³⁹ Explicit grammar instruction is an approach where grammatical rules are directly explained to learners in a clear, systematic manner. In this method, the teacher presents specific grammar rules, provides examples of how those rules are applied, and often follows this with practice exercises.

sections presenting cultural information, which may help develop intercultural competence. MP3s (with slower recording pace) and dialogues from all units accompany the book. The audio materials included on the CD that comes with the book provide students with the opportunity to develop listening comprehension skills and improve pronunciation and intonation. Unfortunately, no speaking exercises are included, which is crucial for developing the speaking skills of older adults (Grotek, 2018). At the end, the book also provides a key to the exercises and a translation (in Polish) of all dialogues from the book. This may help develop learner's autonomy, which is important for older adults. Independent learning is supported by the extensive grammatical commentary present in the book, as well as the large number of examples illustrating specific language structures. When it comes to the graphic design of the book, it is rather simple, with blue, black, and white prevailing. Additionally, only a few elements are placed on one page, and the font is enlarged similarly to the other self-study book analyzed in this section.

The third course book under investigation *English File Elementary* has been proven to be the most popular at UTAs' English courses for older adults, according to the results of an earlier interview with instructors⁴⁰ teaching third-agers and also according to the UTAs websites and programs available. Although the book is targeted at adults in general (not specifically older adults), it suits older adults needs to some extent when taking into account their preferences (Jaroszewska, 2013a; Grotek, 2018; Słowik-Krogulec, 2019). The book is targeted at the A1–A2 levels, according to the publisher, and it covers grammar aspects suited to this level. It also includes a wide range of vocabulary topics typical for elementary levels, but presented in an interesting and encouraging way. The course book is accompanied by either an online practice or workbook, audio, DVDs, a teacher's book with additional exercises, and an audio transcript at the end of the book. Each component has to be purchased separately, though, which might be quite challenging as the course book itself is quite expensive. The textbook series addresses current topics presented in authentic everyday situations, and also includes cultural information, thus meeting the communicative needs of adult learners. The audiovisual materials supplement the book well. The course objectives

⁴⁰ See: Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn, M. & Niewczas, S. (2024)

align with both communicative approach principles and CEFR recommendations. The textbook allows learners to develop their language communicative competence. Contrary to the two previous titles, in this course book grammar points are usually presented in an implicit way (meaning acquiring grammar by becoming familiar with situational scenes rather than overt explanation of rules)⁴¹, and new structures are introduced using colorful tables or diagrams. In the book, there are sections for practicing pronunciation and intonation. Through the use of a wide range of exercises employing various forms and techniques, the textbook also facilitates the implementation of all language skills. The textbook includes review sections and self-assessment exercises encouraging deeper reflection on the learning/teaching process. One drawback of the textbook is its graphic style, which is diverse and includes several images and drawings on one page. However, each page contains many elements, the font size is small, and the glossy paper may cause light reflection.

The last course book that has been analyzed is another popular and frequently used at various courses for adults, *Speakout Elementary*. The book is targeted at older teenagers, young adults, and adults (age is not specified) at levels A1–A2, and the content of the book is well-suited to the proposed target group. The vocabulary presented in the book covers the typical topics at the elementary level, and they are introduced in an interesting way. There are, however, quite a lot of grammar points, which for older adults might create too fast a pace and could be confusing. Grammar is mostly presented in an implicit way with the use of various scenes and dialogues. The course book is accompanied by a workbook, audio materials, DVDs, a teacher's book including extra exercises, and an audio transcript at the end of the book. However, it is important to note that each individual component must be purchased separately. This may be a considerable challenge, particularly due to the high cost of the course book itself. The textbook series caters to the communicative demands of adult learners by addressing current themes in everyday circumstances they may encounter in daily life. It incorporates cultural material to provide a genuine learning experience. The audiovisual resources are properly aligned with the content of the course book. A flaw of the textbook is its varied graphic style, which encompasses multiple images and

⁴¹ More about explicit and implicit teaching of grammar can be found in Nazari, N. (2013).

aesthetically pleasing illustrations. Nevertheless, every page contains numerous features, the font size is small, and the glossy material may cause light reflection.

After evaluating the specific conditions and needs of older adults on the basis of the subject literature, as well as the criteria outlined in the chapter, it was found that none of the textbooks available on the publishing market fully meets all the requirements for teaching English to this cohort. Each textbook, in addition to certain indisputable benefits, has notable flaws. Out of the four titles discussed, *English File* seems to be not only the most popular at Polish UTA English classes, but also the most suitable to be used in the third age language learning classroom, as it is undoubtedly better than the self-study books. It could also be noticed that the most commonly used course books at UTA courses vary in terms of the grammar instruction. As mentioned the self-study books mostly use explicit grammar instruction whereas the other two used mostly implicit grammar instruction. Both implicit and explicit grammar instruction offer distinct advantages, making it important to tailor the choice of method to the needs of older adult learners. Explicit grammar instruction provides clear, structured explanations of grammatical rules, which can be especially beneficial for seniors who may prefer a more systematic approach to learning (Nazari, 2013; Stratton, 2023). It allows for conscious reflection on language use and may suit learners who value understanding the "why" behind language rules. On the other hand, implicit grammar instruction, where learners acquire grammatical structures naturally through exposure and use, can be advantageous in fostering practical communication skills without overwhelming learners with technical terminology (van der Ploeg et al., 2023). For older adults, a balanced approach that incorporates both methods may be most effective, depending on their learning preferences, cognitive abilities, and previous language learning experiences. Adapting the instructional method to the specific needs of the group can enhance both engagement and retention.

However, the investigation was principally undertaken to evaluate the market positions that are available and determine their relevance for later-life language learners. The performed analyses support the need to develop instructional materials for English language training that consider the specific circumstances and expectations, especially thematic ones, of older learners. Without a doubt, the creation of new

textbooks would greatly enhance the efficacy, enjoyment, and fulfillment of learning a foreign language for older individuals.

4.2. Lesson observations

4.2.1. Lesson planning and lesson objectives

The most important aspect of lesson planning and realization is the presentation of lesson objectives at the beginning and then coming back to them at the end of the class. It seems very important, especially when working with older adults, as such a clear structure provides clarity to both the teacher and the students about what is expected to be achieved by the end of the lesson in accordance with Adult Learning Theory— Andragogy (Knowles, 1984). It also keeps the lesson on track and it helps students understand the relevance of the lesson content to their learning goals and overall curriculum (Farrell, 2002). Sadly, out of 20 observed lessons, none actually included stating the lesson objectives at the beginning and then coming back to them at the end of the lesson.

Another aspect was the pace of lessons, which in most cases was accurate and not too fast for the participants. Students managed to keep up with the pace and they did not get lost during transition periods between the exercises. The teachers usually guided the transitions. However, during six observed lessons, the teacher tended to give longer instruction and kept rather a fast pace of lessons, which meant that the participants frequently felt lost about what they should be doing at certain points of the lesson. All those lessons were taught by one teacher, so it might also be connected to their teaching style; however, it clearly caused discomfort among the students.

When it comes to the materials used, in all cases lessons were built around the course book (*English File* or *Direct English*). Additionally, teachers used whiteboards and the dictation method, and, in a few cases, students also completed workbook exercises during the lessons. A lot of question and answer exchanges took place (lots of speaking in each case), drilling, and the immediate use of new vocabulary by building sentences were implemented. This is an important observation in the context of the skills that older adults want to focus on, which in previous research conducted so far was mostly speaking (Grotek, 2018; Klimczak-Pawlak & Kossakowska-Pisarek, 2018).

Group activities and frequent speaking opportunities can keep students motivated and engaged. This is crucial in maintaining interest and participation in the learning process. The immediate application of knowledge and the dynamic nature of group work can make lessons more enjoyable and less monotonous. However, one of the teachers generally assigned tasks to be completed individually, and then the group checked these together. The latter did not appear to be preferred by the students, judging from their reaction and their unwillingness to volunteer when checking the tasks. They clearly felt better to work together as a group and to have a chance to speak many times, even if it meant that they were corrected – either by the teacher or other group members. The observed reluctance towards individual tasks and preference for group work may suggest that these learners might find interactive methods more stimulating and effective. Traditional, individual-focused tasks might feel isolating and less engaging, potentially leading to decreased motivation.

4.2.2. Lesson structure

The second section of the lesson observation sheet focused on the structure of the lesson, including the way new material is presented, whether it is revised and practiced during the lesson, the balance between teacher talking time and student talking time, and, finally, if homework is assigned at the end of the class. The general observation was that ten lessons conducted by one of the teachers tended to follow a clear structure (repeated during almost each class), albeit that no specific lesson goals were formulated at the start (see previous section): homework check, warm-up (a short initial stage of the lesson preparing students for the main part), presentation of the new material, practice of the new material, working with course books, assigning homework. Structures of lessons conducted by two other teachers (another ten observations) closely followed the order of the material from the book. Usually a short warm-up was included in the form of revision of material from the previous lessons or a short speaking exercise based on the already known material. According to Harmer (2007), the warm-up stage can help create a positive atmosphere and wake up students mentally, thereby preparing them for the more demanding tasks ahead. Scrivener (2011) also emphasized

that warm-up activities can build rapport and help break the ice, especially important at the beginning of a lesson or course.

It was interesting to observe that a lot of time during the lessons was devoted to practice speaking, even with groups at quite a low level of proficiency. A positive remark should also be addressed to the way new material was presented. During most observations (17 out of 20), the answers were elicited, and a lot of examples of new structures were first presented in context, then written on the board and discussed/ explained together with the group. There was also time to practice the new material in the form of drills, first repeated based on the teacher's input and examples and then used to formulate questions and ask other students. The new structures were also revised and summarized at the end of the lesson. According to Scrivener (2011), „Teacher Talking Time (TTT) is the amount of time teachers talk within the lesson” (p. 425). Generally, when the teacher talks, it is to give instructions, explanations, to tell a story, a joke, or even to share information about a special event. These activities can be a useful way to provide input to students, and the optimal TTT is said to be no higher than 30% of the lesson (Raze & Farahian, 2012). In most cases, the balance between teacher talking time and student talking time (STT) was kept with the TTT being lower than around 30%, although in some cases the TTT was the prevailing one reaching up to 40-45% of the lesson, mostly because of the number of clarification questions from the students.

After each class that was observed, teachers assigned homework. The forms of homework tasks varied: sometimes it was translating a few questions or sentences from Polish into English, writing sentences or questions with new structures, completing a couple of exercises from the workbook, listening to some recording, practicing reading the text, writing sentences or questions with new words, revising for a short test or revising new vocabulary. It is important to note that only during some of the lessons, the material was summarized at the end, and the students had a feeling that they actually mastered a new structure. It should be included more often, as it could be observed that students found it rewarding when they were able to use the new structure at the end of the class. It was also interesting to observe that almost all of the students regularly completed their homework tasks and remembered to check it as well as reminded the

teacher to check homework. They also eagerly shared some doubts they had while completing.

The observations highlighted several important aspects of lesson structure, including the presentation and practice of the new material, the balance between teacher talking time and student talking time, and the assignment of homework. These strategies align with the best practices in adult education, emphasizing clarity, engagement, and reinforcement to support positive learning outcomes. Therefore, as an important recommendation regarding the structure of the lesson with later-life L2 learners the following aspects of the instructor's work style may be highlighted:

- consistent presentation and summarizing lesson objectives,
- maintaining a balanced pace and providing clear instructions,
- ensuring a mix of TTT and STT to maximize student engagement and practice,
- regularly assigning and reviewing varied homework tasks to reinforce learning,
- summarizing new material at the end of each lesson to enhance students' sense of achievement.

4.2.3. Teaching methods

Within the teaching methods, the lesson observation sheet included aspects such as ways of revising material from previous classes, types of activities used during the class, skills practiced, the use of Polish in the classroom, types of work formats in the classroom (individual, group work, pair work), building on the knowledge already mastered by the students, clear and short instructions, and the use of games and new technologies. After observing 20 lessons, it could be stated that all the lessons used mostly a communicative approach, which aims at enhancing students' language proficiency through interactive activities and communication (Harmer, 2007). One teacher specialized in the Direct Method, or the Natural Approach (see Da Silva et al., 2024), so the lessons were conducted mostly in English, including English-medium grammar explanation, feedback, and instructions. Mistakes were corrected as they

happened in class, and the teacher reinforced the correct usage of the language with praise.

When it comes to aspects observed in this category, revision of material from previous lessons was mostly done in the form of asking and answering questions. Questions were mainly asked by the teacher and they would focus on new vocabulary items or grammar points from previous classes. During a couple of lessons, *dictogloss*⁴² was also used at the beginning to revise and consolidate what had already been learned. An important observation was also the fact that the revision of material from previous lessons took as long as 30 minutes of class time in some cases (so around 1/3 of the lesson). This seems reasonable, as older adults often underline – and so does the subject literature – that they need a lot of revisions (Ramírez Gómez, 2016a; Grotek, 2018). Throughout the observed lessons, it could be noticed that all skills received attention: speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation — not all of them were included in one lesson. In the majority of the observed classes (17 out of 20), the focus was on speaking, and one or two other skills were practiced. Among the activities used during classes were listening activities (through the use of short videos, podcasts, dialogues from course books), reading short texts followed by comprehension questions, writing questions and answers or sentences with new vocabulary and grammar, drills for practicing new structures together with the teacher, and during three observed lessons translating short texts or their fragments.

When it comes to the use of L1 (Polish), it was intriguing to notice that it was quite limited and most stages of the lesson were conducted in English. Only in some cases the teacher turned to Polish, e.g., when explaining grammar rules. It was interesting, however, that the students reacted very positively to the prevailing use of the English language, and they seemed to be comfortable with the lack of Polish in class. They were able to use clarification questions when having doubts or consulted with other group members whether they understood the instruction correctly. However, as some researchers pointed out, some third-agers may also feel the need to use more Polish in class (e.g., Słowik-Krogulec, 2017). This may help them lower their language anxiety levels and therefore L1 use should be allowed in the classroom if need be.

⁴² More about dictogloss can be found here: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/knowing-subject/d-h/dictogloss>

Three types of interactions dominated class activities: whole-class activities organized and led by the teacher, individual work that was mostly employed when completing exercises in course books/workbooks, and in pair-work when practicing speaking skills. No games were used during the observed lessons and very few new technologies were implemented. It might be assumed that incorporating some interactive activities or games could be interesting for the later-life learners, as some of them mentioned using the *Duolingo* application at home between the lessons and calling their family on Skype or Messenger, so they seem to be familiar with the use of popular applications. Furthermore, it is important to remember that fifty years ago, when present-day older adults were in high school, language teaching methods often revolved around traditional approaches like grammar-translation method, where the focus was on rote memorization of vocabulary and grammatical rules (Seretny, 2006). Classes were typically teacher-centered, with little emphasis on communication or real-life application of language skills. Students spent a significant amount of time translating texts and completing written exercises⁴³. In contrast, modern language teaching methods prioritize communicative competence and student-centered learning (Harmer, 2007). There is a greater emphasis on engaging students in authentic language use through activities such as role-play, discussions, and real-life scenarios. Technology plays a significant role in language education today, with the integration of multimedia resources, interactive software, and online platforms for language practice and immersion (Haleem et al., 2022). This means that older adults' previous language learning experiences vary significantly from the current methods of teaching and learning languages. However, it should also be borne in mind that seniors can also be afraid of learning with the use of modern teaching methods (Słowik-Krogulec, 2017; Grotek, 2018). Hence, the teachers could consider some more conservative teaching methods and combine them with, e.g., communicative methods to create a better learning environment for this age group.

⁴³ For more details see: Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn, M. & Niewczas, S. (2024).

4.2.4. Teacher – student rapport

Section four of the observation sheet paid special attention to the following aspects: the teacher's feedback, praising students, creating a classroom atmosphere of trust and respect, and encouraging all students to participate in the lesson. It additionally checked whether the teacher was friendly and open towards the group. The results generally showed that the role of the teacher in the teaching process is crucial. During fourteen observed lessons, the atmosphere was generally very good, the teachers used only positive feedback, and they were open and kind towards the students. They praised the students a lot saying, e.g., „good”, „great”, „well done”, „very nice”, and they encouraged everybody to participate in class. This resulted in a relaxed atmosphere and active participation on the part of the students. As was observed from their body language and gestures (e.g., their relaxed posture, smiles, eye contact, and relaxed facial expressions), they clearly did not feel stressed, even if they did not know the answer to the questions. It was also later confirmed in the focus group interview.

Establishing a nice and serene classroom atmosphere has a substantial impact on enhancing the self-assurance of older students and inspiring them to actively engage in the educational journey (Derenowski, 2019). Moreover, the presence of a nice atmosphere and teacher support plays a vital role in enhancing the willingness of older students to engage in communication during classroom instruction (Borkowska, 2020). In the classroom, older adults require substantial assistance from their teachers (Matusz & Rakowska, 2019). The difficulties they face in learning English at an advanced age mostly stem from their diminished self-confidence and the conviction that they are incapable of learning as effectively as younger individuals. During another six lessons (conducted by the third teacher), however, the atmosphere was very school-like. The teacher was strict and very keen on discipline. The students were praised only occasionally, and it could be seen from their posture and body language (e.g., tone of voice, tightened hands, fidgeting) that they were more stressed and less willing to participate or speak during the lessons. This comes as no surprise, as previous research in the field underlined the crucial role of the teacher in shaping older adults' learning experiences (e.g., Słowik-Krogulec, 2017).

What is more, the teacher's attitude may also have a profound effect on older adults' and shape their general language learning experience. The fear of speaking in a foreign language may partly be related to experiences of humiliating correction of mistakes by the teacher and an excessive focus on accuracy (Grotek & Kiljańska-Przybyło, 2012). For older adult learners, the frustration associated with the lack of linguistic means to express complex thoughts, the necessity of simplifying statements, and resorting to formulations which may not be fully correct can be discouraging (Posiadała, 2017). Teachers might therefore strive to create a welcoming and supportive classroom atmosphere. As observed during the classes discussed here, this can be achieved by using positive feedback, being approachable, and showing genuine interest in students' progress. Foreign language instructors may also encourage all students to participate in lessons. This can involve asking open-ended questions, creating group activities, and providing opportunities for every student to speak. Instructors should recognize and adapt to the unique needs and preferences of older adult learners. This includes being sensitive to their pace of learning and any anxieties they might have about the classroom environment. By incorporating these teaching strategies, educators can significantly enhance the learning experiences of older adults, promoting active participation, reducing anxiety, and fostering a positive and inclusive classroom environment.

4.2.5. Error correction

The next aspect observed during the lessons was error correction and students' reactions to it. Specifically, ways of correcting the mistakes, teachers' reactions to errors, and students' reactions to errors were observed. In general, again the error correction techniques depended a lot on the teacher, but it could be seen that the prevailing techniques were:

- repeating the sentence by the teacher with raising intonation to let the students know they should reconsider the grammar of the sentence (e.g., sentence: „He want to go the cinema?“),

- explicitly addressing and eliciting the correct answer from the student or with the help from the group (e.g., „Yesterday I go to the theater, not go but..?“),
- the teacher’s facial expression (The “surprise, frown, raised eyebrow” technique suggests that something is wrong with the sentence.)
- immediate correction by the teacher providing the correct form of the word.

The last one received the worst reaction from the group, as it was done in a rather strict manner, depriving the student a chance of self-correction and causing stress and unwillingness to error-correction in general and speaking in the first place. In most cases, however, error correction was conducted in a pleasant and stress-free way, sometimes with a use of jokes, providing a funny example, and most importantly, allowing the student for self-correction and reflection. Incorrect sentences were never put on the board to discuss, as it could be embarrassing for the students who made the mistake, but sometimes the corrected sentences were written on the board so that the right form could be consolidated.

In general, students’ reactions to mistakes made during lessons were good; they usually admitted that they were not sure if the sentence was correct. Peer correction appeared during all the observed lessons, and, generally, the older adult learners’ reaction to it was also mostly positive. Overall, students reacted well to correction, often acknowledging their uncertainty and positively receiving peer correction.

These findings emphasize the importance of a supportive and considerate approach to error correction to foster a conducive learning atmosphere. It could also be remembered that error correction may influence the language anxiety, so it might be done in a proper way not to discourage older adults from learning and progressing.

4.2.6. Classroom and group management

The sixth section of the observation sheet analyzed classroom management. In an EFL class, effective classroom management is crucial for creating a conducive learning environment (e.g., Scrivener, 2012; Yasin et al., 2022). Issues such as discipline, classroom management, individual approach towards the students, and monitoring students' work were noticed. The lessons showed little problem with

discipline, as there were only occasional issues, for example when ladies argued about the right seat or students discussed homework aloud without paying attention to the teacher. Generally, it could be said that in all observed lessons, teachers managed the group very well and made adequate use of classroom space and whiteboards. One teacher took quite a school-like approach and often silenced the students, saying, „Ladies, please stop talking!” which did not seem to be working well, especially given that at the time the students tried to consult their homework tasks with other group members.

During all of the classes, students sat in semicircle with the teacher sitting or standing in the middle. Maintaining the semi-circle arrangement can promote interaction and ensure that all students can see the instructor and the board (Scrivener, 2011). This arrangement also helps in creating a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. It should also be mentioned that teachers used the whiteboard effectively, writing a lot and supporting the students, who often complained about the discrepancy between English spelling and pronunciation (an example of a student request to write the words on the board: „Could you write it on the board, as I often have difficulties with spelling?”).

In terms of individualization of approach towards the students, teachers frequently asked about students’ individual experiences, and what other words they would like to learn when discussing particular topics. The teachers also closely monitored students’ work asking whether they needed any further explanation. Students seemed to appreciate the fact that their instructors were ready to answer all their questions and explain certain grammar points a few times, if needed („Oh, you are so patients with all our questions”- admitted one of the students).

To conclude, it is worth bearing in mind that such an attitude of always being eager to help and explain things is desirable in the approach of the teachers. This practice reassures students that their understanding is a priority and encourages them to seek help without hesitation.

4.2.7. Learner's autonomy

According to Confessore & Park (2004), one of the most important skills for adult education is the ability to cultivate autonomous learning in order to continue independent learning practice in an efficient manner. Therefore, a separate section of the lesson observation sheet focused on the learner's autonomy, examining especially aspects such as students' deciding about certain aspects of the lessons, the use of self-evaluation tools during the class, and whether the teacher encouraged students to work outside of the classroom.

The results showed that, generally, students do not decide about the topics of classes themselves; however, at times, they are given a choice of the types of tasks for revision or tests. In terms of tools supporting the autonomy used during the classes, not much was observed and it mostly pertained to checklists and can-do statements (I can/I can't) in revision sections of course books. This way of repeating or self-evaluating was present in 14 out of 20 observed lessons. The teachers, however, encouraged students to work on their English also between the lessons by assigning homework and recommending some Youtube channels or podcasts that they could listen to.

The observations revealed significant room for improvement in fostering the learner's autonomy. Third-age learners often have specific interests and practical needs, of which they are mostly aware (Duay & Bryan, 2008; Grotek, 2018). Autonomy allows them to tailor their learning experiences to these personal goals, making the learning process more relevant and engaging. Additionally, autonomous learning fosters a sense of control and accomplishment. For older adults, who might feel anxious about returning to education, this can significantly boost their confidence (Jaroszewska, 2009; Matusz & Rakowska, 2019). Finally, autonomy equips later-life learners with the skills to continue learning beyond the classroom. This is crucial as it aligns with the concept of lifelong learning, which is essential for adapting to new challenges and staying mentally active (Findsen & Formosa, 2012). Some strategies that the teachers could use to foster later-life L2 learners' autonomy are as follows:

- allowing students to have a say in selecting topics or themes for lessons,
- introducing self-assessment,

- regularly providing students with a list of resources such as websites, applications, podcasts, and books that they can explore independently,
- using positive reinforcement to acknowledge students' progress and efforts.

4.2.8. Learners' attitude

The last aspect of the language learning and teaching process that was observed was the students' attitude, which included following the teacher's instructions, showing an interest in the lesson, using the foreign language voluntarily, coming to class prepared, and being tolerant of others' working styles and pace in the group. It could be stated that students were really engaged in each lesson, eagerly took part in all activities, and always came prepared to class, i.e., they had completed the homework tasks and had memorized new vocabulary, so they probably had spent some additional time at home to practice the new material. They showed interest in what the teacher said and more generally in the topics of classes and did their best to use as much English as possible during class time („Oh, this is so useful— I was thinking about ordering something online the other day”— a comment from one of the students when discussing online shopping on E-bay). In terms of their tolerance towards others' pace, sometimes they got quite impatient and immediately answered for other people. It could be seen both judging from their facial expression, gestures, or comments (e.g., „Oh, come on, we already talked about it”, „Please, speed up, this is very easy”). They also showed little patience to people who needed more time to complete given tasks, reporting them being ready to move on and expressing surprise that some people were still working. However, in general, the atmosphere between group members was really good: they were kind to one another and willing to help. They also behaved respectfully towards the teacher.

4.2.9. Summary

To sum up, the results of the classroom observations shed light on many aspects of later-life language learning. What is more, their results seem to be in line with previous findings that also highlighted the importance of enhancing learner motivation and cognition with the assistance of tailored third-age learning support (Pfenninger & 158

Polz, 2018; Schiller et al., 2020). It was interesting to observe that the third-agers were really engaged in learning and eagerly participated in various tasks, but the engagement of the teacher was equally high. The teacher adjusted the pace of lessons, but also the teaching methods and materials, so that they became more suitable for their older adult learners. What could be modified is the lack of goal setting strategies or even making older adults aware of the importance of setting reasonable goals in language learning. In the literature (see Rose et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2018), this aspect is quite often emphasized as crucial in later-life language learning as a factor supporting the autonomy. Schiller & Dorner (2021) claimed that older adult learners' autonomy is influenced to a great extent by how actively they set learning goals and how engaged they are in learning, because of their interest in the culture of the target language (p. 348). Additionally, learner's autonomy may also be influenced (even if indirectly) by the level of motivation to learn a language (Liu, 2015), so this aspect should also be taken into account when working with older adults.

4.3. Focus group interviews

Table 9 presents the descriptive statistics of the dataset for the group interviews in terms of the total amount of the participants, their sex, age and education level.

Dataset	Frequency	Percentage
Total number of participants	25	100%
Female	21	84%
Male	4	16%
Age range	63-76	-
Mean age	69.5	-
Educational level:		
a) university graduates	19	76%
b) secondary education	6	24%

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of the focus group interviews' participants

The reflexive thematic analysis employed in this study enabled a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted experiences of older adults in foreign language learning. Upon the analysis of their answers to questions 1-9, eight main themes were identified, and the results are presented in the subsections below.

4.3.1. Motivation to learn a language in late adulthood and join a language course

Motivation turned out to be one of the most important aspects of later-life language learning, and three dominating factors influencing motivation may be distinguished in this study.

First of all, having family abroad seemed to be a major motivating factor. Polish older adults want to feel comfortable when traveling to their family abroad and also to be able to communicate with their grandchildren, who very often do not speak Polish well.

Traveling abroad (on holiday, on organized trips) was another motivating factor for the respondents. Some of their answers were, “I quite often travel to various places, so I want to be able to communicate in hotels and at airports”⁴⁴, „I travel abroad 2-3 times a year and I need English to feel secure and comfortable”, „When I go on holiday, I want to be able to use English at hotels or when I go shopping”. We have to remember that since Poland became a EU member in 2004, it has become so much easier to travel within Europe, and therefore students might be focused on learning a language that they find useful for communication at airports, hotels, and shops. Their goals might be learning phrases useful for traveling, not mastering the language to a high proficiency level. Some of the respondents admitted: „ I do not expect to be fluent in English as I am aware it can be difficult at my age - I just want to be able to communicate when I travel”, „I’m not going to take any English exams now; I’d rather focus on being able to speak when I arrive at a hotel or at the airport.”

Finally, older adults also indicated having a lot of free time after they retired as their main motivating factor to learn English. Some of their voices were: „ I have much more free time now, so I can finally focus on my hobbies, including language learning”,

⁴⁴ All answers to the questions were translated by the author of this study into English as the interviews were conducted in Polish.

„I have a lot of free time, so I can participate in language courses at UTA”, „I decided to focus on learning English as I don't have to work anymore and have more free time”. It could be easily noticed that seniors' motivation is mostly intrinsic, as they often engage in learning a language because of the inherent satisfaction from the activity rather than the desire for a reward or specific outcome.

Polish later-life L2 learners were also asked what was important for them in a language learning course and why they enrolled in a language course in late adulthood. Among the answers, four main aspects were identified: getting to know other seniors, interesting ways of spending free time, self-development, and learning a language to travel abroad. Older adults underlined that it was crucial for them to have the possibility to get to know and stay in touch with other older adults, make new friends and share experiences. Some of them said, „ I'm glad that at the UTA I got to know a lot of interesting people in my age range, with whom I meet also after classes”, „I made a lot of new friends here, who have similar interests and problems”, „It's important that I have a chance to share my problems and doubts with other seniors who understand me well”. Participants' responses seemed to generally be in line with previous research (e.g., Grotek, 2017; Słowik-Krogulec, 2019), indicating that third-agers pay a lot of attention to their rapport with the teacher, but the social aspect was prevailing and they wanted to find new friends when enrolling in a language course in late adulthood.

4.3.2. Language skills

Out of 25 respondents, 22 (88%) indicated speaking and listening as the most important skills they wanted to focus on, and six (24%) pointed out that they deemed all skills to be important to develop during learning.

Speaking is often described by the researchers of other studies as the most important for older adults, and communicative competence should be among the goals of later-life language learning (Kacetyl & Klimova, 2021). As for the motivations that were named to focus on specific language skills in English, the following responses appeared, „I have family abroad, so I need all skills for communication during trips”, „Listening and speaking facilitate contact with other people, moving around the city, and handling various matters”, „Speaking is extremely difficult for me because I am

usually a shy person, but at the same time it is the most important for me”, „Currently I am learning the language for myself, so I mainly focus on communication skills with other people, and I mainly want to practice speaking”, „Speaking and listening are the most important from my perspective, because these are necessary when traveling abroad”, „Speaking - the possibility of using the language in practice”.

The practical motivations—such as family communication, travel, and overcoming personal challenges—further illustrate why these skills are prioritized. This also aligns with other research findings where older adults prioritized these skills due to their immediate practical applications in a daily communication (Klimczak-Pawlak & Kossakowska-Pisarek, 2018; Grotek, 2018; Gabryś-Barker, 2018). Hence, other skills like reading and writing were not chosen by many participants, because later-life learners do not perceive them as important or useful from their perspective. They mostly use language for spoken communication, so they do not want to focus that much on writing or reading.

4.3.3. Challenges in learning English in late adulthood

Among the participants’ responses, three main areas could be identified in terms of challenges they face when learning English: speaking, listening and learning and remembering the vocabulary. There might be a couple of reasons for their choices. Older adults may have difficulty perceiving and producing the sounds of English accurately due to changes in sensory acuity issues that often accompany aging (Jaroszewska, 2013a). This can make it harder for them to distinguish between similar sounds in English and to produce them correctly. Third-agers may have had limited exposure to English-speaking environments throughout their lives, especially if they grew up in non-English-speaking countries or communities. This lack of exposure can lead to less familiarity with English pronunciation and intonation patterns, making it harder to understand spoken English and to produce it accurately. One of the seniors admitted, „I wish I could have more contact with English between the lessons; otherwise, it’s difficult to understand spoken language, especially when they speak so quickly”. Some of them also pointed out their hearing deficits as hindering their learning process and making it harder for them to understand what people are saying in

English e.g., „When I hear somebody speaking with an accent I haven't heard before I immediately become nervous and cannot really focus on what is actually being said”. Some participants also underlined that the difference between English spelling and pronunciation was difficult for them, because it was hard for them to read new words as well as understand when they listened to somebody speaking English: „The difference between the written and the spoken language is extremely difficult for me and I find it problematic to remember the way words are pronounced because there are so many exceptions to the rules”; „You write words differently and you say them differently, so very often I am not sure what somebody said and it makes me feel confused”. Quite a few participants underlined the problem with speaking caused by their language barrier that they have had for years, e.g., „Speaking is the biggest challenge for me, because for many years I have had a language barrier caused mainly by focusing too much on grammatical correctness and being afraid of making a mistake. And when it does happen, I completely freeze up and can't continue speaking”; „I am generally shy, and when I have to speak English I usually suffer from a language barrier, and I am very often unable to finish the sentence I have started”.

Finally, older adults often may face problems with learning and remembering vocabulary. Many participants underlined that they forgot new words very quickly, and they quite often had a problem recalling vocabulary items they were sure they had learned before: "Even though my memory isn't what it used to be, I try to learn new English words every day. I use Duolingo regularly”; „Some words still slip away from me, but I don't give up. Every day, I repeat them in different contexts to remember them better.”; „I find it problematic to remember new words and their pronunciation, I feel a constant need to go over the words already known, as I think I forget their meaning very quickly.”

In general, there seem to be similarities between the attitudes towards listening skills expressed by the participants in this study and those described by Słowik (2016) and Słowik-Krogulec (2019), where the author claimed that listening was usually the most challenging for this group of learners, lessons lacked listening comprehension practice, and older adults were unaware of many listening strategies that could facilitate their learning. Therefore, students would definitely benefit from listening strategies

training during classes and more listening exercises prepared by the teacher specifically for this age group.

4.3.4. Role of the teacher

The role of the teacher in language courses for older adults was also investigated to examine whether it markedly differs from teacher roles in classes aimed at young adults, teenagers or children. As most older adults (20 out of 25; 80%), who took part in the interview underlined, the teacher's role cannot be overrated. According to them: „The role of the lecturer is very important; their approach to learners as well as the teaching methods can either encourage further participation or discourage it”, „The role of the teacher is vital; they create the atmosphere in the classroom, guide us and motivate us to learn and improve our English”. At the same time, five older adults also admitted that the role of their teacher is more demanding than when working with younger people as „young people have no complexes about their speaking and usually do not suffer that much from a language barrier like we do”. They would like their teacher to motivate and praise them regularly „our teacher should first of all motivate us to work and praise, as we— older people— like being praised”. An interesting response that goes beyond the most popular themes, but is equally important, was the statement of one of the interviewees: „The most important thing is good interaction with the teacher”. This confirms the conclusions drawn from earlier research on the importance of the teacher's role in teaching foreign languages to older adults (Grotek, 2017; Słowik-Krogulec, 2019; Borkowska, 2022).

A few participants (six; 25%) also underlined patience as a highly desired feature of their teachers. The main reason why seniors attended language sessions at an advanced age was the presence of a patient teacher, as stated by Jaroszewska (2013b). These focus group outcomes seem to be consistent with other research investigating the role of the teacher in later life language learning. According to Kilian (2015), for one, “the role of teachers and educators is maximizing the benefits of learning in late adulthood by adjusting the methods of teaching to the needs and abilities of older adults” (p. 182; my own translation).

It is also stressed that the teacher has a responsibility to identify and meet the educational needs of older adults by stimulating and exploring their potential (Kawula,

1996). To achieve this goal, an educator might use their existing knowledge and communication skills. What is more, teachers could consider depending on students' willingness to accept others, value their active engagement in educational activities, and trust them. Finally, it would be advisable to respect older learners' privacy and avoid any personal biases or prejudices towards the group members.

4.3.5. Previous experiences in learning a foreign language

Two main perspectives on prior experiences in foreign language learning emerged from the focus group interviews with older adults. Eight participants (32%) felt that their previous language experiences could help them learn a foreign language now, e.g., „My previous language learning experiences help me, because I know how to learn and revise vocabulary”, „I know how I prefer to learn, so it's easier now for me to organize my language learning process”, „I have always had problems with pronunciation, so now when I learn English, I know what to focus on”. On the contrary, 13 participants (52%) claimed that their previous language learning experiences felt more like a burden to them. As noticed before, they used to learn in a completely different classroom model, which was mostly based on grammar translation methods (see Seretny, 2006). Therefore, it might be hard for them now to find their place in a communicative model of language teaching and learning. It may seem strange to them now that they are asked to speak from the very start of the course. What is more, they often still have an old-fashioned image of a language teacher (strict, in the center of the learning process), which is very often a barrier to current language learning. The majority of later-life learners who participate in foreign language courses offered by the Universities of the Third Age (UTAs) draw upon the knowledge and skills acquired throughout their primary and secondary education. While the grammar-translation method may appear old-fashioned, it proves challenging to eradicate it in language courses for older adults at lower levels. What is more, it seems advisable then that the teachers consider incorporating some elements of the grammar-translation method to decrease language anxiety, especially at the beginning of the language course. Adults, in contrast to children or teenagers, learn deliberately and use grammar rules consciously (Knowles et al., 1984). As inquisitive individuals, they often translate every word at the

beginning of a course. Therefore, it is worth introducing elements of didactic translation, which has recently experienced a revival in the latest foreign language teaching methodology (see, e.g., Lipińska & Seretny, 2006; Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn, 2020). Didactic translation is an important component of teaching seniors, as it is a natural form of communication. One of the benefits of using translation in the learning process is that it improves learning and makes it more effective by capitalizing on learners' innate inclination to transfer new information into their mother tongue (Dunin-Dudkowska, 2016). Additionally, it serves as a source of motivation for older individuals to persist in their language learning endeavors, as they may promptly assess their proficiency by translating various materials, such as advertising, menus, song lyrics, and other similar content.

4.3.6. Ways of working in the classroom

When it comes to the ways of working in the classroom, it could be seen that older adults preferred group work; however, individual work followed in their responses. Around 65 % admitted their strong preference for group classes, e.g., „I prefer group classes; 1:1 classes with a lecturer are more demanding for me. I had the opportunity to participate in individual classes twice, but they were too stressful for me and I resigned”. Individual classes can be intense and demanding as the sole focus of the teacher's attention is on one student, which can create pressure and anxiety, particularly if the student is self-conscious or fears judgment. Participants also underlined contact with other group members when working within a group. Seven people claimed that they „Can exchange ideas and views on different topics”, „help when other group members have difficulties understanding the task”, or „give advice how to approach the task in the best way”. This preference might be influenced by the social aspect of group learning, which can provide motivation, a sense of community, and opportunities for social interaction, all of which are important for mental well-being in later life (Pikhart & Klimova, 2020).

Generally, the only problem with group and pair work the older adults noted was the noise and inability or difficulty to understand when a lot of people were talking at once, which was mentioned by six people (24%). Most of them (16 out of 25 people;

64%) also admitted they quite liked working together with the teacher when „The teacher simply asked a question and appointed a person to answer, and the rest of us could listen and see if the answer was correct, and at the same time think what we could say”.

Some other students seemed to be in favor of individual classes, and they said: „I think that only individual contact with a teacher would be effective for my situation. I consider it the most efficient way of learning”; „I am open to working in pairs or groups, but sometimes it can be so stressful that it directly prevents me from benefiting from such classes”; „Honestly, if I could afford it, I would definitely seek help from a native speaker.”. It seems that some later-life learners believe individual instruction allows the teacher to tailor lessons specifically to the student's pace, learning style, and specific needs, which can be particularly beneficial for those learners who might require more focused guidance.

Eight participants also underlined the financial aspect of choosing a particular option claiming that individual classes are far too expensive for them and they would not be able to afford such a course.

4.3.7. Teaching materials

The participants seem to have clear preferences when it comes to learning and teaching materials for English language learning. Course books, songs, and audio and video materials emerged as the most favored resources. 15 participants (60%) admitted that course books make the learning well-organized and easier. Some of their answers were: „I really like working with English File (our course book), as it covers lots of interesting topics and the texts are also up to date”; „Our course book helps me organize my learning, I can use it for homework, repeating vocabulary and grammar exercises”; „I like the fact that thanks to our course book I have all the materials and notes in one place”. Additionally, worksheets prepared by teachers were highlighted as beneficial tools for learning. Worksheets may also be at times used by teachers to supplement the course book to answer the need of older adults, to repeat the material more often or to provide more exercises on a certain topic or a grammar point.

These findings underscore the importance of incorporating diverse and engaging materials into English language instruction for third-agers, catering to their preferences and enhancing their learning experience. Some of the participants' responses were, „I prefer working with interactive materials the most, although the textbook gives me a sense of organization; I know what happened in the classes - it's easy for me to repeat the material and I have everything in one place.”; „I really like learning English with the Duolingo app; I use it every day and I really see the progress”; „My favorite materials are songs and films, I like it when we listen to songs and then try to translate them with the teacher or search for some grammar items in the lyrics but I also like watching short videos in English; our teacher sometimes shows us 3-4 minute clips and then we discuss them”.

In general, looking at the answers it might be suggested that older adults appreciate the sense of organization that the course book gives them, but they also enjoy working with authentic materials like songs or videos.

4.3.8. Testing and assessment

Later-life learners' attitudes towards testing and knowledge assessment were also explored. In terms of responses, seniors were quite divided whether they wanted to be tested on their progress during classes or not. Among the respondents, there were many proponents of testing (12 participants; 45%): "Yes, but only when I assess myself and can see what I still don't know or haven't fully mastered"; "Testing is OK"; "Testing allows for assessing the level and progress of course participants"; "Testing provides insight into the results of work during classes"; "Testing is necessary, it allows for checking knowledge, comparing my performance against the group, what else I need to review", as well as opponents of testing (13 participants; 55%): "Testing is always stressful for me; I believe seniors should not be evaluated in this way during classes"; "It's not necessary; it only causes unnecessary stress"; "I learn for myself, I don't take exams, so I see no reason to stress me out with tests"; "Testing seniors is unnecessary; I come here voluntarily not to take an exam”.

Interestingly, the topic of testing elicited diverse opinions also among teachers, as was shown in the study conducted by Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas (2024), but

other researchers also discussed the topic of older adult learners' unwillingness to take tests (e.g., Słowik-Krogulec, 2019). Some teachers expressed willingness to use various forms of testing, including written and oral tests, quizzes, group projects, and in-class revisions, while others opposed formal testing, citing concerns about its potential to demotivate seniors and the stress associated with traditional tests and grades. Instead, they favored informal methods of assessing progress and knowledge that are more enjoyable for seniors.

These findings highlighted the importance of considering seniors' preferences and comfort levels when implementing assessment strategies in adult education programs. The results are similar to the ones presented by Słowik-Krogulec (2019), who claimed that the assessment system for older adult learners should be reconsidered to reduce stress and become more conducive to student's success. Additionally, greater emphasis should be placed on tailoring lesson content to meet the specific needs of the learners and promote their engagement.

4.3.9. Summary

To conclude, the results of the interviews discussed in section 4.3. revealed that older adults are primarily motivated to learn English to connect with their family abroad, enhance their travel experiences, and as meaningful ways to spend their free time post-retirement. From the data collected, it can be seen (in accordance with the literature) that older adults' motivations and expectations are crucial when it comes to foreign language learning. It is even more important, because older adults do not need to take any exams in English or get grades, so their instrumental motivation is usually lower. They mostly have intrinsic motivation at a higher level. The current study confirmed that seniors learn language mostly for communication with others when traveling or with family abroad, which was suggested in previous research (Garcia, 2017; Słowik-Krogulec, 2020).

Later-life L2 learners prioritize speaking and listening skills, recognizing the practical need for effective communication. However, they seem to face significant challenges in speaking, listening, and vocabulary retention due to age-related factors (pertaining to, among other things, sensory acuity problems) and lack of consistent

exposure. Addressing these challenges through tailored teaching strategies and increased practice opportunities can enhance third-agers' language learning experience.

Participants also emphasized the critical role of the teacher in creating a supportive learning environment and the challenges posed by transitioning from traditional to modern teaching methods. Preferences for group work, interactive learning materials, and mixed feelings about testing were highlighted, along with the importance of social connections and self-development opportunities inherently present in language courses. These emphasize the need for tailored teaching approaches and materials that cater to the unique needs of senior learners.

Incorporating all the above-mentioned results into the design and implementation of foreign language programs for third-agers can create a more enriching, personalized, and effective learning experience. It not only empowers older learners to embrace language acquisition, but also underscores the value of lifelong learning as a pillar of active aging.

4.4. Questionnaire for older adults

4.4.1. Language learning experience

This section includes the discussion of the later-life learners' language learning experience, including aspects such as languages the participants had learned earlier in life in the school settings, languages they had learned in adulthood, and the way they learned those languages — whether on their own, at work, as part of a language course, etc.

The survey results indicated the distribution of languages learned by older adults during their school education (number of participants, $n = 134$). The data revealed the following percentages for each language:

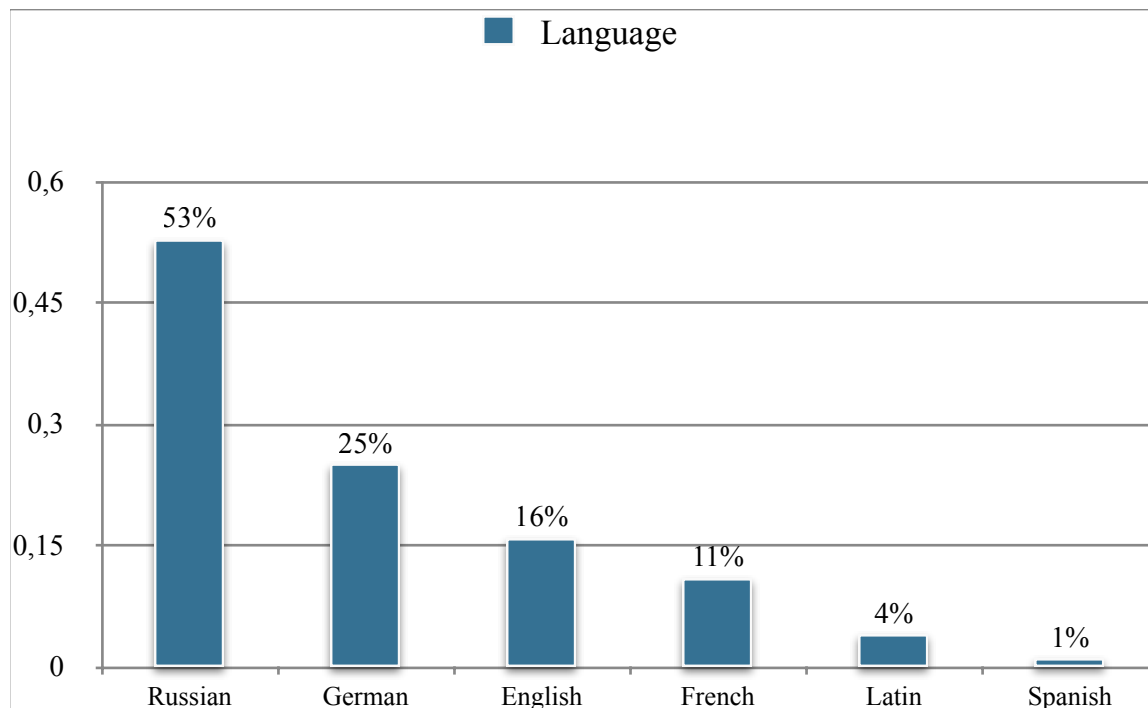


Figure 5. Languages that the participants learnt during their school education

The high percentage of respondents who learned Russian (53%) reflects historical and geopolitical influences. In many Eastern and Central European countries, including Poland, Russian was a mandatory subject during the Cold War era due to the Soviet Union's dominance (Figarski, 2008). Germany's proximity to Poland and its significant economic ties likely contributed to German being the second most learned language (25%). English, learned by 16% of respondents, showed that although this percentage is lower compared to Russian and German, it highlights a growing trend in the importance of English in global communication that started when the older adults surveyed as part of this study were young. French (11%) shows a moderate level of past educational emphasis, potentially influenced by cultural ties and historical relations. Latin (0.04%) and Spanish (0.01%) were significantly less common, likely reflecting their limited practical application and historical focus within the Polish education system. In general, the results highlighted the historical and practical factors influencing language learning among older adults.

The respondents were also asked about the languages they had learned in adulthood ($n = 134$), so post their secondary education. The results are presented by the figure below:

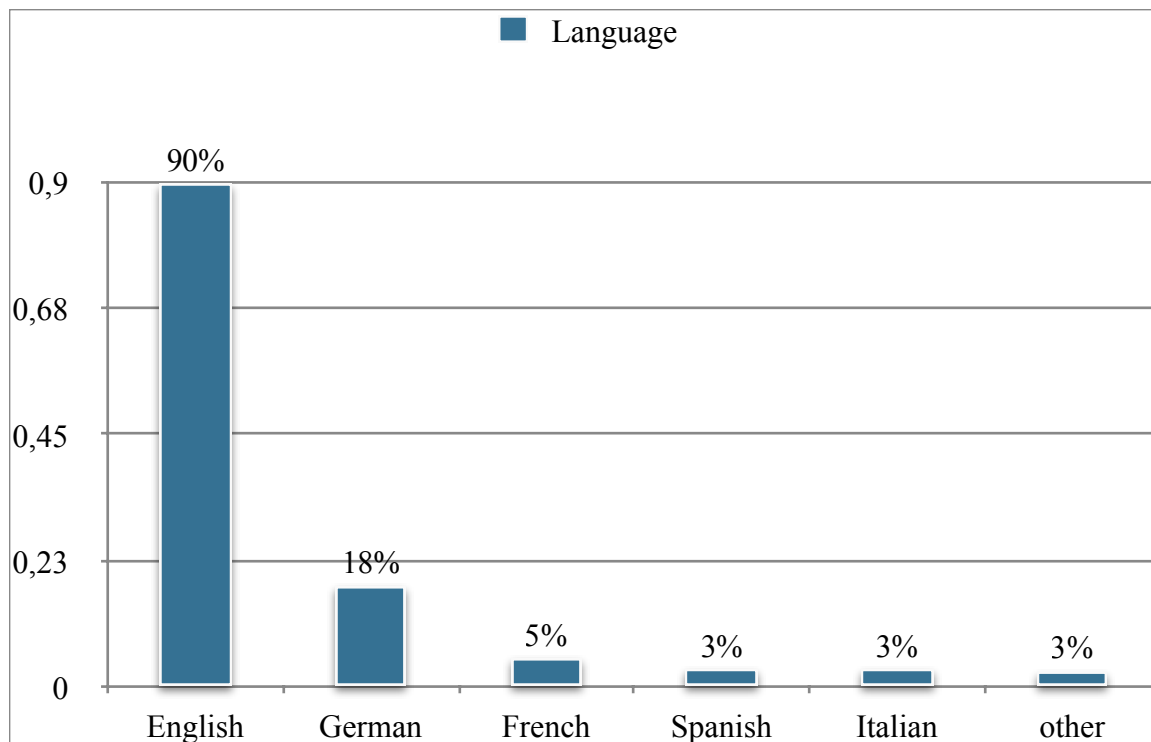


Figure 6. Languages that the participants learnt/ have learnt in their adulthood

The overwhelming preference for English (90%) underscored its status as the most important present-day global language and the so-called *lingua franca*. This high percentage reflects the widespread recognition of English as essential for international communication, travel, business, and access to information. With 18% of older adults learning German, this choice is significant, but much lower than English. This likely reflects Germany's economic influence and geographic proximity⁴⁵, making German a valuable language for business, cultural exchange, and personal connections. Some languages are learned by a very small percentage of older adults: 0.05% for French, and 0.03% each for Spanish and Italian, 0.007% Norwegian, Swedish, Greek, and Bulgarian. This suggests limited interest or perceived utility among the surveyed population. Compared to languages learned during school education, a clear shift towards practical and globally relevant languages in adult life can be found, with English taking a dominant role.

Another question focused on the way(s) third-agers have learned foreign languages in their lives; the answers are shown by the figure below:

⁴⁵ <https://www.gov.pl/web/development-technology/new-opening-in-polish-german-relations>

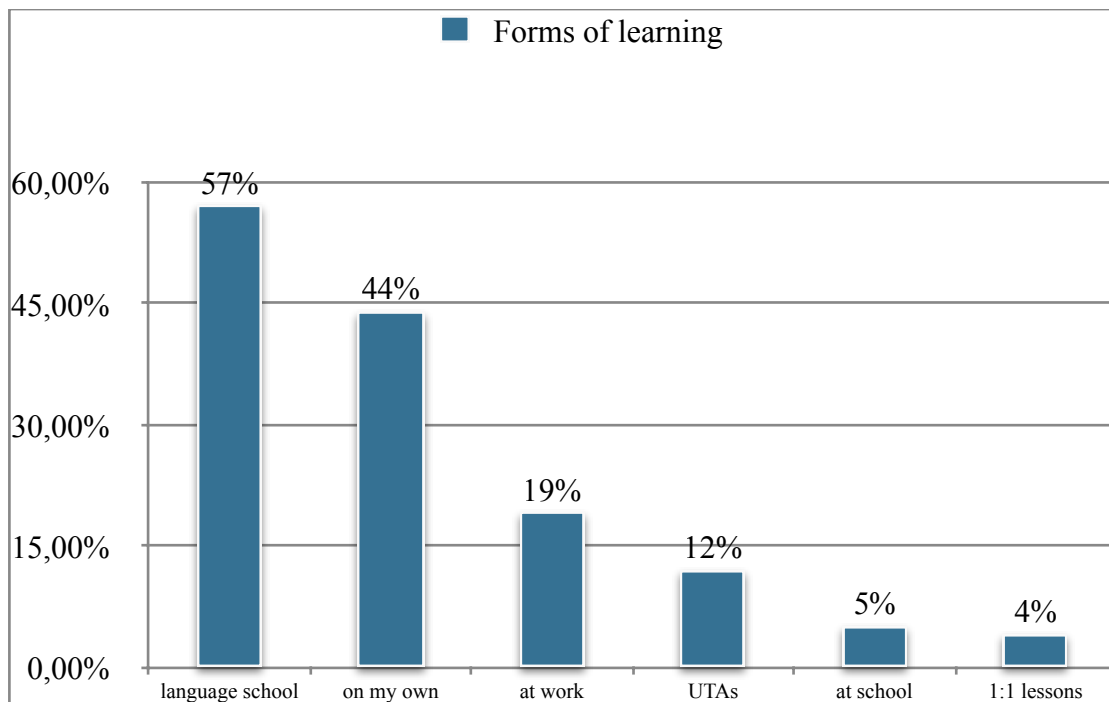


Figure 7. Ways older adults have learnt languages so far (n=134)

From the results, we can see that more than half of the respondents attended various language school courses in their lives (57%). Quite many also tried learning on their own at home (44%). There might be many reasons for their motivations to learn at home instead in the form of a language course. For example, it might be connected to financial reasons and they could have chosen learning at home if they were not able to afford courses organized by language schools.

Another reason may be a lack of opportunity to commute to language schools in the times when it was not possible to participate in online courses. Almost 20% of the participants admitted they also learned a language at work (and often because of work), while only 12% learned languages before at UTAs. This is an interesting outcome, and it could suggest that the participants of the study started attending UTA courses only recently. This can actually be true, as the popularity of UTAs in Poland boosted in the last few years. In the 2021/2022 academic year, there were 552 Universities of Third Age in Poland (UTAs) operating in Poland (GUS, 2023). The largest proportion of UTAs (37%) began their activities between 2006 and 2010, and 32% between 2011 and 2015, although the history of these institutions dates back to 1975 (see section of

chapter 2). Nonetheless, by 1995, there were only 20 UTAs and in 2010, there were 110⁴⁶.

Five percent of the respondents reported they only learned languages at school when they were children, and only five people indicated to have opted for private lessons with a tutor in the past to learn a foreign language.

Finally, the respondents were asked a follow-up open-ended question about the reasons underlying the chosen format of language learning. In their responses, 6 main motives were identified:

- the knowledge of language was required by the employer (therefore they started attending or were offered a language course);
- their financial capabilities, e.g., lack of money to attend a regular course at a language school, so they decided to learn on their own;
- accessibility of the specific form of learning, e.g., courses at work, a language school close to their home, online lessons 1:1) or lack of it, which might have influenced their decision to learn on their own;
- frequent travels (to visit family abroad or because of work), which motivated them to start learning or to learn more regularly;
- a friend's recommendation, e.g., their friends recommended a particular language school to them, and later they attended a course together;
- lack of skills to learn on their own, so they decided to join a language course to „learn with support and guidance of a qualified English teacher”.

4.4.2. Motivation to learn a foreign language in late adulthood and older adults' expectations

Polish third-agers' motivations to learn foreign languages are presented in the table below:

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
I can get to know new people and cultures	79	59%

⁴⁶ https://www.infor.pl/prawo/prawa-seniora/edukacja-seniora/260628,Uniwersytety-Trzeciego-Wieku-w-Polsce.html#google_vignette

I can travel abroad	53	40%
I learnt this language when I was young	41	31%
I have family abroad	39	29%
I have a lot of free time	35	26%
Out of curiosity	24	18%
Learning languages is my hobby	12	9%
I know the language and I don't want to forget it	9	7%
Knowing the language was required at my work	9	7%
Other	8	6%

Table 10. Older adults' motivations to learn a foreign language in late adulthood (n=134)

Results in the table were gathered from options provided for the respondents to choose from, and additionally, they could indicate any other reason in the category *other*. It is also important to mention that they could choose more than one option, so even though the number of participants was 134, the percentages do not add up to 100.

As for the results, from the table above, it can be seen that getting to know other people and cultures was the prevailing reason for the respondents to take up a language course. Many older adults also learn English to travel and enhance their experiences while visiting English-speaking destinations. A significant group of participants learned English earlier in life and seek to maintain or improve their language skills as they age. Nearly a third of respondents have family members living in English-speaking countries, motivating them to learn English for improved communication. A substantial number of respondents have more free time in late adulthood, which they choose to dedicate to language learning pursuits, while other respondents are driven by curiosity, indicating a desire to explore and expand their knowledge by learning a new language.

For a smaller group, language learning serves as a hobby, providing enjoyment and intellectual stimulation. Finally, some participants are motivated by a desire to maintain proficiency in English and prevent skill deterioration over time, due to job requirements, indicating professional motivations for language learning.

Additional motivations cited by respondents are listed in the category *other*, and they included cognitive benefits such as brain exercise, an awareness of the mental advantages of language learning, and perceiving language learning as a trendy or fashionable activity, possibly influenced by societal trends or perceptions.

Third-agers' answers shed light on various motivations they can have for learning a foreign language. As Keijzer et al. (2023) pointed out, motivation is vital in language learning. What is more, when it comes to factors contributing most to older adults' motivation, their attitude towards learning as well as specific goals turned out to be essential (Schiller & Dorner, 2021).

Additionally, later-life learners were asked what is important for them in a language course and what expectations they have. Among the answers, four main themes were identified:

- getting to know other seniors,
- interesting way of spending free time,
- self-development,
- learning a language to travel abroad.

It is vital to point out here that the results correspond almost one to one with the results of the focus group interviews. Respondents underlined that it is crucial for them to have the possibility to get to know and stay in touch with other seniors, make new friends, and share experiences. This suggests that social interaction and community building are important aspects of the course for them. Some of them said: „I'm glad that at the UTA I got to know a lot of interesting people in my age, with whom I meet also after classes”; „I made a lot of new friends here, who have similar interests and problems”; „It's important that I have a chance to share my problems and doubts with other seniors who understand me well”. Presently, there is a growing trend of senior citizen clubs gaining popularity among the older population in Poland (Piechota, 2020). An official survey conducted by the Main Statistical Office (GUS) revealed that language courses

have emerged as the most favored among skill-development programs, with nearly 3,300 older adults choosing them in the year 2020 (GUS, 2021). This figure is substantial and focuses solely on the ones enrolled in courses offered by various organizations, primarily Universities of the Third Age. After they retire, older adults have a lot of free time that they want to spend in an interesting and meaningful way. Learning a language seems to be a good option that more and more seniors think of choosing it as a way of spending their spare time. Some of our respondents agreed with that, saying: „I finally have time to pursue my hobbies, including learning a language”; “I want a language course to give me an opportunity to spend my free time in an interesting way, and this language course provides it”.

Additionally, self-development emerged as another key theme, suggesting that participants see language learning as a means of personal growth and skill enhancement. Many of the respondents were well-educated seniors, who had graduated from good universities and spent their lives working mentally. They now want to continue to self-develop, including learning foreign languages.

Lastly, some respondents expressed a desire to learn a language specifically for the purpose of traveling abroad, indicating practical motivations for language acquisition (either on holiday or visiting their family). It is related to their answers to the first question about their reasons to learn a language. Their need to be able to communicate when traveling is both their motivation to learn as well as an expectation that they have when choosing or starting a language course in late adulthood. Overall, these themes highlighted the multifaceted expectations and motivations of later-life learners participating in foreign language courses.

4.4.3. Factors contributing positively to later-life L2 learning in the classroom

Another part of the questionnaire focused on positive contributions to older adults learning a foreign language, including factors supporting their learning in the classroom – the results are graphically illustrated in the figure below:

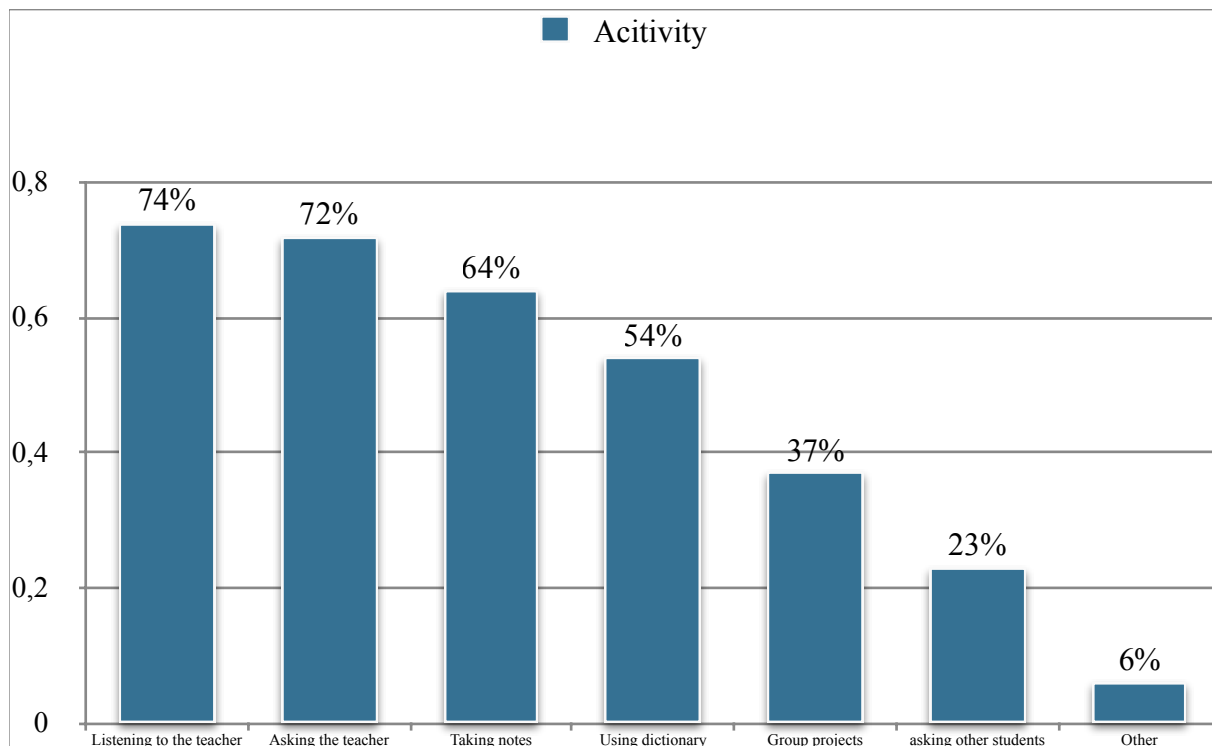


Figure 8. Factors supporting older adults' learning in the classroom

Results presented in the figure were gathered from options provided for third-agers to choose from, and additionally, they could indicate any other reason they found important in the category *other*. The fact that 74% of respondents believed that listening carefully to the teacher supports their learning may highlight the importance of effective communication and instruction in the classroom. Older adults value clear explanations, demonstrations, and verbal instructions provided by the teacher to aid their comprehension and retention of new information. However, it might equally mean that older adults still remember the teacher-centered model of the classroom and they deem this approach as the most effective, so they carefully listen to the teacher. A significant percentage (72%) of respondents believed that asking the teacher when in doubt supports their learning reflects the importance of teacher-student interaction and guidance in the learning process. Older adults seem to feel comfortable seeking clarification, asking questions, and receiving feedback from the teacher to address uncertainties and deepen their understanding of the course materials.

The high percentage (64%) of respondents indicating that taking notes supports their learning highlights the role of active engagement and cognitive processing in language acquisition. Older adults also seem to recognize the value of actively

summarizing key points, writing down important information, and organizing their thoughts through note-taking as a way to enhance understanding and memory retention. Slightly more than half of the respondents (54%) viewed using a dictionary as a helpful tool for supporting their learning, indicating a reliance on external resources for language comprehension and vocabulary expansion. Older adults appreciated the accessibility and utility of dictionaries in facilitating independent study and overcoming language barriers.

As for peer cooperation, a notable proportion of respondents (37%) shared that in their opinion taking part in group projects supports their learning, suggesting that collaborative learning activities promote engagement, teamwork, and skill development among older adults. Group projects offer opportunities for peer interaction, knowledge sharing, and hands-on application of language skills in real-world contexts. Some respondents (23%) reported asking other members in the group for support, indicating a sense of companionship and mutual assistance within the classroom community. Older adults benefited from peer learning, peer tutoring, and peer feedback, which might all foster a supportive and collaborative learning environment.

Additional strategies mentioned by seniors under the *other* category included frequent revisions, rote learning (e.g., memorizing poems and songs), multimedia resources, and interesting topics during lessons.

Overall, the results highlight the multifaceted nature of supports for learning during classes for older adults, encompassing teacher guidance, active learning strategies, peer collaboration, and external resources. By recognizing and leveraging these supporting factors, language instructors can create inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environments that cater to the diverse needs and preferences of older adult learners.

4.4.4. Factors contributing positively to late L2 learning

The factors that positively contributed to effective learning in the eyes of the respondents are visualized by the figure below. This mind map was created after the analysis of the frequencies of certain options chosen by the respondents and, in the next stage, putting the factors connected to similar aspects under broader groups of factors.

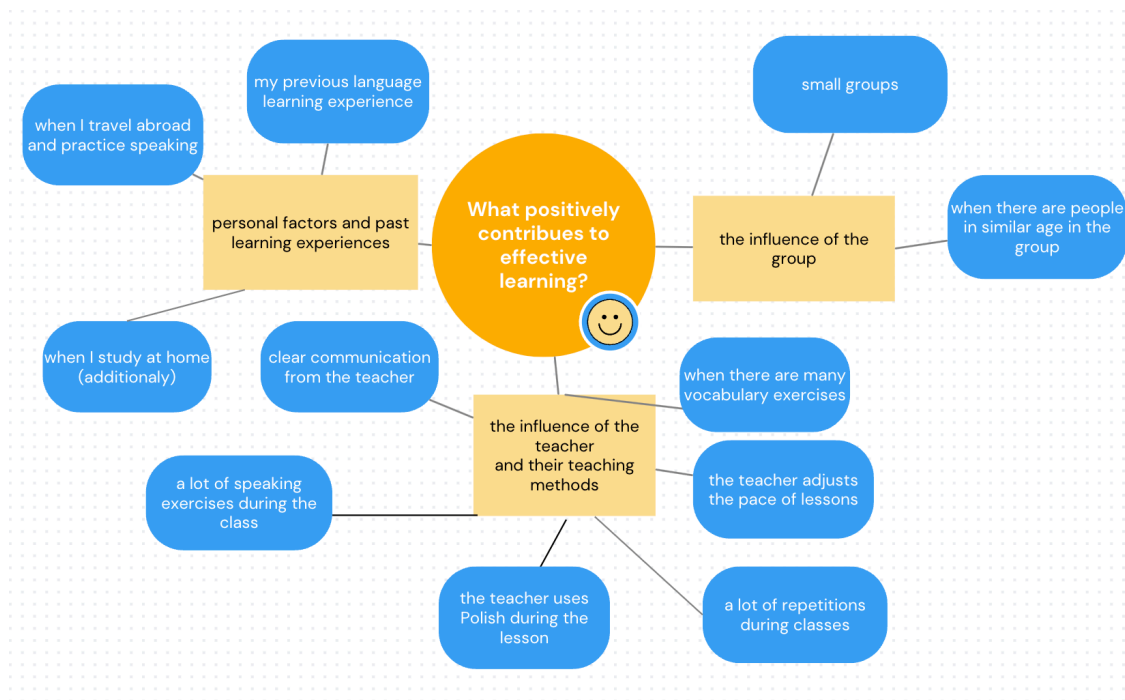


Figure 9. Factors positively contributing to effective L2 learning – respondents’ perspective

Here, third-agers could indicate as many answers as they wanted, resulting in an overview of the intricate interplay of all factors positively influencing later-life language learning process. Again, following the six stages of reflexive thematic analysis, the main themes were identified in the respondents’ answers:

- personal factors and past learning experiences,
- the influence of the teacher and their teaching methods,
- the influence of the group, additional factors (mostly connected to practicing language outside the classroom).

There were a few popular issues that positively contributed to their learning in the eyes of older adults; most of which seem to be connected to the teacher, their teaching style, and the group. Firstly, respondents emphasized the importance of the teacher adjusting the pace of work to the group. This may indicate that older adults value personalized instruction that accommodates their individual learning needs and preferences, enhancing their overall learning experience. Additionally, clear and audible communication from the teacher was also deemed crucial, which may underscore the significance of effective verbal communication in facilitating understanding and

comprehension, particularly for those who may encounter hearing-related challenges. The incorporation of speaking exercises during classes was highlighted by a significant majority of the respondents. This suggests that opportunities for oral practice and interaction play a key role in language learning for third-agers, enabling them to actively engage with the language and build confidence in their speaking abilities. Furthermore, the preference for small group sizes may indicate that later-life learners feel they benefit from a supportive and intimate learning environment, where they can receive personalized attention and interact closely with peers and the instructor.

Interestingly, nearly half of the respondents expressed a preference for the teacher to use the Polish language during instruction. This may suggest that occasional clarification or translation in the native language may aid comprehension and facilitate learning, particularly for complex language concepts.

Overall, the responses shed light on several factors that positively contribute to what older adults believe to be effective language learning. It is also crucial to bear in mind that previous research underlined the correlation between self-esteem and motivation for learning (e.g., Schiller, Dorner & Szabo, 2023). The authors claimed that a positive self-image can influence motivation, and, on the other hand, self-image may be influenced by language attainment and third-agers' general performance in class. It is the teacher's role, therefore, to improve later-life learners' self-image as learners and build their self-esteem by adjusting the materials, methods and setting realistic learning goals.

4.4.5. Difficulties and challenges

This part explores different challenges that older adults face when learning a foreign language. The mind map suggested below – as in the above subsection – was created after the analysis of the frequencies of certain options chosen by the respondents, and in the next stage, putting the factors connected to similar aspects under broader groups of factors identified in the analysis.

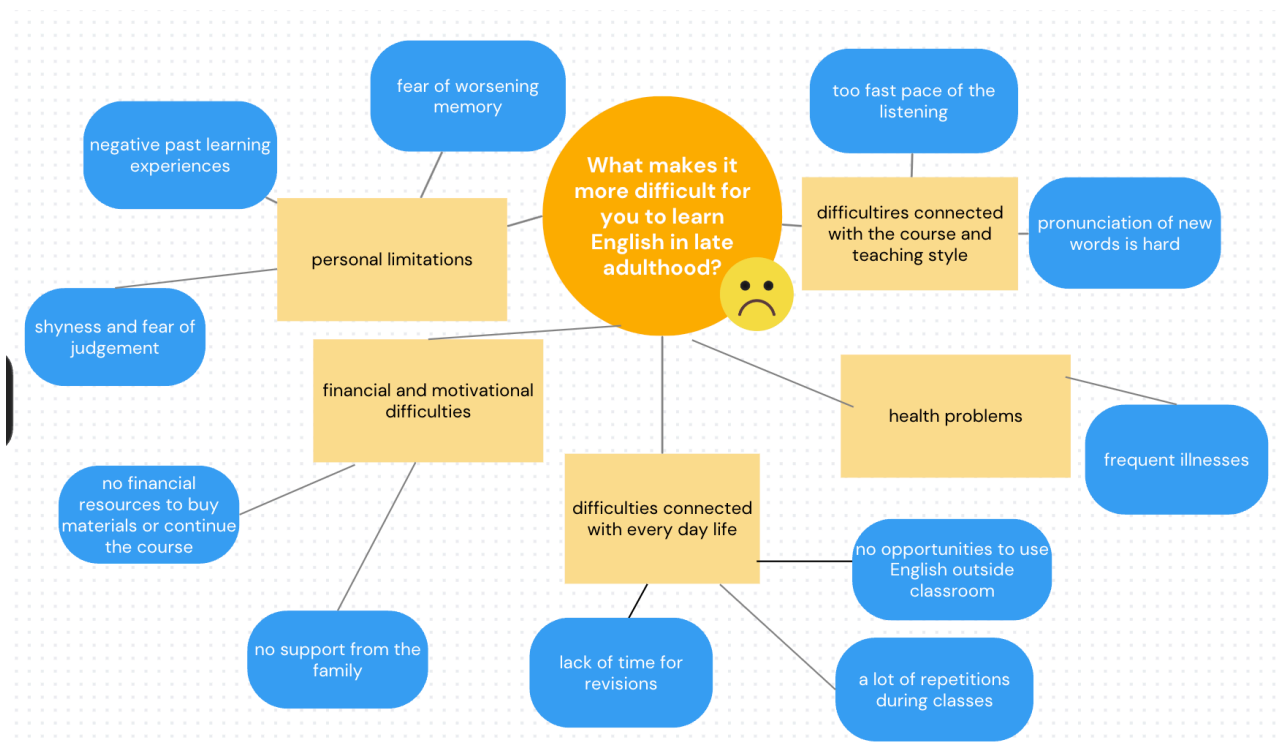


Figure 10. Factors hindering later-life foreign language learning in the eyes of older adults

Here also the respondents could indicate as many answers as they wanted, resulting in this overview of possible difficulties that third-agers might come across in taking up a new language. With the use of reflexive thematic analysis, five main themes were identified in older adults' answers:

- personal limitations, connected also to past learning experiences,
- complications connected with everyday life and learning logistics,
- difficulties connected with the language course and teaching style,
- health problems,
- financial and motivational obstacles

In terms of the detailed difficulties mentioned within the identified themes, they were: fear of poor memory, the situation when seniors cannot use English outside of the classroom setting, when the pace of the listening files is too fast, and when the pronunciation or spelling of the new words is difficult. Some older adults also said lack of time for the recycling of material, shyness, and performing in public are obstacles to overcome for them. The fact that more than 50% of third-agers indicated fear of

worsening memory as a difficulty may suggest that cognitive concerns play a significant role in later-life language learning in the eyes of older adults. This fear may stem from a perceived decline in memory function associated with aging, which can impact confidence and motivation in learning English. According to Derenowski (2018), educators could assist older adults in enhancing and preserving their cognitive capacity through many means, including incorporation of memory-enhancing activities into instructional sessions, the use of visual and auditory mnemonic techniques and memory associations to help later-life learners' practice, and subsequently recall language and expressions from their long-term memory.

Another difficulty is connected to the fact that older adults may struggle to find opportunities to apply their English skills in everyday situations, limiting their ability to reinforce learning and build up their fluency. Additionally, past negative learning experiences may influence current perceptions and approaches to language learning. Fast-paced listening files and challenges with pronunciation or spelling may hinder comprehension and language learning. Problems with the fast pace of listening tracks may also suggest that auditory processing challenges may be common among older adult learners. Rapid speech and complex audio materials may pose barriers to comprehension, particularly for individuals with hearing impairments or processing difficulties.

In turn, shyness and difficulty performing in public chosen frequently as barriers may underscore the importance of addressing socio-emotional factors in later-life language learning (Grotek & Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2012). Fear of embarrassment or judgment may inhibit participation and engagement in language classes and conversational practice.

Furthermore, respondents mentioned a lack of time for recycling the material, which suggests that older adults may struggle to balance language learning with other commitments and responsibilities. Limited time for practice and review can impede progress and retention of new language skills. However, it is also worth mentioning that not all seniors have the support of their families in their decision to learn a foreign language in late adulthood, which may hinder their motivation even further. Some can also face difficulties connected with the lack of financial resources, which poses

problems connected with buying additional materials or sometimes even attending the course in the long run.

To sum up, understanding these issues that may be perceived as obstacles by older adults learning a language later in life provides valuable insights for educators and curriculum designers to tailor language learning programs that address the specific needs and challenges of later-life L2 learners. Strategies such as incorporating real-life contexts, adjusting teaching methods to accommodate age-associated cognitive changes, and fostering a supportive learning environment can help mitigate these difficulties and promote successful language education in late adulthood. As could be seen from earlier studies, a positive learning environment is particularly important for older adults. It has already been examined that the fear of failure intensifies when older adult learners encounter high-pressure learning environments that demand rapid progress (Derenowski, 2018). It is the teacher’s role, then, to create favorable learning conditions and a supportive environment to help older adults flourish in their learning.

4.4.6. Methods, learning styles and technology in the classroom

The figure below presents the most effective forms of learning according to the respondents:

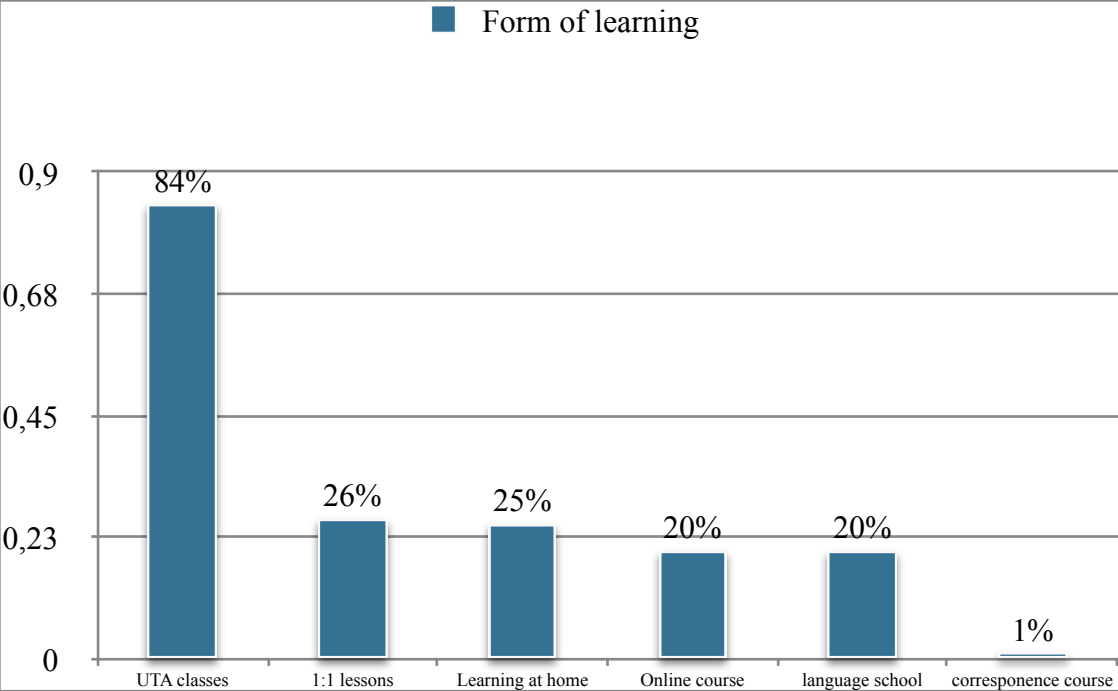


Figure 11. The most effective forms of learning a foreign language (n=134)

Based on the responses to the question about the preferred form of learning for older adults, it can be stated that there is a strong preference for classes organized by Universities of the Third Age (UTAs), with 84% of respondents indicating this as their preferred option. This suggests that older adults value the structured and supportive learning environment provided by UTAs, where they can interact with peers and receive guidance from experienced instructors.

Additionally, the fact that some respondents also marked learning on their own at home (25%) and private lessons with a teacher (26%) as an effective way to learn a new language suggests that there is a subset of older adults who prefer more individualized approaches to learning. These individuals may value the flexibility and personalized attention offered by self-directed study or one-on-one instruction. The relatively lower percentages of respondents choosing online courses (20%) and group courses organized by language schools (20%) may indicate that these options are less favored among older adults. This could be due to factors such as concerns about technology, preferences for in-person interaction, perceived differences in the quality of instruction compared to other forms of learning, or financial aspects (the difference in fee between UTAs' classes and private language school courses). The preferred style of work during foreign language classes was another aspect investigated and presented by the figure below:

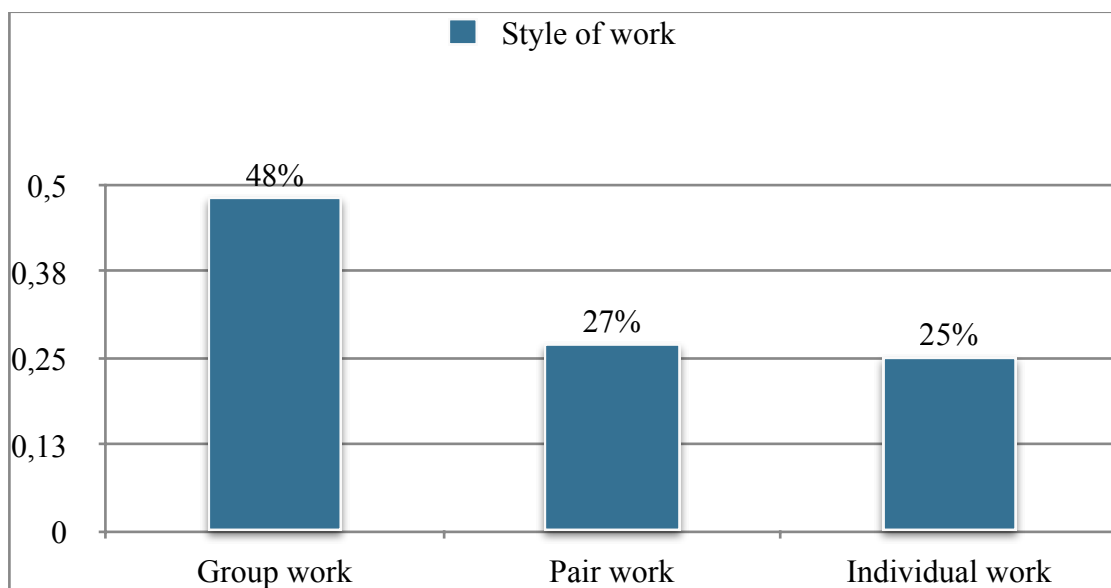


Figure 12. The preferred work format during foreign language classes for older adults (n = 134)

Based on their answers, it is evident that group work is the most favored way of learning in the classroom, with 48% of respondents indicating a preference for this style. Pair work and individual work were also mentioned by a significant portion of respondents, at 27% and 25%, respectively. The high percentage of respondents preferring group work may suggest that later-life learners value opportunities for social interaction, collaboration, and peer support in the learning process. Group work may provide a supportive environment, where learners can engage in discussions, share ideas, and learn from one another's experiences. For third-agers who may have more free time and enjoy socializing with others, group work may well offer a stimulating and enjoyable way to learn a foreign language. The preference for group work may imply that language instructors should prioritize incorporating collaborative activities and group-based tasks into their lesson plans when teaching this demographic. By emphasizing group work, instructors can enhance their students' engagement, motivation, and sense of belonging in the language learning classroom. Additionally, group work promotes communication skills, fosters a sense of community, and encourages active participation, all of which are beneficial for older adult learners.

Pair work and individual work were also identified as suitable by a considerable proportion of respondents. While group work may be preferred by the majority, it is important for instructors to provide a variety of learning activities that cater to different preferences and learning styles. However, one should be cautious in understanding what group work is for older adults. Some of them claimed, „I really like working in a group when we collaborate as a whole group with the teacher”; „I prefer to work in the form of the whole group and teacher interaction”. It should be mentioned that very often third-agers also treat interaction between teacher and students as group work, when the teacher asks questions to the whole group and they answer together or by volunteering. Pair work allows for more intimate interactions and personalized attention, while individual work offers autonomy and flexibility. Incorporating a mix of group, pair, and individual activities can ensure that language classes for this age group are engaging, inclusive, and effective in meeting diverse learning needs.

Finally, the attitude towards the use of new technologies by older adults in their L2 learning was investigated.

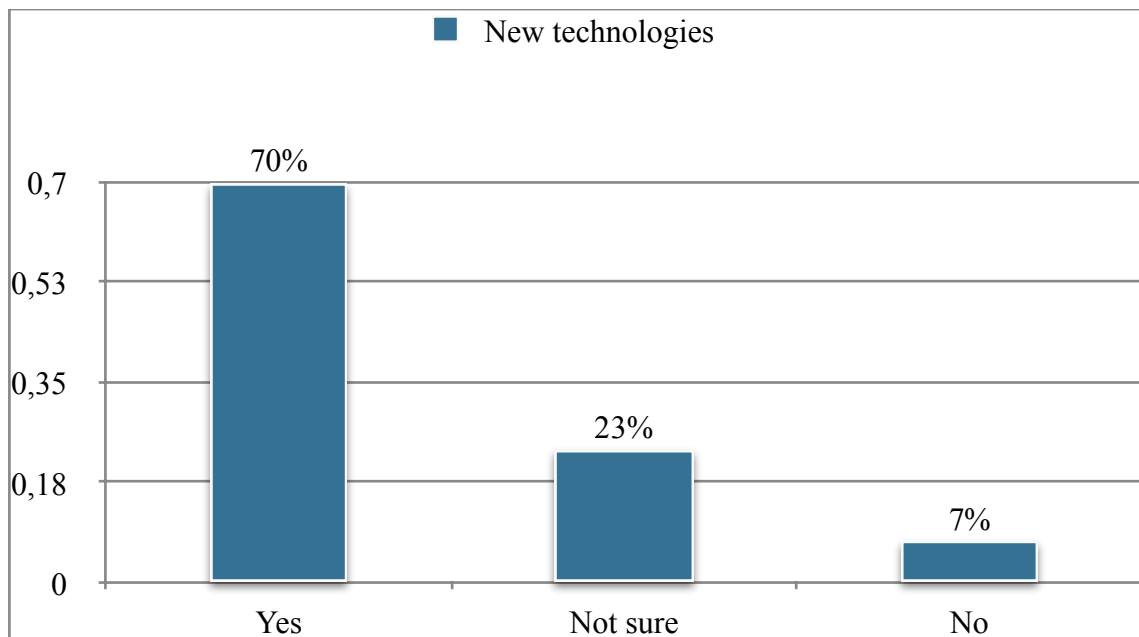


Figure 13. The use of new technologies in learning a foreign language (n = 134)

The respondents could choose between the options: yes, no, not sure (not sure if they have not used technologies or do not have a strong opinion about the subject). The vast majority of respondents (70%) are open to using new technologies in foreign language learning. They mentioned using platforms like YouTube, podcasts, and applications such as *Duolingo*. Some even expressed an interest in using artificial intelligence (AI) for language learning purposes. However, a small percentage (7%) expressed a dislike for using new technologies, citing reasons such as being traditionalists or feeling uncomfortable with unfamiliar technology. On the other hand, about 23% of respondents either have not had the opportunity to use new technologies for language learning or have no strong opinion on the matter.

Language instructors could explore ways to integrate technology into their teaching methods. Demonstrating the effectiveness of technology-enhanced language learning and providing guidance on its use can encourage more older adults to embrace these tools. For the minority resistant to technology, instructors can offer support and training to help them become more proficient with digital resources. Showing the benefits of technology in language learning, such as flexibility and access to a wealth of materials, may change their perspective. What is more, ongoing support and guidance in using technology may be beneficial to seniors throughout their language learning

journey. This can include regular check-ins, troubleshooting assistance, and updates on new technology tools that may enhance their learning experience.

4.4.7. Teaching materials and preferred topics

The table below presents the most interesting topics from the perspective of older adults:

Preferred topics	Frequency	Percentage
Traveling	118	88%
Role plays (e.g. at the shop)	107	80%
Everyday life	104	78%
Customs and holidays of the English speaking countries	71	53%
Culture (film, theatre, music etc.)	70	52%
Food, eating and cooking	64	46%
Hobbies	36	27%
Health and illness	33	25%
Current affairs	29	22%
Sports	20	15%
Politics	8	6%
Other (e.g., celebrities, fashion, science)	7	5%

Table 11. The most interesting topics to be discussed/ taught in the class

Based on the results of the survey question regarding the topics of classes that older adults in Poland are interested in, several key insights can be discussed. First of all, the overwhelming preference (88%) for topics related to traveling suggests that older adults may have a strong interest in exploring different cultures, destinations, and experiences. They may enjoy learning about travel destinations, planning trips,

discussing travel experiences, and acquiring practical language skills for navigating in foreign countries. The high percentage (80%) of respondents interested in role plays indicates a preference for interactive and practical learning activities that simulate real-life scenarios. Therefore, older adults may enjoy role-playing exercises such as shopping, dining out, and social interactions, as they provide opportunities for language practice in context. The significant interest (78%) in topics related to everyday life suggests that older adults value learning about practical aspects of language use in daily routines and activities. Topics such as greetings, introductions, household chores, and personal routines may be particularly relevant and engaging for this demographic. While still popular (53%), the lower percentage of respondents interested in customs and holidays of English-speaking countries may suggest that older adults tend to prioritize practical and relatable topics over cultural or seasonal themes. Nevertheless, learning about cultural traditions, festivals, and customs can provide valuable insights into English-speaking societies and enhance cross-cultural understanding. The moderate interest (52%) in cultural topics indicates that older adults appreciate opportunities to explore artistic and creative expressions in English-speaking cultures. They may enjoy discussions about films, theater productions, music genres, literature, and other forms of cultural expression as a means of enriching their language learning experience. The interest (46%) in topics related to food, eating, and cooking suggests that older adults enjoy learning about culinary traditions, recipes, dining etiquette, and gastronomic experiences from English-speaking countries. Food-related topics provide a sensory and experiential approach to language learning that appeals to diverse interests and preferences.

While less prevalent, some respondents expressed an interest in hobbies, health and illness, current affairs, sports, politics, and other miscellaneous topics. These findings highlight the diverse interests and preferences of older adults and underscore the importance of offering a wide range of topics to cater to individual learning needs and motivations. Overall, the results may suggest that older adults in Poland have varied interests and preferences when it comes to the topics of English language classes. Specific preferences for certain issues may also be connected with older adults' motivations for learning a foreign language. For example, those seniors who want to

learn English for traveling abroad may be more interested in discussing booking a holiday, accommodation or airport, while those who are interested in the culture of English-speaking countries would be more willing to discuss topics connected to culture. It should be noted here that the interest in discussing illnesses and health issues was quite low, which is in contrast with a common stereotype about older adults frequently talking about their illnesses and complaining about them (see chapter 2, section 2.2 for more details about stereotypes about seniors in Poland). It is crucial to point out, however, that in this question respondents could choose as many options as they wanted.

Third-agers were also asked what materials are used in the language course that they attend. The teaching tools indicated by surveyed seniors are presented below:

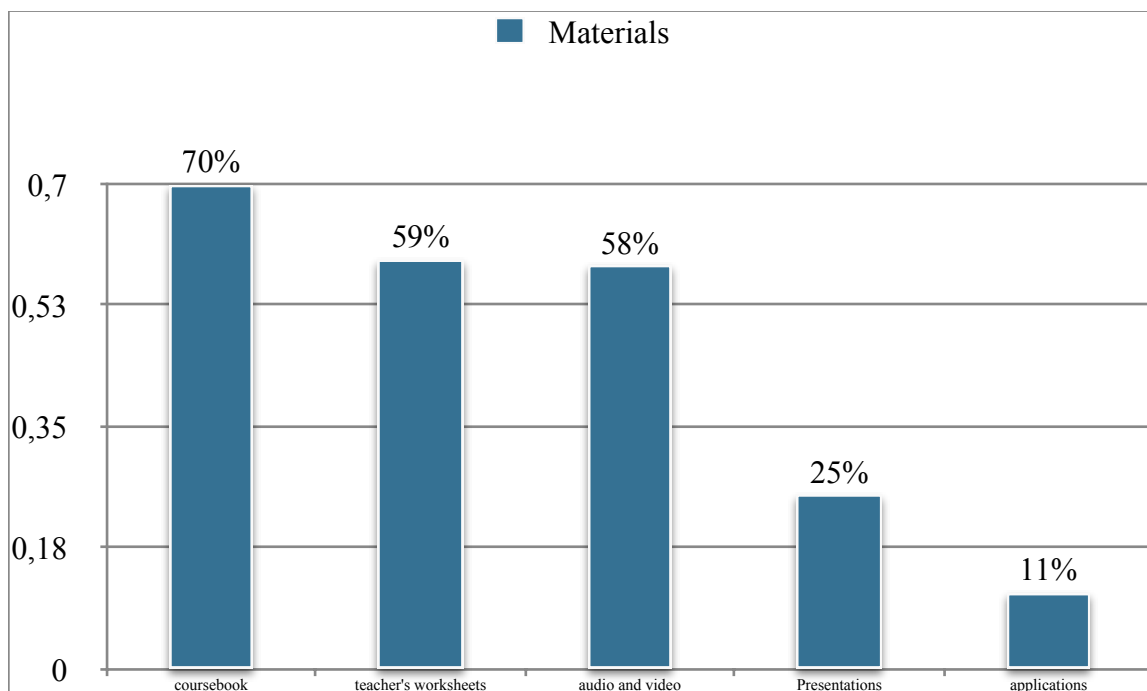


Figure 14. Types of materials used in the classroom

According to the findings, it seems that the majority of older individuals in Poland who are learning English depend on traditional course materials. Specifically, 70% of the respondents stated that the course book was their main resource. This discovery may imply that well-established textbooks have a crucial function in organizing the curriculum and offering vital materials for language instruction. The significant percentage of audio and video resources (58%) demonstrates an acknowledgment of the importance (mostly by the UTAs and UTAs teachers, who choose resources for classes)

of auditory and visual stimuli in the process of acquiring language skills. These tools are expected to improve listening comprehension abilities and expose learners to real spoken English, which will contribute to a more immersive learning experience. This is also important, as in results of other questions (and also from the focus group interviews), it could be seen that listening is usually seen as the most difficult skill for later-life learners. The teacher's worksheets (59%) are also frequently used, indicating a choice made by the teachers to strengthen lesson content and to offer chances for additional practice or reinforcement. This interactive method may accommodate various learning preferences and provide extra assistance in comprehending linguistic principles. The incorporation of digital technologies into language learning is reflected by the employment of multimedia presentations, which account for 25% of the responses. These resources have the potential to increase student involvement and interaction in the classroom, providing dynamic learning opportunities that go beyond conventional teaching methods. The inclusion of applications (11%) and online dictionaries highlights the potential of technology to enhance and support language learning beyond the classroom. These digital tools offer simple access to vocabulary, grammar explanations, and language practice activities, enabling learners to expand their study beyond planned class times. The low percentage of their use may also be connected with the digital literacy among seniors. It is possible that some teachers resign from them, because of the third-agers' unwillingness to use them.

As a follow-up question, older adults were asked to provide their preferences for the materials used in the course. This allowed for the comparison of what is offered at the courses later-life learners attend and the preferences they have in terms of materials. The figure below shows their choices:

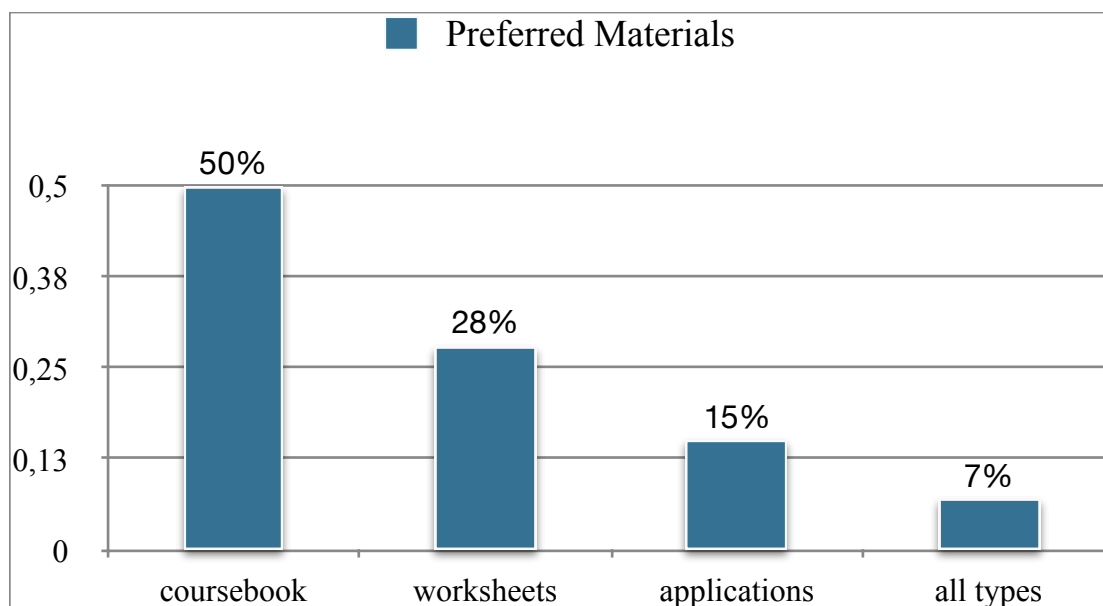


Figure 15. The preferred teaching materials from the perspective of older adults

The results highlighted the perceived usefulness of different materials used in language courses for later-life learners. The findings may also suggest that course books are highly valued by half of the respondents, most likely due to their comprehensiveness and ease of use. Seniors appreciated the ability to follow along with the structured content, practice various language skills, and review the material at home. The inclusion of scenes from everyday life in the course books likely enhances relevance and engagement, allowing learners to relate language learning to real-world contexts. This is deemed really important, especially when working with learners, who prefer to learn relevant content (Duay & Bryan, 2008; Kilian, 2015). Worksheets prepared by the teacher also received significant recognition, with around 28% of respondents finding them valuable. Older adults seem to appreciate the thoughtfulness and relevance of these materials, which are tailored to the specific topics covered in class. This may indicate that teacher-prepared worksheets serve as effective supplements to course content, providing additional practice and reinforcement of language concepts.

Games and applications for learning, as well as audio and video materials, were named by approximately 15% of respondents as preferred teaching materials. While thus less frequently mentioned, these resources may offer interactive and multimedia-rich experiences that can enhance engagement and motivation in language learning.

Their inclusion may suggest a recognition of the importance of diverse and engaging materials in supporting later-life language education.

Around seven percent of seniors expressed trust in the teacher's judgment in selecting appropriate materials for the course, which means they seem to trust the teacher's choices of materials. It is also interesting that older adults' preferences expressed in the survey are reflected in the materials used during the courses. Course books and teacher's worksheets turned out to be the most popular at the language courses at UTAs (according to the survey) and at the same time, they also turned out to be the preferred materials from the perspective of the students. This result seems to be confirmed also by the observations conducted in this study, where teachers mostly used course books and prepared additional worksheets as supplementary materials.

4.4.8. Language skills

Section 8 investigated which language skills, specifically which aspects of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, are important and difficult from the perspective of the respondents. The questions were open-ended, so they allowed the participants to indicate the chosen skill and provide a short justification for their choice. The figure below shows the results obtained.

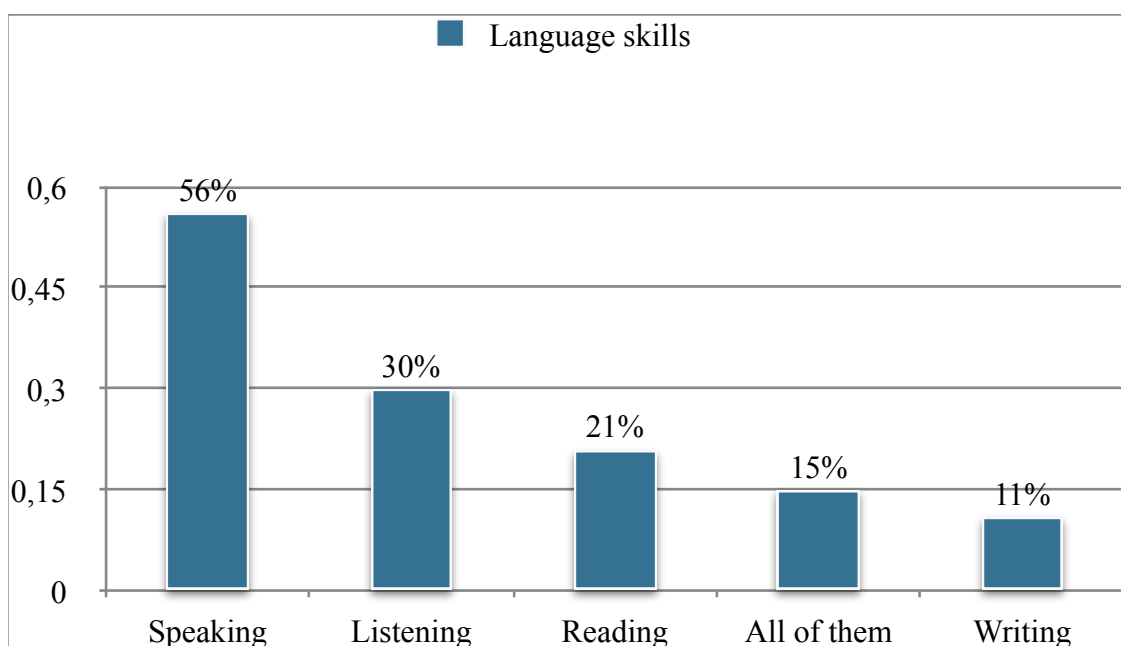


Figure 16. The most important language skills from the perspective of older adults.

The majority of respondents (56%) identified speaking as the most important language skill to learn. Some of their answers were, „Speaking is the most important, because I focus on communication”; „Speaking, as the real conversation teaches me the most and motivates me”; „Speaking is the most difficult and most important in my opinion—it enables establishing contact and solving problems”; „Speaking and free communication makes life easier”. This preference may reflect third-agers’ primary motivation for learning English, which is usually communication either with family members living abroad or when traveling and it was also visible in the answers as almost in every answer, provided it was stated that older adults focused on communication with others.

While speaking is the top priority, a significant portion of respondents (30%) also recognized the importance of listening skills. Later-life learners seem to understand that effective communication involves not only speaking, but also active listening and comprehension, which they expressed in their answers: „Listening is the most important, because the more you listen, the more familiar you are with the language; „Listening is the most important skill for me, because without listening there is no speaking”; „Listening is the most important and also the most difficult for me, I usually have a problem to understand native speakers, especially if they talk quickly, but I know it’s crucial to be able to speak”; „Listening, so that I can understand what people are saying to me”. Older adults seem to value the ability to understand spoken language, follow conversations, and extract meaning from audio materials, such as lectures, conversations, and audiovisual media.

Reading skills were considered important by a smaller, but still noteworthy percentage of respondents (21%). Third-agers acknowledged the importance of reading for various purposes, such as gathering information, understanding written texts, and enjoying literature. Reading proficiency allows them to access a wide range of written materials, including books, newspapers, websites, and instructional materials, enhancing their language comprehension and vocabulary development.

As for writing skills, they were deemed less important by older adults, with only 11% of respondents prioritizing this skill. This may be attributed to later-life learners’

emphasis on spoken communication and their perceived limited need for extensive writing in their daily lives.

A noticeable share (15%) of respondents indicated that all language skills are equally important to them. These respondents seemed to recognize the interconnectedness of the four language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—and believe in the holistic development of language proficiency, which they expressed in their answers, „All skills are important, so I try to focus on all of them. When practiced regularly, they give you effects”, „All these activities are important because they allow for comprehensive use of the language”. Those older adults seem to balance their focus on all skills to achieve well-rounded language competence.

Overall, the results may suggest that third-agers prioritize speaking skills as the most important for their language learning goals, driven by their desire for effective communication. While speaking takes precedence, older adults also value listening, reading, and writing skills to varying degrees, recognizing their importance for comprehensive language proficiency and communication competence. Language instructors could tailor their instruction to address these priorities and provide opportunities for later-life learners to develop and strengthen their preferred language skills in meaningful contexts.

The surveyed seniors were also requested to indicate language skills they consider to be most difficult to master. Those skills are shown in the figure below:

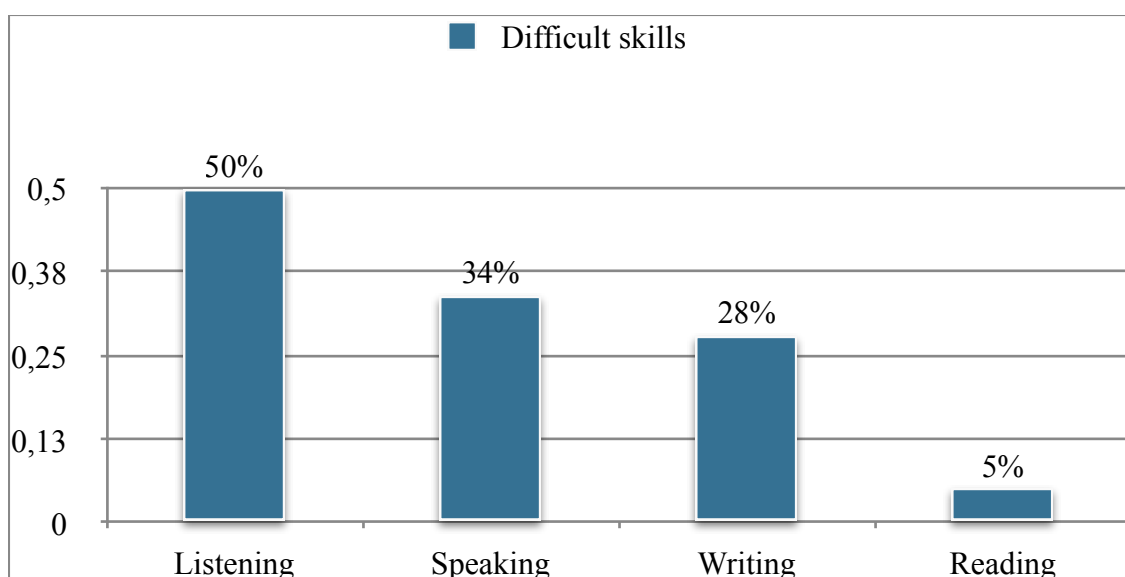


Figure 17. The most difficult language skills from the perspective of older adults

In this open-ended question, half of respondents (50%) identified listening as the most challenging language skill for them. This difficulty may stem from factors such as auditory processing difficulties, hearing impairments, or unfamiliarity with English pronunciation and accents (see Chapter 1 for more details about changes connected to aging). Later-life learners may struggle to understand spoken language, follow rapid speech, or recognize individual words and phrases in audio materials, which seem to be confirmed by their answers, „Listening, due to slight hearing impairment.”, „Listening due to worsening hearing and relatively little practice in this area”, „Listening - I don't have regular contact with spoken language, difficulty in understanding, especially when the pace of speech is fast and there are many unfamiliar words”. Additionally, challenges in auditory discrimination and comprehension may contribute to the perceived difficulty of listening skills (Jaroszewska, 2013a).

A significant portion of respondents (34%) indicated that speaking is the most difficult language skill for them, claiming, for example, „Speaking is the most difficult for me and the most stressful one”, „Speaking, because of different and difficult pronunciations”, „Speaking, as in the past learning was really passive and we really rarely spoke in the classroom”, „Speaking, because of a lack of vocabulary”. This difficulty may arise from factors such as limited vocabulary, limited grammar knowledge, pronunciation issues, or lack of confidence in oral communication. Third-agers may feel apprehensive about speaking English due to fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, or self-consciousness about their accent or fluency level. Overcoming psychological barriers and building speaking proficiency through practice and exposure to spoken English can help alleviate this difficulty.

A notable percentage of respondents (28%) reported that writing was the most challenging language skill for them. This difficulty may be attributed to factors such as limited writing experience, unfamiliarity with English writing conventions, grammar rules, and sentence structures or as one of the participants admitted, „You write words in English differently and you pronounce them differently, so it's very confusing”.

Older adults may also struggle with spelling, punctuation, sentence coherence, and expressing their thoughts coherently in written form. Providing explicit instruction, guided practice, and constructive feedback on writing tasks can support older adults in

developing their writing skills over time. A smaller percentage of respondents (5%) identified reading as the most difficult language skill for them. This may suggest that later-life learners generally perceive reading as less challenging compared to listening, speaking, and writing. However, some seniors may still encounter difficulties in reading English texts due to factors such as limited vocabulary, unfamiliarity with English syntax and grammar, or difficulty understanding complex written passages. Strategies such as pre-reading activities (see e.g., Komorowska, 2006; Harmer, 2007) or vocabulary building exercises can help older adults improve their reading comprehension skills and overcome reading challenges.

Conversely, in another open-ended question the respondents also pointed out which skills are the easiest for them to master. The results are given in the figure below:

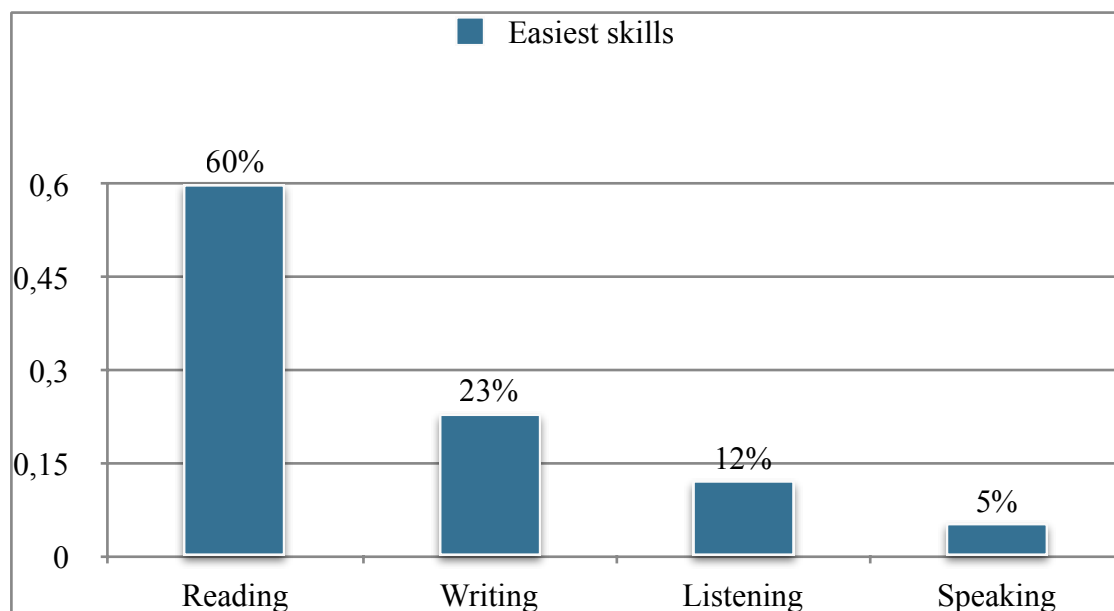


Figure 18. The easiest language skills in older adults' view

In relation to the previous aspect, where reading was not found to be challenging, 60% of the respondents identified it as the least difficult skill. This may be attributed to factors such as familiarity with written texts or previous exposure to reading materials in their native language. Older adults may find reading enjoyable and manageable, as it allows them to proceed at their own pace, use context clues, and refer back to the text for clarification. Some of the participants' remarks included, „Reading is the easiest, as I can see what I read”, „I acquire knowledge by visual means, since I take the time to contemplate the significance of words and their pronunciation while I read”, or „When I

read silently, I don't need to consider pronunciation". Writing was also perceived as quite effortless, since it ranked second with a 23% score. Third-agers may appreciate the opportunity to organize their thoughts, practice grammar and vocabulary, and convey their ideas in a structured format. Writing tasks may provide later-life learners with a sense of control and autonomy over their language production, allowing them to express themselves creatively and effectively. Additionally, there is a lot of research on progress monitoring and monitoring techniques in reading and writing, so teachers may use them to help older adults to develop those two skills (Dietrichson et al., 2017, 2021; Temelman-Yogev et al., 2024).

The survey results indicated that a small percentage of respondents (12%) found listening to be the easiest skill, stating, for example, „Listening, because I can figure out what somebody is saying on the basis of the words I caught”, „Listening, as long as the pronunciation is clear and the speed is not too fast”, „Listening, but when the level is not too difficult for me”. Active listening strategies, such as predicting, summarizing, and inferring meaning, may further enhance older adults' proficiency in this skill area. A minority of respondents (five percent) identified speaking as the easiest language skill for them. This may suggest that speaking tends to present more challenges or barriers for later-life learners compared to reading, listening, and writing.

Factors such as self-consciousness, lack of confidence, pronunciation difficulties, and limited speaking opportunities may contribute to the perceived difficulty of speaking skills. It should also be pointed out that respondents' preferences appear to be linked to their personality traits. Those who found speaking to be difficult often described themselves as shy individuals who struggle to communicate in a classroom setting. Some of them said: „I'm shy so it is really hard for me to speak in front of a group during lessons”, „I am always stressed when I have to speak during lessons”, „I never liked performing in public, so in our classes I prefer group work, where I don't have to speak in front of the whole class”. On the other hand, those who found speaking easy expressed confidence in their ability to interact with others. These results further support the suggestion that the anxiety experienced while speaking, which is the most anxiety-inducing skill for these participants, may be intensified by the inability to hide or avoid providing an immediate answer, limited opportunities to

prepare for performance, and age-related physical and cognitive challenges and limitations (Baran-Łucarz & Słowik-Krogulec, 2023).

After investigating their perspective on various language skills in terms of their difficulty level, participants were also asked about the most important grammar aspects. The question was open-ended, so it allowed older adults to justify their choices. Their answers were put into three most popular categories, which are presented by the figure below, followed by the analysis with participants' comments:

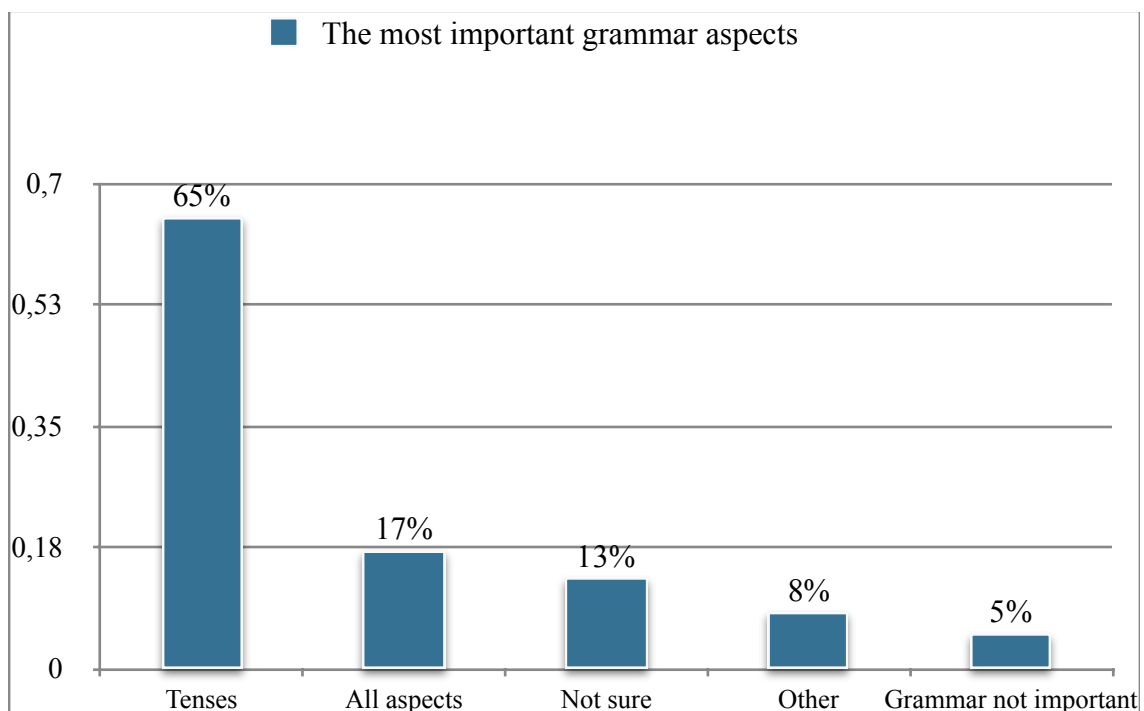


Figure 19. The most important grammar aspects in the eyes of older adults

Regarding the most important grammar aspects, respondents primarily selected mastering tenses, particularly basic tenses, as the most crucial aspect. While tenses can be equally vital and challenging for some individuals, a majority of seniors (60%) acknowledged that their objective was to achieve proficiency in the fundamental tenses that are essential for good communication, particularly when traveling overseas: "Knowledge of tenses in grammar is very important; the listener needs to be certain about which time frame we are referring to and what we mean. The three basic tenses, understanding basic grammatical forms that allow for the construction of simple sentences, and tenses at a fundamental level". 17% of respondents admitted they try to

focus on everything when learning a language, and all aspects are important from their perspective: „Everything is important, but requires a lot of practice and repetition” „Everything that is needed for proper communication”. A minority of the respondents (13%) expressed uncertainty or admitted to recently starting their English language learning journey and hence being unfamiliar with the subject matter. Various additional grammar concerns that were addressed by eight percent of respondents included the proper usage of articles (since Polish does not have articles), comparatives and superlatives, and word order, which differs from that of Polish. Some other noteworthy remarks included: „I solely study English for basic communication during travel, not to achieve mastery in it”; „Personally, I prioritize tenses as they are crucial when interacting abroad, where grammar is often overlooked”; „It is preferable to make a grammatical error while speaking than to refrain from speaking altogether”. This attitude is intriguing, as adolescents in the school age frequently experience significant concern over their mistakes and may even encounter difficulties in communicating as a result (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Elahemer & Said, 2022; Daud et al., 2021). It was also interesting to notice that the participants’ attitudes varied significantly, starting from: „All grammar aspects are important, we should focus on everything and practice all of them”, to „none, as even when I make mistakes while speaking people still understand me” as 5 percent of the respondents emphasized that grammatical knowledge had little importance to them, as their primary goal was to acquire fundamental communication skills for use during international travels. However, the results were too low in order to generalize it as a common attitude among older adults. The goal of this study, however, was to investigate and collect various experiences of this cohort to show their perspective on the subject.

Another issue that later-life L2 learners were asked about was the difficulty of English grammar aspects. The seniors’ opinions are presented by the following figure:

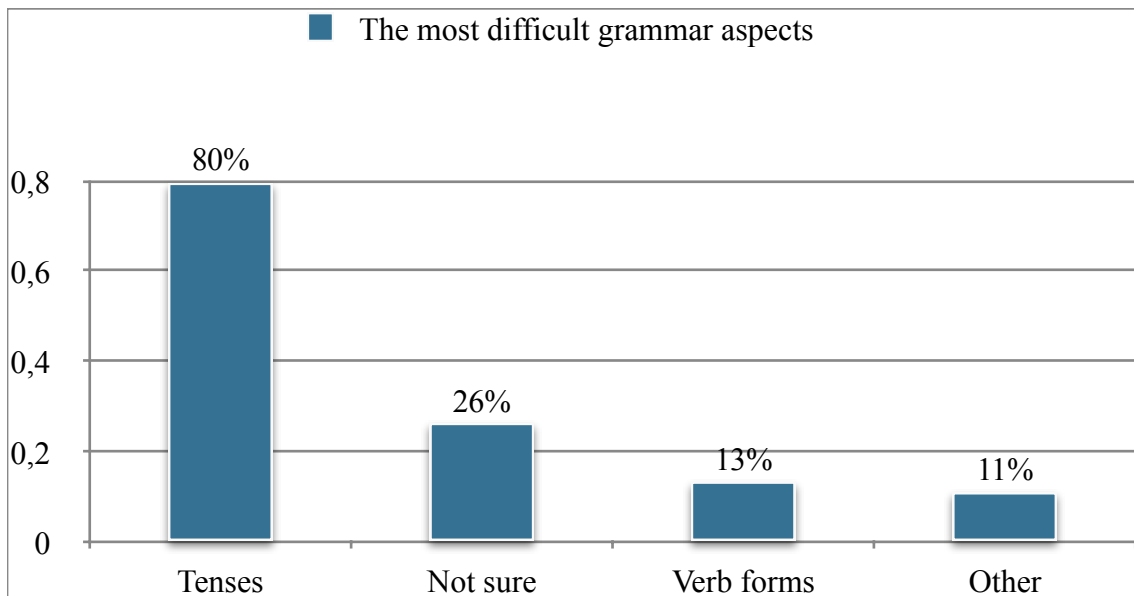


Figure 20. The most difficult grammar aspects according to older adults

It turned out that for the vast majority of respondents (80%), the most challenging aspect of language learning was dealing with tenses, particularly those that did not exist in Polish. This included selecting the correct tense and differentiating between them. The complexity of English tenses, coupled with the need for memorization and understanding subtle grammatical rules, mostly contributed to the perceived difficulty in this area. Quite a large group of respondents admitted that because they had started learning not so long ago, it was hard for them to indicate the difficult aspects or that they were not aware of them yet. Some of them claimed: „I’m not sure”, „I haven’t learnt more difficult aspects yet”, „I don’t know”.

13% of the respondents claimed that remembering various verb forms, including irregular verbs in the past causes difficulty, because there are many forms to remember. Among other aspects, older adults may find it challenging to remember the various conditional forms and phrasal verbs leading to hardships in applying them accurately in speech and writing. The need to memorize numerous grammar rules and exceptions adds to the overall complexity of learning English grammar for later-life language learners. They also highlighted the need to recall conditionals and certain aspects of grammar word order variations from Polish and reported speech.

Older adults emphasized that English grammar is inherently challenging, and their declining memory exacerbates the difficulty of learning new content. Some

noteworthy observations were: „Acquiring new knowledge is initially effortless, but becomes challenging over time”; „Constructing grammatically accurate sentences in the appropriate tense poses difficulties, as there are no straightforward aspects”; „the abundance of tenses, coupled with the absence of references to equivalent Polish tenses by teachers, hinders comprehension”; „Similarly, the lack of guidance on comparative and superlative forms of adjectives in relation to Polish adds to the complexity”; „I have participated in numerous classes where the instructors have not made an effort to facilitate our comprehension by drawing comparisons to the Polish environment, Instead, they typically presented the concepts in an abstract manner”. As could be seen from the comments, some respondents mentioned that English grammar is often explained in an abstract manner during language courses, without sufficient reference to the Polish context for cross-linguistic comparison reasons. This abstract approach may make it difficult for third-agers to connect English grammar concepts to their native language and grasp the underlying similarities or differences. Without concrete examples and contextual explanations tailored to the Polish language, seniors may struggle to fully comprehend English grammar rules and apply them effectively in their language learning journey.

It is important to mention that here the participants could provide as many problems with grammar as they wanted and then the answers were added and calculated, so the answers do not add up to 100%.

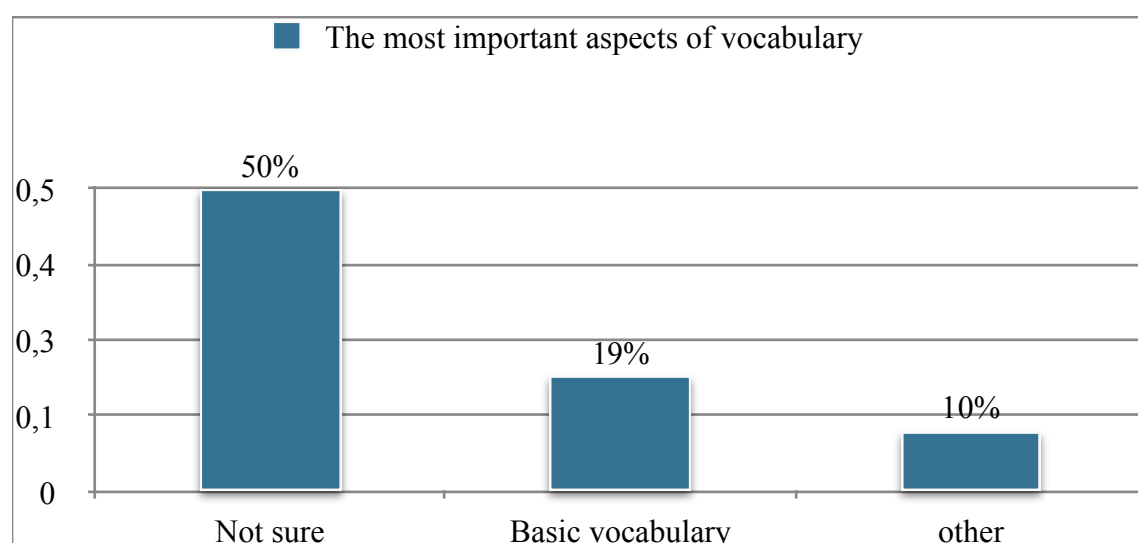


Figure 21. The most important aspects of vocabulary for older adults

The preferred by third-agers' topic areas were also investigated. When asked about the most important aspects of vocabulary, approximately 50% of the respondents were unable to provide any responses to this question, maybe due to their limited competence level, which hinders their ability to recognize what is significant to them. They said, for example, „I don't know yet”, „It's hard to say” and „It's difficult for me to choose as for now everything seems important to me.” For 19% of the respondents, the most important aspect was the vocabulary connected to various situations from everyday life and basic vocabulary that they would most probably use. 10% of respondents listed several other aspects in their comments: „Expanding our vocabulary is crucial for engaging in discussions on various subjects”; „Particularly significant are words related to everyday situations such as shopping, medical consultations, asking for and giving directions, and traveling-related topics like hotels, airports, railway stations, ticket purchases, and getting a taxi”; „It would be advantageous to be able to converse about our homeland, hobbies, and family, as these topics frequently arise in our Polish conversations”; whereas, as one respondent pointed out, „specialized terminology is of relatively low importance and can be refined at a more advanced stage”. As it can be seen, later-life L2 learners emphasized the importance of vocabulary related to everyday situations, such as shopping, medical consultations, asking for and giving directions, and traveling-related topics. This may suggest that third-agers prioritize practical vocabulary that enables them to navigate common scenarios encountered in daily life, both domestically and while traveling abroad. They recognize the relevance of these words for effective communication and interaction in real-world contexts. Their choices also correlate to their motivations for learning English expressed earlier (and also confirmed in the focus-group interviews) being mostly traveling and contact with their family members abroad.

Participants also highlighted the significance of vocabulary related to social interactions, including discussions about their homeland, hobbies, and family. These topics are integral to interpersonal communication and play a central role in conversations they hold in Polish. By acquiring vocabulary associated with personal interests and relationships, seniors may aim to engage more confidently in social interactions and express themselves authentically in English.

The respondents' focus on vocabulary expansion as essential for engaging in discussions on various subjects underscores their desire to enhance their communication skills in English. They recognize that diverse vocabulary facilitates effective communication and enables them to express ideas, opinions, and experiences more accurately and fluently. This emphasis on communication may reflect older adults' aspirations to overcome language barriers and actively participate in conversations across different topics and contexts.

Notably, some third-agers expressed a preference for practical vocabulary over specialized terminology, suggesting that they prioritize words that are immediately applicable to their daily lives. While recognizing the importance of specialized vocabulary in certain contexts, such as professional or academic settings, older adults may prioritize mastering vocabulary relevant to their immediate needs and interests before delving into more specialized domains. Language instructors may, therefore, tailor vocabulary instruction to address these priorities and provide opportunities for later-life learners to acquire and practice vocabulary relevant to their daily lives and communication goals.

Another question related to vocabulary and collocations concerned their most difficult aspects, which illustrates the following figure:

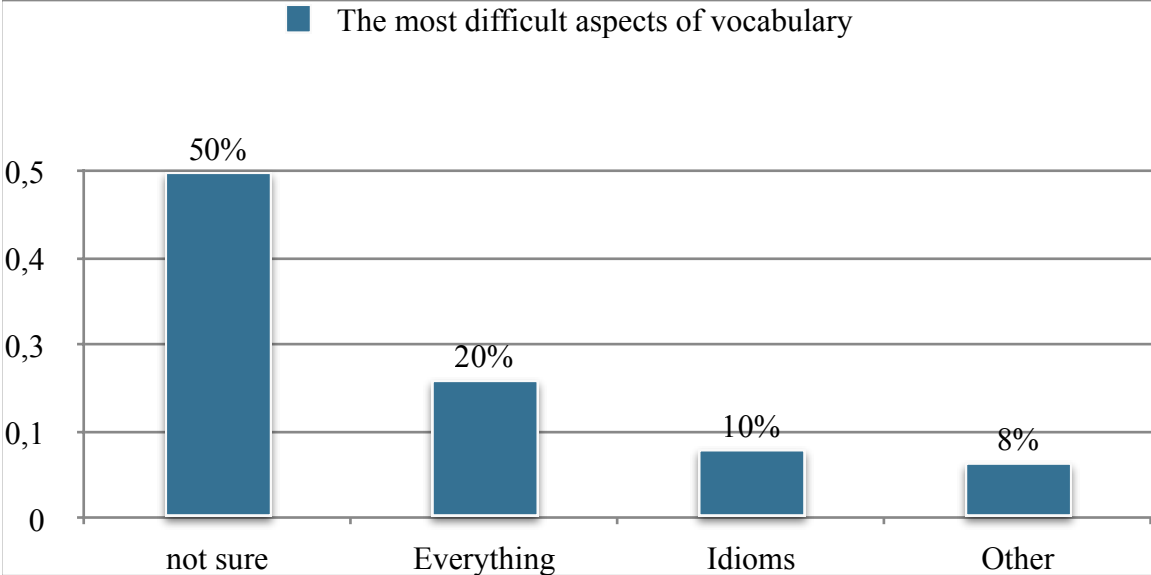


Figure 22. The most difficult aspects of vocabulary

Also for this question, 50% of respondents were unable to provide any examples of the most challenging aspects of vocabulary from their perspective. This again may be

attributed to the fact that a significant portion of them are still at a basic level of English, which makes it difficult for them to recognize what has significance to them at this stage. However, from the responses, it could be seen that the most challenging elements are those that were never heard or utilized, including for example idioms. This suggests that older adults may struggle with vocabulary that extends beyond basic everyday usage, especially if it involves nuanced or culturally specific expressions. Limited exposure to such vocabulary in their learning environment may contribute to this struggle. It is understandable, however, and was actually an expected answer bearing in mind that most participants are at a basic level of English (A1-A2). The answers could, of course, be different for participants with higher language proficiency. Similarly, as with the subject of grammar, they mostly concurred that there are typically no easy aspects (20%), stating, for example, „The language itself presents a difficulty for me, particularly when the pronunciation deviates greatly from its written representation”. Some respondents (10%) indicated idioms as difficult, stating at the same time that they had not learned many of them yet.

Older adults mentioned a few other aspects, which were listed under *other* category (8%): „Phraseology involves words with multiple meanings, which I have to understand from the context”; „The easiest ones are those directly derived from Latin (vocabulary) and those that evoke similar associations in the native language (phraseology)”; „The most difficult for me is the ambiguity of words; the easiest are those with etymology from Latin or those closely related to the Polish language”; „Initially, everything is difficult; later, it becomes somewhat easier, but nothing is the easiest”; „Maybe I'll put it this way - it depends on motivation. Even the most challenging elements are learnable if there is enough motivation (often necessity)”.

Overall, the responses reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of Polish seniors learning English vocabulary. Participants highlighted difficulties stemming from discrepancies between written and spoken English, especially regarding pronunciation. This discrepancy can pose challenges for older adults, especially if they are accustomed to languages with more consistent phonetic representations. Learning to pronounce words accurately may require additional effort and practice, leading to perceived difficulty. Some respondents mentioned the ambiguity of words and the challenge of

interpreting multiple meanings, particularly when context is not readily available. This difficulty underscores the importance of context in understanding and using vocabulary effectively. Third-agers may struggle with words that have diverse interpretations or subtle connotations, requiring careful attention to context clues for comprehension. Several participants emphasized the role of motivation in overcoming vocabulary challenges. They noted that even the most difficult elements become more manageable with sufficient motivation, highlighting the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic factors in learning success. This insight underscores the need for educators to foster a supportive and motivating learning environment for older adults, encouraging persistence and engagement in vocabulary learning activities. Most importantly, however, it should be kept in mind that understanding the challenges can help instructors adapt their teaching methods and approaches to better meet the needs of their learners, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and success of the instruction.

Another open-ended question allowed the participants to share their challenges with the English pronunciation, which is summarized below:

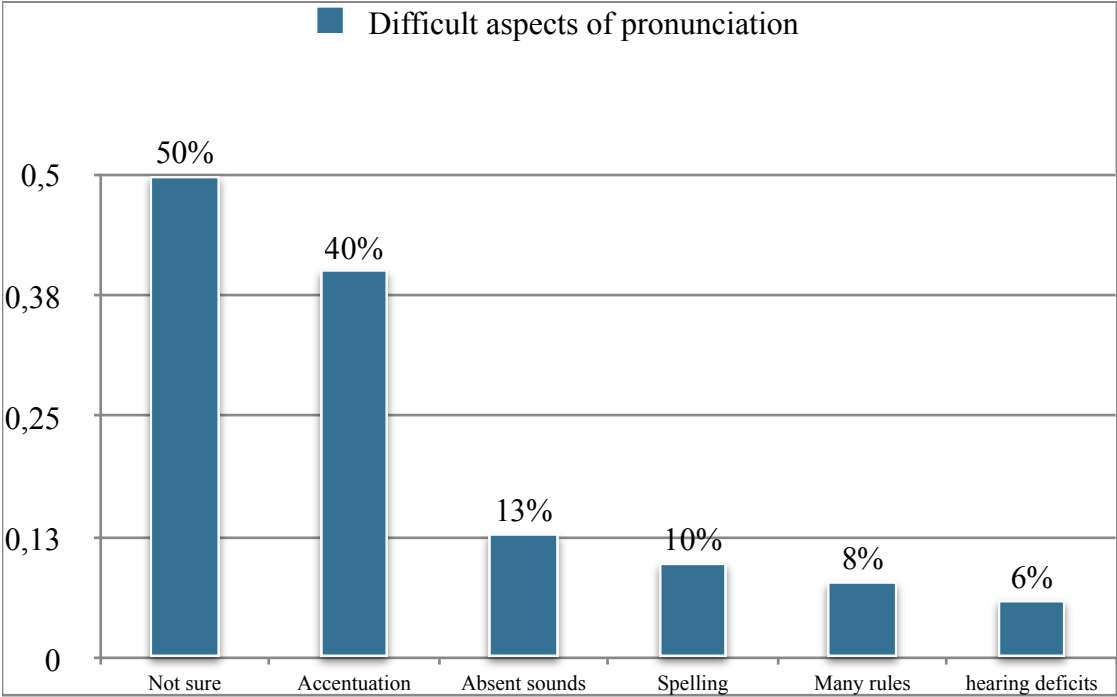


Figure 23. The most difficult aspects of pronunciation for older adults

Their overall common remark was that, generally, pronunciation is hard, especially because of the discrepancy between the way words are written and pronounced.

However, 50% of the group was unable to provide specific examples of issues that they find problematic. Again, the reason for that might be that they have not learned much and are not yet aware, or everything seems challenging for them at the moment.

Approximately 40% of respondents identified accent as a significant challenge. English has varying regional accents and stress patterns, which can affect intelligibility for non-native speakers. Some of seniors' comments were: „Speaking with the right accent. Every language has its own "melody," which is difficult for a foreigner.”; „Accent and especially, British pronunciation are hard for me”; „Speaking required courage, as pronunciation is usually really difficult”. Additionally, rapid word pronunciation and the correct placement of stress in multi-syllabic words present further obstacles to effective communication. Sounds absent in Polish were another difficulty for (13%) of respondents: „Sounds, which are absent in Polish are very difficult for me” or „Some sounds are different than the ones in Polish and it causes stress”. English contains a wide range of phonetic combinations and diphthongs that may be unfamiliar to L1 speakers of Polish, leading to difficulties in accurately reproducing these sounds. Certain sounds in English, such as the "th" sound (phonemes: /ð or /θ/), pose particular challenges for Polish learners due to their absence in the Polish phonetic inventory. Overcoming these articulatory differences requires focused practice and often proves elusive for older adult learners.

Some respondents (10%) also highlighted the inconsistency between English spelling and pronunciation as a major difficulty: ”When the pronunciation is different from spelling”, „You write words differently and then you pronounce them differently, so especially at the beginning you have to literally memorize everything”, „Pronunciation in English is difficult because it is not straightforward; words that are spelled the same are pronounced differently and mean different things”. This inconsistency can be attributed to the historical development of the English language, especially that the process of standardizing English spelling commenced throughout the 15th and 16th centuries (Denham & Lobeck, 2009).

The presence of silent letters, irregularities in vowel and consonant sounds, and variations in stress patterns make it challenging for learners to predict pronunciation based on written forms. The absence of consistent rules in English and generally many

rules also seemed to cause difficulty to 8% of the respondents. Unlike languages with more regular phonetic systems, English exhibits numerous exceptions and idiosyncrasies, making it challenging for learners to internalize consistent pronunciation patterns.

A couple of older adults (6%) cited problems with hearing and auditory processing as barriers to accurate pronunciation „Sometimes it’s difficult for me to hear the sounds correctly”, „I can’t always catch the correct pronunciation of a foreign word.”. This may stem from age-related hearing loss or difficulties in discriminating between subtle phonetic distinctions, leading to the need for slower speech rates and repeated exposure to reinforce correct pronunciation (see, e.g., Jaroszewska, 2013a).

4.4.9. Testing and assessment

The analyzed questionnaire also examined if older adults found testing necessary and what form of feedback they would prefer. The figure below presents the responses received from seniors.

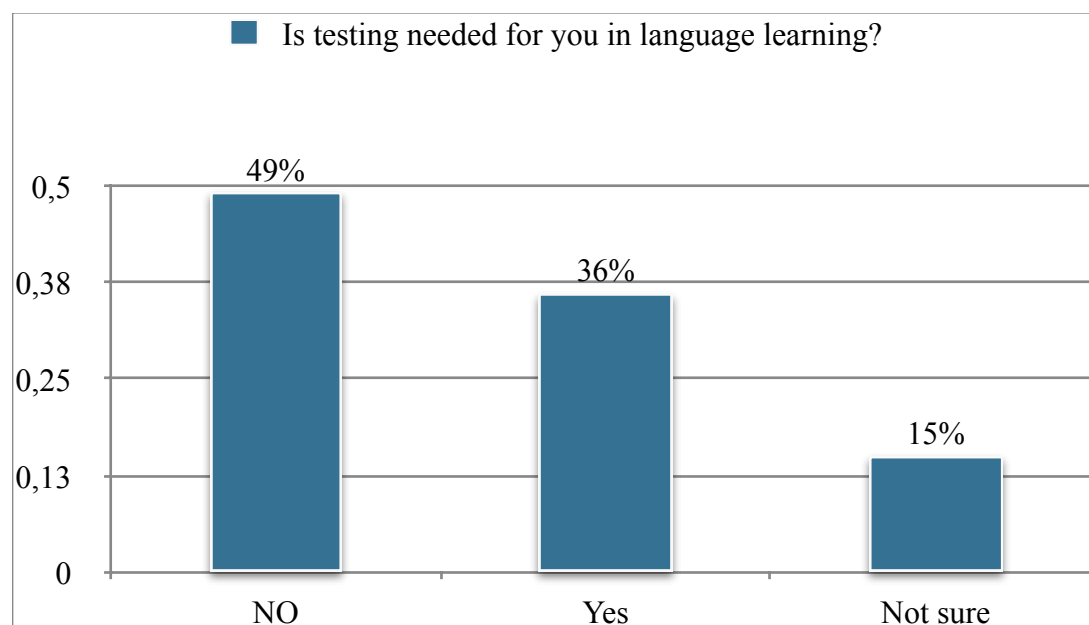


Figure 24. Older adults’ opinion regarding the need for testing in later-life language learning (n = 134)

Here, the answers of respondents revealed a divergence of opinions regarding the necessity of testing in the teaching and learning of foreign languages among older adults in Poland.

Almost a half (49%) of respondents did not see the necessity of testing. They perceived testing as stressful rather than beneficial to the learning process and advocated for a more enjoyable and relaxed approach to learning, saying, for example, „Testing is too stressful for me”; „I don't think that testing is needed as I don't learn for grades or exams”; „I learn mostly for myself so I don't see any point in testing”; „In certain age learning should be pleasant, so I say no to testing”. This sentiment reflects a desire for learning experiences that prioritize comfort and enjoyment over formal assessment. What is more, older adults' reluctance to undergo formal assessment has been evident in previous scientific research in the Polish context (e.g., Kilian, 2015; Grotek & Ślęzak-Świat, 2017; Klimczak-Pawlak & Kossakowska-Pisarek, 2018; Słowik-Krogulec, 2019).

A notable proportion (36%) of respondents expressed the view that testing is indeed necessary and important in language learning, claiming, „I can test my knowledge and level, so yes”, „Yes, it motivates me to learn more”; „Yes, I think testing is needed as it allows me to compare my level with others". They emphasized that testing provides an opportunity to assess their knowledge, exercise memory, and gauge their progress. However, they also suggested a preference for oral testing or frequent revisions of smaller portions of material, indicating a desire for less traditional and potentially less stressful assessment methods.

It is worth noting that a portion (15%) of respondents did not express a clear opinion on the matter, citing insufficient experience or exposure to language learning. This indicates a need for further exploration and understanding of the role of testing in language education among this demographic. Overall, the survey results underscored the importance of considering individual preferences and needs when determining the role of testing in language instruction for older adults. Balancing the benefits of assessment for measuring progress with the desire for a positive and stress-free learning environment is crucial in designing effective language learning programs for this demographic. Creating favorable learning conditions is extremely important, as it may

influence the effectiveness of the learning process itself. According to Arnold (1999), negative emotions like anxiety, stress, or fear hinder the learning process, whereas positive emotions like self-confidence, empathy, or motivation facilitate it.

As a follow-up question, seniors were requested to indicate their preferred forms of testing. The results can be seen in the figure below:

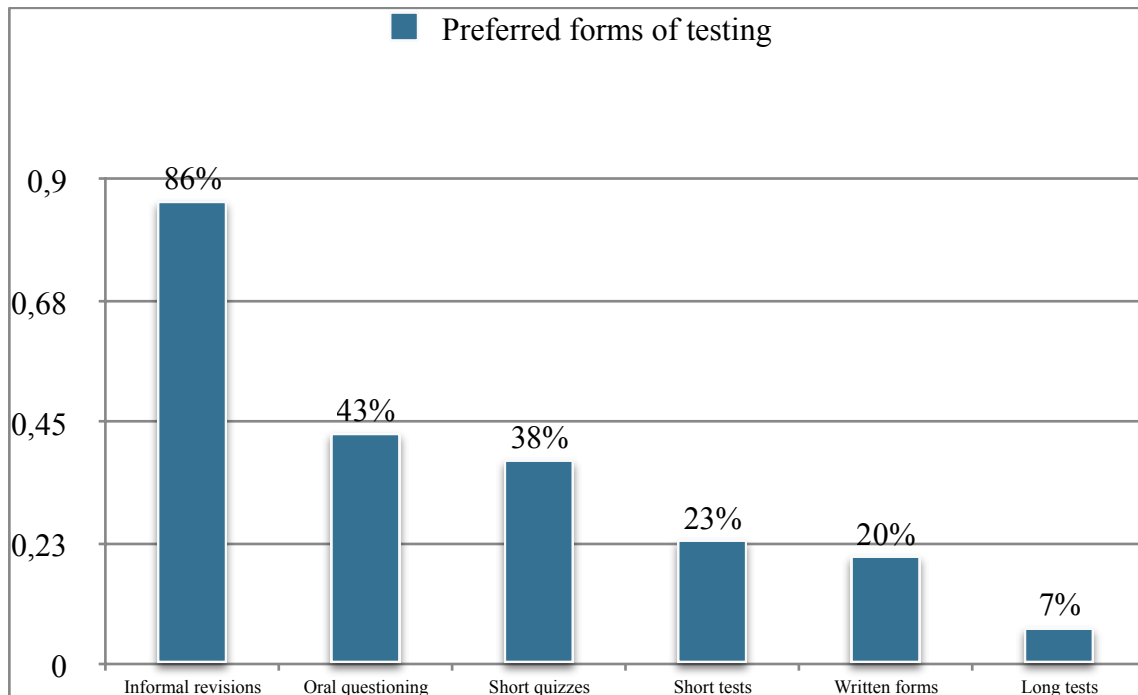


Figure 25. Preferred forms of testing in the language classroom in the eyes of the respondents

As one of their most favorite forms of testing, third-agers (86% of respondents) indicated revisions with the teacher during classes. This highlights the value placed by older adults on interactive learning experiences and personalized feedback provided by teachers during classroom sessions. It should be mentioned, however, that the respondents could choose from the options provided as many as they wanted, so the percentages do not add up to 100. Oral questioning emerged as one of the second most favorite forms of testing, with 43% of respondents indicating a preference for this method. This may suggest older adults like interactive assessment methods that allow for direct communication and verbal expression, which can be particularly beneficial for language learning.

Short quizzes or tests on specific topics were also favored by a significant portion (38%) of the respondents. This may indicate a preference for targeted

assessments that focus on specific language skills or areas of knowledge, allowing for more focused practice and feedback. Older adults also confirmed that in the interviews, saying that they would rather prepare for shorter quizzes from a small portion of material rather than longer ones including a couple of units. Written tests from each textbook chapter and written tests covering a larger portion of the material were less preferred, with only 23% and 7% of respondents choosing these options, respectively. This suggests that older adults are not fond of traditional assessment methods, as they may be perceived as more challenging or less engaging.

Overall, the survey results suggest a preference among older adults for a combination of interactive and targeted assessment methods, with a strong emphasis on oral questioning and in-class revisions with the teacher. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating varied and engaging assessment strategies into English language learning programs for older adults, and after the needs analysis of a specific group of students, also a decision to avoid formal testing in case they turned out to be disregarded by older adults.

Apart from their preferred way of testing, older adults were also asked about the way they liked receiving feedback.

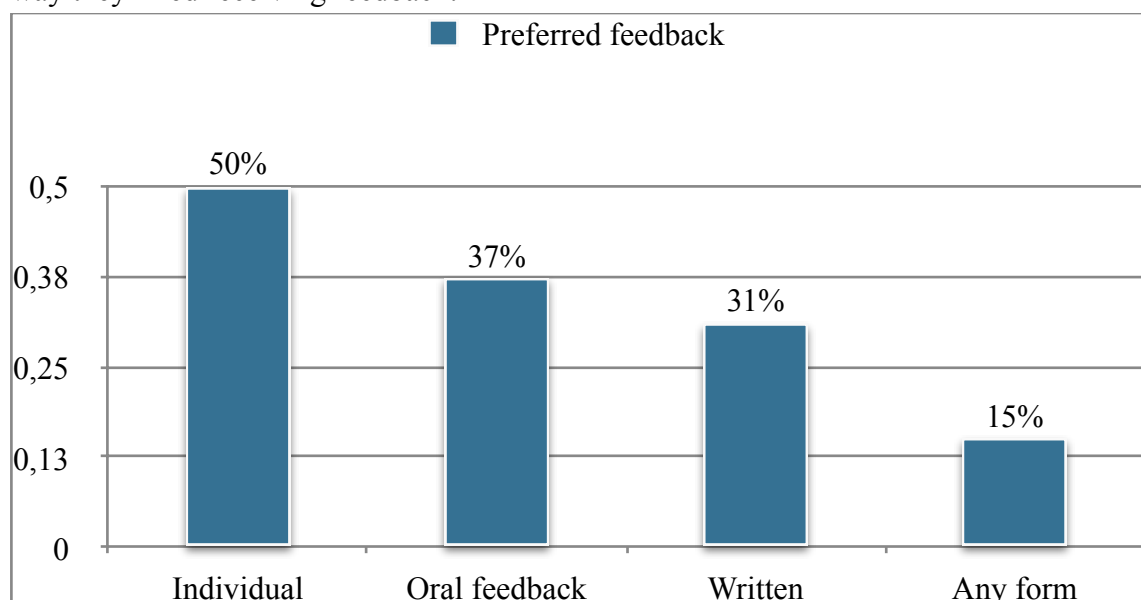


Figure 26. Preferred forms of feedback by older adults

The respondents could choose here as many options as they wanted, and the responses to the question about preferred forms of feedback from the teacher indicate a variety of preferences among Polish older adults learning English. The most popular form of

feedback seems to be individual feedback from the teacher, which was chosen by 50% of respondents. This suggests that half of them prefer personalized feedback tailored to their specific needs and progress.

Individual conversations with the teacher may allow for more detailed feedback and the opportunity to address questions or concerns directly. The preference for oral feedback within the group may indicate that a significant portion of respondents value collective learning experiences and peer interaction. This option was chosen by 37% of respondents. Group feedback might foster a sense of companionship and collaboration, allowing learners to benefit from each other's insights and perspectives. It is also important to point out that the fact older adults do not mind receiving feedback in front of the group may suggest the atmosphere in the courses is generally good and friendly and students are not ashamed of the comments they receive. While not as popular as individual or group conversations, a notable percentage of respondents still appreciated written feedback (31%). This variant may provide a tangible record of progress and areas for improvement. Some respondents may feel confident in their ability to assess their progress independently or may prefer informal feedback channels.

15% of respondents admitted any form of feedback is fine for them, and they did not have any specific preferences. This group's responses highlight the diversity of learner preferences and the importance of accommodating individual learning styles; however, it has to be borne in mind that respondents could choose more than one option, so their answers do not add up to 100%.

4.4.10. Homework

Section 10 of the analysis delved into the aspect of homework in later-life language learning. Older adults were asked if they received homework in their language course, what kind of homework it was, and which types of homework they preferred. Figure 26 presents whether homework assignments were part of the respondents' language learning experiences:

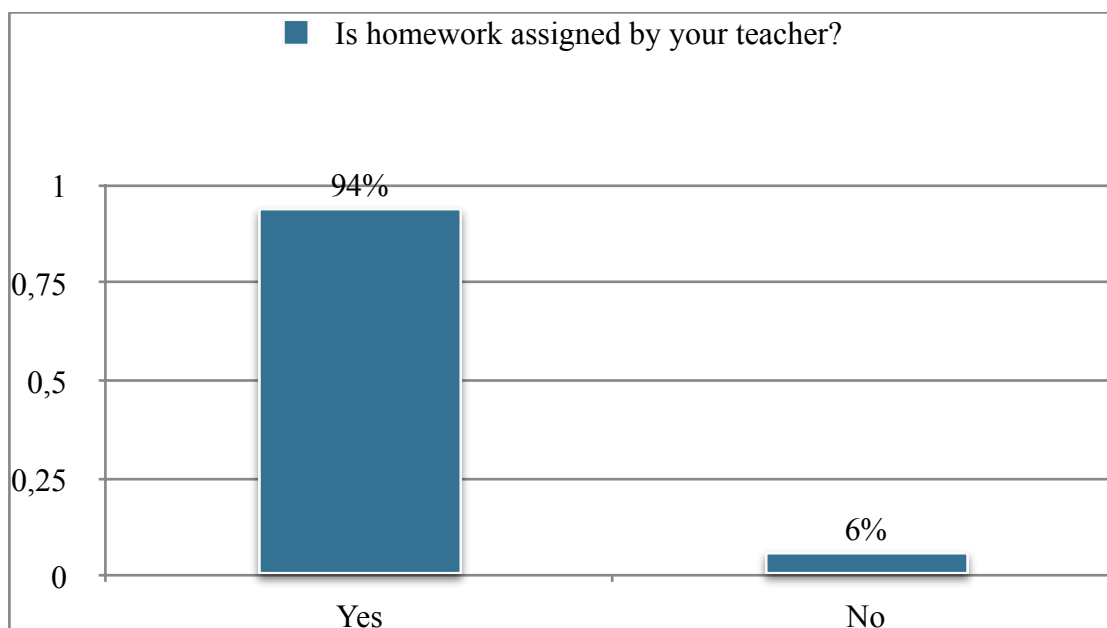


Figure 27. Homework assigned in the language course

The overwhelming majority of respondents (94%) indicated that their teacher assigned homework, while only a small percentage (6%) stated otherwise. The high percentage of respondents who receive homework assignments suggests a strong commitment to learning English among older adults. It indicates that both learners and teachers prioritize regular practice outside of the class, recognizing its importance in language acquisition. What is more, the prevalence of homework assignments may reflect the teaching philosophy and approach of their instructors. Teachers who assign homework likely believe in the value of consistent practice and may view it as essential for students' progress and proficiency development, and what is more, homework may have a lot of different purposes (Cooper, 1994; Wallinger, 2000). Additionally, homework assignments may serve as a supplementary learning tool, allowing students to reinforce and apply what they have learned during the class. For older adults balancing various responsibilities, homework provides structured opportunities for independent study and continued engagement with the language.

As a follow-up questions, older adults were asked to indicate the types of tasks they received and the types they preferred. The figure below presents the types of homework in descending order:

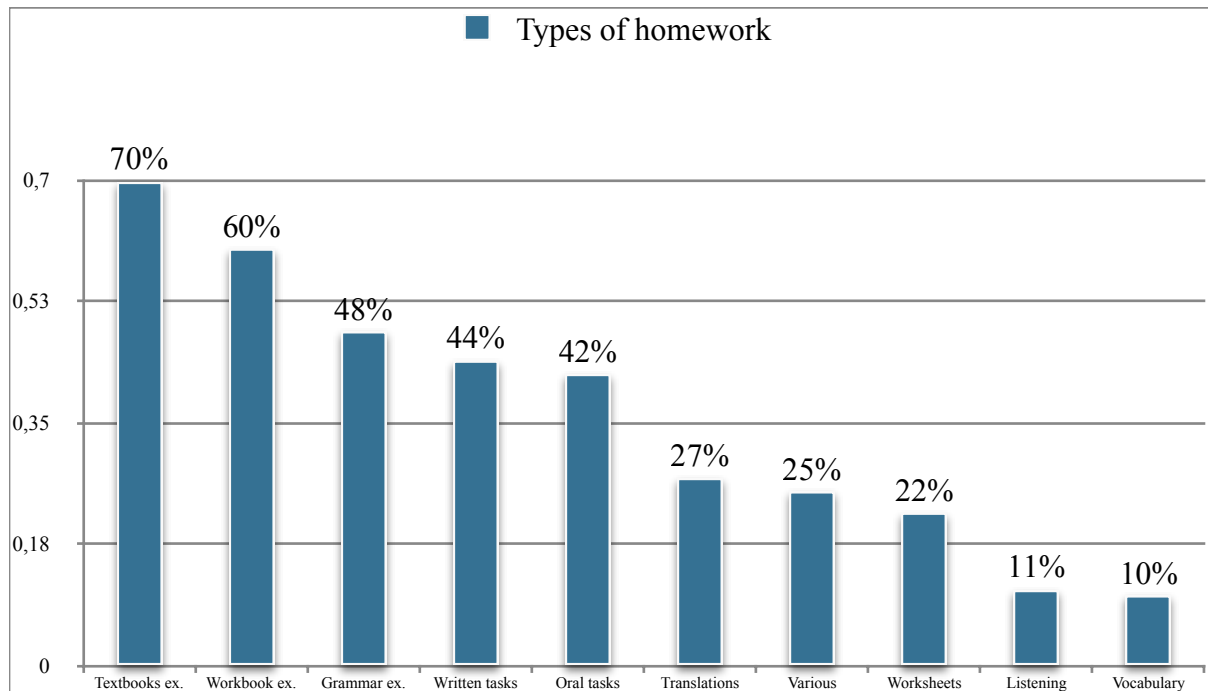


Figure 28. Types of homework received by respondents

In the context of the question under discussion, older adults pointed out various exercises. The high percentages for textbook (70%) and workbook exercises (60%) may indicate that traditional written exercises are a staple of homework assignments. These tasks likely include grammar drills, vocabulary and writing exercises, reading comprehension tasks reinforcing material covered in class. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) reported receiving grammar exercises as part of their homework. This finding may underscore the importance of grammar proficiency in language learning and suggest that learners prioritize honing their grammar skills through targeted practice. However, it should be kept in mind that homework tasks are chosen by the teachers, so it could equally mean the teacher's preferences for certain tasks, and the results from figure 28 may equally reflect teachers' preferences.

A significant portion of respondents (44% for written, 42% for oral) received assignments requiring them to prepare written or oral responses. This type of homework may encourage language production and application, allowing students to practice expressing themselves in English, whether through essays, presentations, or conversational dialogues. A portion of respondents reported receiving worksheets prepared by the teacher (22%), or various types of exercises (25%). The next subset of

respondents indicated receiving assignments focused on translation (27%) or vocabulary practice (10%). Translation exercises may help reinforce language comprehension and build vocabulary, while dedicated vocabulary exercises target the expansion and retention of lexical knowledge. Even though a smaller percentage (11%) reported receiving listening comprehension exercises, these tasks are still a notable component of homework assignments. Listening exercises likely involve audio recordings or online resources, requiring students to listen to spoken English and demonstrate their understanding through various tasks. It is, however, important to remember that older adults could choose as many options as they wanted to show their perspective, so the answers do not add up to 100%.

As far as the preferred forms of homework are concerned, the below figure presents third-agers' answers, which they could choose from the list (and again, respondents could choose as many options as they wanted so the percentages do not add up to 100):

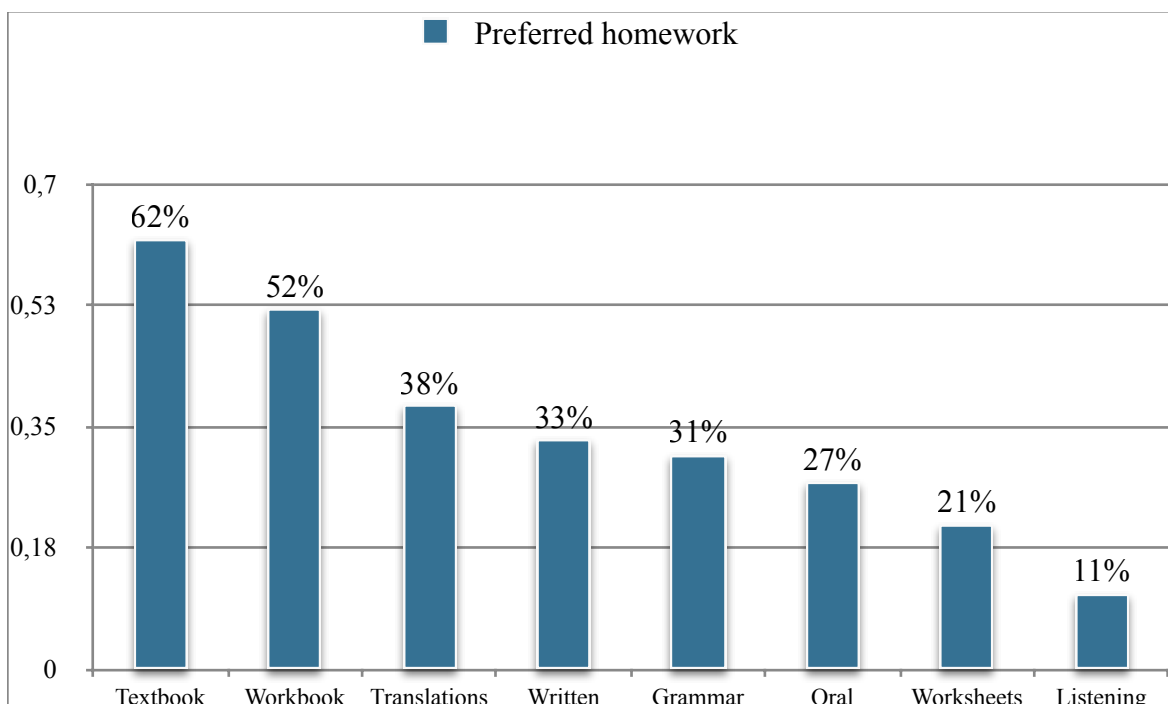


Figure 29. Preferred types of homework by older adults in a language course

Overall, the results indicated a preference among older adults in Poland for structured and practical homework assignments that reinforce classroom learning, provide

opportunities for language practice and application, and target key language skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension.

The majority of respondents (62% for textbook, 52% for workbook) expressed a preference for traditional textbook and workbook exercises. These tasks, which likely include grammar drills, vocabulary exercises, and reading comprehension passages, are favored for their structured format and alignment with classroom materials. A notable percentage of respondents (38%) expressed a preference for sentence or text translations. Translation exercises offer opportunities for learners to engage with language at a deeper level, requiring comprehension, analysis, and synthesis of linguistic elements. Translating texts also allows learners to compare linguistic structures between English and their native language. A significant portion of respondents (33% for written, 27% for oral) indicated a preference for assignments involving the preparation of written or oral responses. This may suggest that older adults value opportunities to practice language production and application, whether through writing essays, delivering speeches, or engaging in conversational activities. Older adults' preferences for translation activities go hand in hand with a growing trend in the subject literature toward rehabilitating the role of translation in language education (Lipińska & Seretny, 2006; Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn, 2020; Piechota, 2020). As noted by Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn (2020), this positive view of translation exercises is partly a result of the publication of the document „*The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*” (CEFR), in which translation is positioned among the so-called mediating activities and is treated as one of the forms of developing communicative competence (Janowska, 2016). In the CEFR descriptions, mediation is presented from a broader perspective than just translation, allowing for a multifaceted and flexible approach to translation exercises in various educational settings.

Approximately one-third of respondents (31%) favored grammar exercises, highlighting the importance of mastering grammatical concepts in language learning. Grammar exercises provide focused practice on syntax, sentence structure, and language rules, which learners may find beneficial for improving their accuracy and fluency. This result also suggests, what has already been mentioned in this dissertation,

that Polish older adults still express the need for including grammar translation method in the courses, as it may help them understand grammar rules better.

A minority of respondents (21% for worksheets prepared by teachers) expressed a preference for worksheets or materials provided by the teacher. These materials may offer additional practice opportunities, supplementary resources, or customized exercises tailored to the learners' needs and interests.

While a smaller percentage (11%) favored listening comprehension exercises, these tasks remain valued by some learners. Listening exercises challenge learners to understand spoken English in various contexts, improve their auditory processing skills, and reinforce vocabulary and grammar in aural contexts. It is something that should actually be considered not enough, and there should be more listening exercises (not only as homework), as older adults underlined their problems with listening skills. Understanding these preferences can help educators design homework tasks that align with learners' needs, abilities, and preferences.

4.4.11 Errors and error correction

The final survey section explored an important aspect of language mistakes and whether they cause stress to seniors, as well as the acceptance of error correction, both from the teacher and other group members.

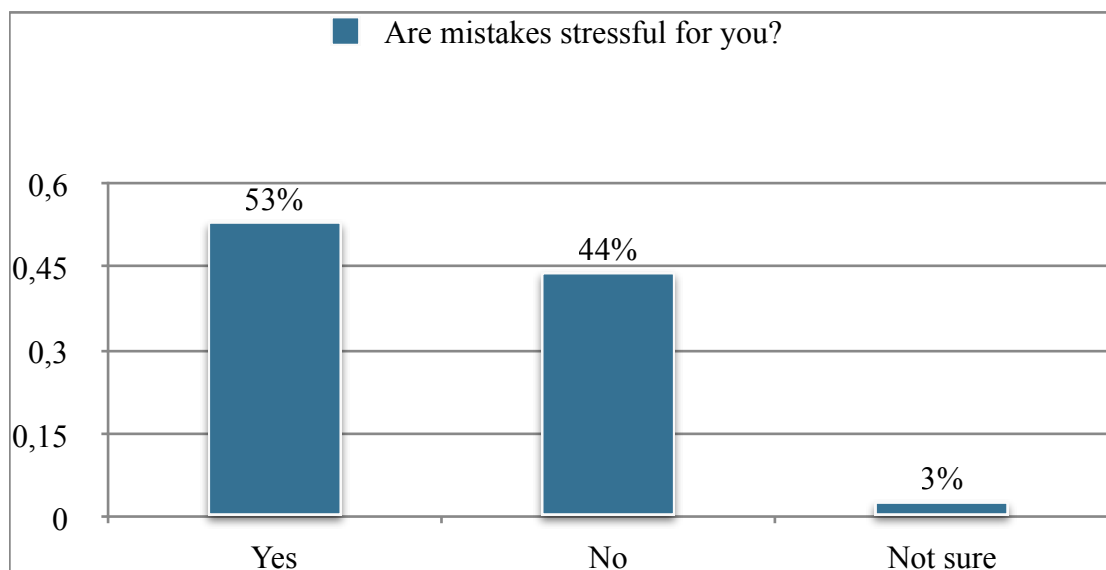


Figure 30. Stress induced by language mistakes

An interesting discrepancy can be observed in the respondents' answers. The majority of participants, accounting for 53%, indicated that language errors do cause them stress. This stress primarily stems from the desire to communicate effectively without errors. The frustration is heightened when these errors lead to misunderstandings during communication. However, approximately 44% of respondents reported that language errors do not cause them stress. They attribute this lack of stress to the positive atmosphere in the class, their life experience, and the belief that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process. A small proportion of respondents (3%) did not provide any answer to this question, indicating variability in how individuals perceive and react to language errors. It is possible that the reaction to stress is connected with their general personality traits and mindset, as they probably also react differently to various situations in life including failures. However, it is advisable that teachers working with older adults are aware of various attitudes towards testing among their students.

When asked whether they accept error correction from the teacher, the overwhelming majority of respondents in the survey expressed a clear expectation for corrections of their mistakes from the teacher, with 96% indicating so (see the figure below):

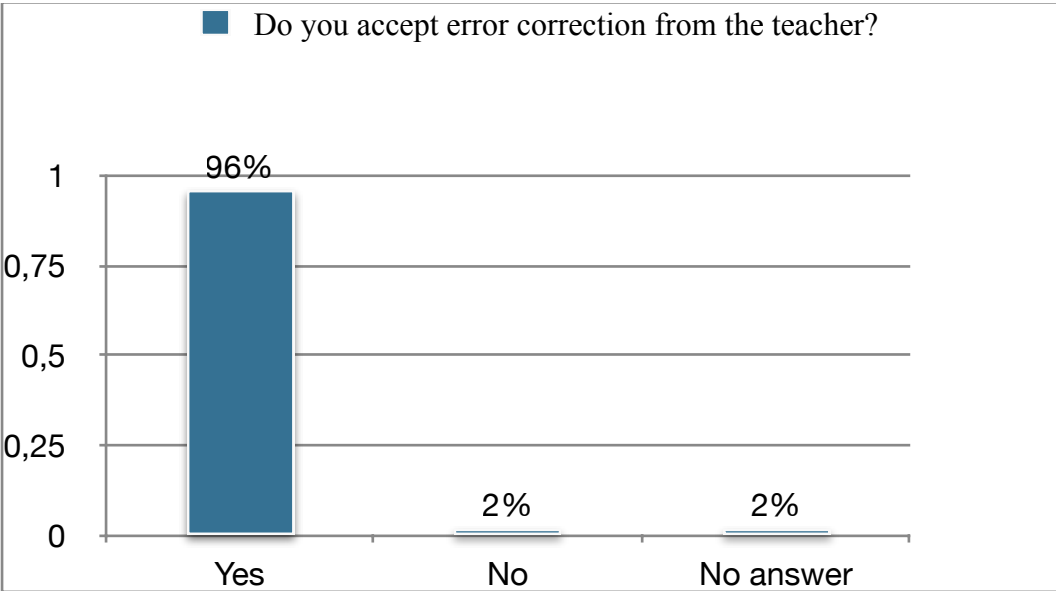


Figure 31. The acceptance of error correction from the teacher

96% of respondents expecting error correction from the teacher may suggest their strong desire to receive regular and immediate feedback on their language errors, highlighting their commitment to improving their language proficiency. Some of the older adults stated: „I expect immediate oral correction when I speak and written feedback regarding homework tasks”; „Yes, in the form of improving speech and homework assignments”; „Direct oral correction during speaking”; „Yes, of course. If we are not corrected by the teacher, we will remain under the illusion that our English is flawless”; „Yes—repeating the correct answer after the teacher”; „Yes. Every mistake in speech should be corrected immediately”; „Written corrections after reviewing the text." The need for corrections suggests a recognition of the importance of accuracy in language learning and a willingness to learn from mistakes.

Corrective feedback plays a crucial role in language learning by providing learners with guidance on areas for improvement and helping them develop linguistic accuracy. It should be mentioned, that 2% of the respondents admitted they did not expect error correction, stating that they try to correct themselves or they only talk when they are sure they were right. Another 2% did not answer the question. When it comes to the preferred way of correcting the mistakes, some answers were provided in one of the earlier questions (regarding feedback), but here older adults underlined, for example, the importance of immediate correction (when they still remember what the mistake was), their expectation for correction from the teacher, and additionally, they like when the teacher asks them to repeat the correct form a few times to make sure they practice it. Participants also underlined their problems with pronunciation and therefore the need for correction in this area and also the need for both oral and written correction (e.g., „Yes, especially work on phonetics. This aspect is completely neglected in teaching in Poland”), as well as the need to provide polite and respectful feedback, because of the fact that for so many people mistakes are still stressful.

The responses to the question regarding the acceptance of corrections made by fellow participants in the English class among Polish later-life learners revealed various attitudes towards peer feedback (see the figure below):

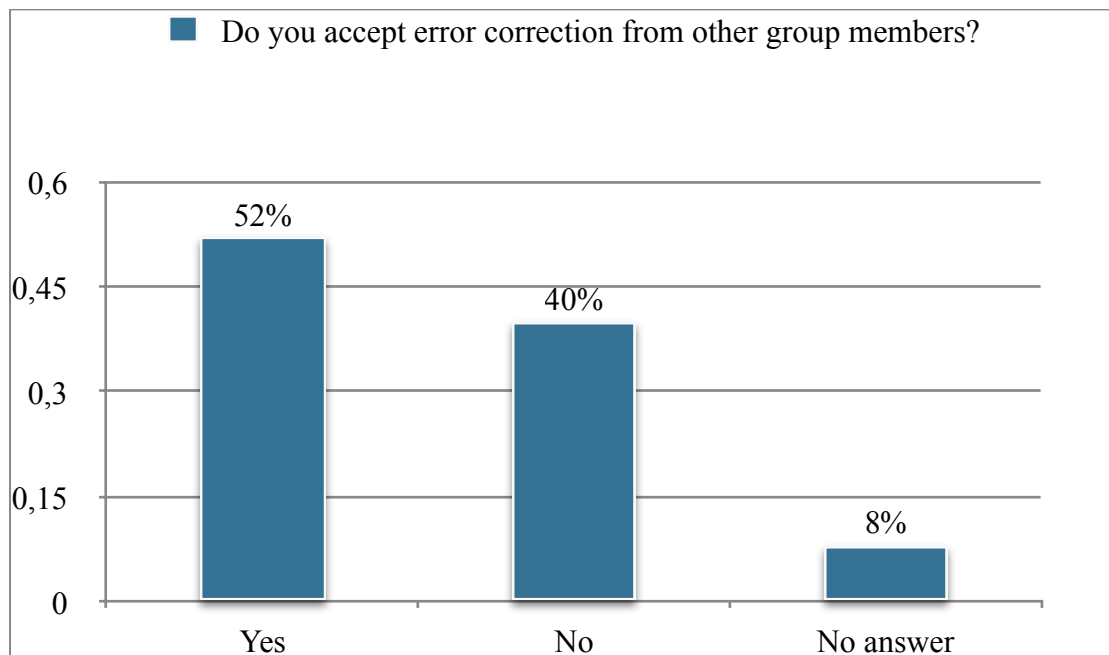


Figure 32. Acceptance of error correction from other members of the group

Approximately half of the respondents (52%) indicated their acceptance of corrections from other group members. This may suggest a willingness to engage in collaborative learning and to benefit from the insights and observations of peers, as well as prove a good atmosphere in most classrooms. Accepting corrections from classmates can also foster a supportive learning environment, where learners actively contribute to each other's language development. Some of the responses were as follows: „I don't mind error correction from other group members”; „Yes, as long as it's correct”; „Yes, as long as they first give me some time to think and maybe try to correct myself”; „Yes, seniors are usually friendly and correct each other. I see such corrections as a favor to me”.

On the other hand, a significant proportion (40%) expressed a reluctance to accept corrections from other course participants. This may stem from factors such as concerns about preserving face or status in the group, a preference for receiving feedback only from the teacher who is the authority for them, or a lack of confidence in the accuracy of peer corrections. Some older adults underlined the role of the teacher in correcting the mistakes: „No, I don't accept [the correction], this is not their role”, „ I prefer the teacher's correction, as I am sure then it's the right one”; „No, because they may be wrong themselves”; „ No, I only accept the correction from the teacher as other

group members can make mistakes too”; „ I believe error correction should be done by the teacher as this is his/her role”.

A relatively small percentage (7%) who did not respond to the question may indicate uncertainty or ambivalence regarding their stance on accepting corrections from classmates. Various attitudes towards peer correction may highlight the importance of considering individual preferences and comfort levels when incorporating collaborative learning activities in the classroom. Teachers can encourage peer feedback by fostering a supportive and respectful classroom culture, providing guidelines for constructive criticism, and emphasizing the benefits of learning from one another's mistakes. Additionally, offering opportunities for self-assessment and reflection may empower learners to take ownership of their language development and make informed decisions about accepting corrections from peers.

4. 5. General discussion

This dissertation has explored later-life language learning in Poland on the example of English. The study aimed to answer the following research questions related to later-life language learning that were grouped into three areas of investigation:

A) self-perceived language learning needs and preferences:

1. What are the preferences, needs and motivations of older adults in terms of language learning?
2. What are older adults' preferences in terms of ways of working and collaboration in the classroom (e.g. individual, group work, pair work etc.)?
 - a) Which are the easiest and the most difficult language skills in the eyes of older adult learners?

b) Which are the most useful language skills from the perspective of older adults?

B) (past) influences that help or hinder later-life language learning

3. What helps and what can hinder third-age language learning in the eyes of third-age learners?
4. Do past language education experiences influence the current language learning process and if so, to what extent?

C) teaching methods and materials adaptations for older adults

5. a) Which methods and techniques of teaching are used during language courses for older adults?

5. b) Which methods and techniques of teaching facilitate third-age language learning process?

6. What preferences do older adults have in terms of teaching materials ?

7. a) Do older adults need/want testing and assessment?

b) What methods/techniques of testing and assessment are recommended when working with older adults?

In order to answer these research questions, first a literature review was conducted, which helped identify gaps in knowledge and set a research agenda for the later-life language learning field (Chapters 1 and 2). This served as a basis for designing the study, choosing and constructing research tools and finding participants. In terms of the methodology, mixed-methods approach was chosen to answer the 7 research questions, and the tools used in the study were course book analysis, lesson observations, focus group interviews, and a survey for older adults learning English in Poland.

This section presents a recapitulation of the most important results from the study. The discussion on teaching English in late adulthood should also, at this point, be supplemented with answers to the research questions posed in Chapter 3.

The conducted course book analyses showed that none of the books available on the market was entirely suitable for older adults. Each textbook offered certain undeniable benefits, but also had significant shortcomings. Among the four titles reviewed, *English File* stood out as the most popular and suitable, clearly surpassing self-study books like *Angielski dla Seniora* [English for a Senior Learner] or *Angielski dla Seniorów* [English for Seniors]. The analyses conducted underscored the necessity of developing instructional materials tailored to the specific circumstances and expectations, particularly thematic ones, of later-life learners. Undoubtedly, the creation of new textbooks or materials would significantly enhance the effectiveness, enjoyment, and satisfaction of learning a foreign language for older adults. This need was earlier expressed in another study conducted among the teachers of older adults (Niewczas & Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn, 2024) and the current study confirmed it.

As for the classroom observations, they drew attention to various aspects of language learning in later-life. These observations underscored several key elements of the lesson structure, such as the presentation and practice of the new material, the balance between teacher talking time (TTT) and student talking time (STT), and the assignment of homework. Additionally, the findings align with previous research that emphasized the significance of enhancing learner motivation and cognition through tailored third-age learning support (Grotek, 2017; Derenowski, 2018). It was noteworthy to observe that the participants were highly engaged in learning and actively participated in various tasks, with the teacher's engagement being equally high. The teacher adjusted the pace of lessons, as well as the teaching methods and materials to suit older adults' needs. However, an area for improvement was the lack of goal-setting strategies and the need to make later-life learners aware of the importance of setting reasonable goals in language learning. This aspect was frequently highlighted in the literature as crucial for supporting learner autonomy in later-life language education (e.g., Schiller & Dorner, 2021). It is also crucial to allow for self-directed learning or relevant things, which usually turned out to be preferred by older adults (Dual & Bryan, 2008; Knowles et al., 2009; Kilian, 2015).

As far as the results of the four focus group interviews [and the surveys for seniors] are concerned, they showed that third-agers are predominantly driven to learn English in order to build relationships with family members living abroad, enrich their travel experiences, and make productive use of their leisure time after retiring. Based on the collected data, it is evident, in line with existing literature, that the motives and expectations of older adults play a vital role in foreign language learning. It is particularly crucial due to the absence of English tests or marks for older persons, resulting in often weaker instrumental motivation. However, they primarily showed high levels of intrinsic motivation, as they often admitted learning English only for themselves. The present study corroborated the findings of the previous research (Garcia, 2017; Słowik-Krogulec, 2020) by demonstrating that later-life learners primarily acquired language skills for the purpose of communicating with others during travels or when interacting with family members residing in foreign countries. They gave priority to the development of speaking and listening skills, acknowledging the

practical necessity of being able to communicate effectively. Nevertheless, older adults encountered considerable obstacles in their ability to talk, listen, and retain vocabulary, primarily due to age-related issues and a lack of continuous exposure to language. To overcome these problems, it is important to use customized teaching methods and provide more opportunities for practice, as this can greatly improve the experience of learning a new language. Participants highlighted the crucial importance of the teacher in establishing a nurturing learning atmosphere and the difficulties encountered while shifting from conventional to contemporary instructional approaches. They still seemed to like traditional methods of learning (including the grammar-translation method). The study also emphasized the significance of group work, interactive learning tools, and various attitudes towards testing. It also underscored the value of social relationships and chances for personal growth in language classes. The importance of social aspects of later-life language learning confirmed the results of the previous studies, also because of the connection between learning a foreign language and an increase in the subjective feeling of well-being (Duay & Bryan, 2008; Grotek & Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2012; Pfenninger & Polz, 2018; Valis et al., 2019; Pikhart & Klimova, 2020).

Furthermore, the observations highlighted the necessity of personalized instruction and resources that address the distinct requirements of older learners. The results of the survey for older adults highlighted some key aspects of later-life language learning and confirmed findings from the other research tools: course book analysis, observations, and focus group interviews. At the same time, they contradicted other analyses, which will also be discussed in this section. Altogether, however, they allowed for collecting comprehensive answers to the research questions that guided this study. To address our first research question, which asked older adults about their motivations to learn English in late adulthood, needs and preferences, the results from both the interviews and the survey indicated that getting to know other people and cultures, communicating during travels, and with family members living abroad were the prevailing reasons for the respondents. This finding aligns with the literature (e.g., Wawrzyniak & Świdorska, 2011), where three types of language learning motivation were distinguished: social (the need to communicate with family members who do not speak Polish), practical (to be able to find employment abroad) and intellectual (the

need to exercise the brain and memory or pursue interests of other cultures). Duay and Bryan (2008) and Słowik- Krogulec (2024) contended that acquiring language skills in old age is a social endeavor. The proposal suggested that language courses should give priority to interaction, since it provides older adult learners with the essential abilities and tools to actively engage with others in a globalized world. Similarly, Kacetyl & Klímová (2021) highlighted the importance of incorporating communicative competence as a learning goal at later stages of life. What is more, creating a supportive and collaborative classroom environment can enhance motivation and engagement. This was previously mentioned by other researchers, e.g., Słowik-Krogulec (2023), who claimed that foreign language courses for older adults should encompass creating a motivating and supportive learning environment for older adults. Other studies on motivation among older adults (Jaroszevska, 2013a; Słowik-Krogulec, 2017, 2020; Derenowski, 2019) also listed similar motivating factors, including communication when traveling abroad or with their family abroad, getting to know other older adults, exercising the brain and spending free time. As far as the preferences were concerned, an interesting discrepancy could be observed between the preference for the use of L1 (Polish) expressed in the survey (almost 50% of respondents admitted they do not mind the teacher's using Polish during the classes), whereas in 20 observed lessons Polish was used only occasionally. It could be related to the fact that later-life L2 learners did not need further explanation in Polish during the observed classes or they did not want to admit it when being observed. However, as stated by Derenowski (2022), elderly individuals frequently exhibit an unwillingness to openly articulate their opinions and are inclined to feel apprehensive about departing from the language learning techniques they employed during their early years (p. 61). This could mean that they do not always feel comfortable admitting that they did not understand something, especially when other group members seem to keep up with the teacher. Respondents also had some preferences regarding topics that they would like to see during language classes, including, e.g., traveling, role-plays in a shop, at the airport, at a restaurant, the customs and culture of the English speaking countries, culture, food and eating.

When it comes to research question number two, where older adults were asked about their preferences regarding the ways of working in the classroom, the preference

for group classes and group work prevailed. To be able to draw conclusions from their answers, however, it is important first to explain how older adults understand group work. Very often, third-agers also treat interaction teacher – students as group work, when the teacher asks questions to the whole group and they answer together or by volunteering. This may also suggest that seniors prefer a teacher-focused teaching style (which means learning with others but mainly from the teacher). It is easier for them to work in one, bigger group guided by the teacher, whom they trust, especially at lower levels and should be allowed for. Question two focused also on the easiest and the most difficult language skills from the perspective of older adults, as well as the most useful and important skills. Here, one of the most important observations (confirmed both by the data from focus group interviews and the survey) was that for later-life learners not all language skills seemed to have equal importance. They mostly listed speaking and listening as crucial for communication, so it might be claimed that these two skills should account for the core of the language courses for third-agers. As they underlined, they did not need to practice or develop writing that music and reading were usually perceived as much easier than listening and speaking, so they did not focus on them much. This outcome corroborates the findings of Klimczak-Pawlak & Kossakowska-Pisarek (2018), who found that among a group of older adults (50+) in Poland, speaking and listening turned out to be the most important skills. As for the easiest skills to master, 60% of older individuals identified reading as the least difficult skill. This may be due to factors such as prior exposure to reading materials in their native language or familiarity with written texts. Reading may be enjoyable and manageable for third-agers as it enables them to progress at their own tempo, utilize context clues, and refer back to the text for confirmation.

In response to research question number three regarding factors that hinder and facilitate later-life language learning, the survey data highlighted that personal limitations (connected among others to past learning experiences), difficulties connected with everyday life and learning logistics, difficulties connected with the language course and teaching style, health problems, financial and motivational difficulties are among the most common ones. This outcome corroborates the findings of earlier studies (Ramírez Gómez, 2016; Kuklewicz & King, 2018), who found that

being aware of many factors hindering their learning is crucial, as existing research indicated that older adults generally perceive their language learning capabilities to be worse compared to younger learners. This could be attributed to the prevailing societal notion that younger individuals who acquire languages are more likely to achieve success compared to later-life language learners (Penfield & Roberts, 1959). As for the factors positively contributing to their language learning experience, we can distinguish: personal factors and past learning experiences; the influence of the teacher and their teaching methods; the influence of the group; additional factors (mostly connected to practicing language outside the classroom).

In research question number four, we asked whether past language education experiences influence older adults' current language learning process. Here, the answers collected with all the research tools shed light on a few crucial aspects. First of all, older adults admitted that previous experiences may help them learn English in late adulthood (31% of respondents). However, for another 52%, their previous language education experiences turned out to be more of a burden hindering their current learning. This might be connected to aspects such as methods, which they now find attractive based on what they already know, the perceived role of the teacher or their preferences for types of tasks in the classroom, techniques used, or even the amount of Polish in the class. These previous encounters with language learning often contribute to one's attitudes, beliefs, and strategies in new learning environments. For instance, positive experiences, such as successful communication in a foreign language or effective instruction, can build confidence and motivate continued learning. Conversely, negative experiences, such as struggles with grammar or pronunciation, can lead to anxiety or reluctance in approaching new language tasks. Finding out about third-agers' previous language learning experiences is an important aspect of needs analysis, which should be conducted before starting to work with this age group.

Research question number five explored teaching methods that are used during the lessons and that are or would be expected by older adults. As for the methods used, lesson observations showed that older adults seemed generally fine with the communicative language teaching method; however, as was already mentioned before, they still like the occasional inclusion of grammar translation method. This is a method

they remember from their first encounters with foreign languages, and it actually often helps to keep their anxiety at a lower level (see earlier comments about the use of this method). What is more, the grammar translation method is closely linked to explicit grammar teaching, as it relies on the direct transmission of grammatical rules. In this method, the teacher first explains the grammar rules in the learners' native language, and then demonstrates their application through examples and sentence translation. Students acquire grammatical knowledge consciously, by analyzing structures rather than through intuitive language understanding characteristic of implicit grammar instruction. However, grammar-translation method is the one that most older adults in Poland have been familiar with (they probably had this type of instruction at school). It may turn out to be useful when working with this cohort, because it might be helpful in reducing language anxiety among third-agers. Throughout the years, numerous studies have been conducted to examine the efficacy of various language teaching approaches. Nevertheless, achieving a consensus on the most effective strategy is challenging (Andringa & Rebuschat, 2015). The meta-analyses conducted by Norris and Ortega (2000), Spada and Tomita (2010), and Goo and colleagues (2015) indicated a distinct benefit of explicit language education. The current level of research in this field has only used young learners, primarily those in high school. It is not viable to apply these findings on explicit versus implicit training to older adults because there is a lack of research on successful approaches for language learning and teaching in this stage of life. Results of other studies have shown that implicit grammar instruction was more effective, especially for older adults (Midford & Kirsner, 2005; Lenet et al., 2011; Van der Ploeg, Keizer & Lowie, 2023). In terms of the teaching materials used during the lessons and preferred by older adults, which were the focus of research question number six, it could be concluded that what was offered in the classroom adhered to older adults' preferences. From their answers, it could be seen that older adults preferred working with course books, worksheets prepared by the teacher (as a supplementary resource), and audio and video materials the most. Later-life learners seem to be open to the use of new technologies and they require error correction and feedback, however provided in stress-free and pleasant way. What they often underlined was also the need for frequent repetitions of the material that they had already studied and personalization

of the learning, so that as relevant topics as possible are the core of the course. What could be seen as an improvement is using more audio and video materials, because they were rather absent during lesson observations, and clearly they would be welcomed by the respondents of the survey. This finding aligns with earlier studies, where Słowik (2017) found that audio and video materials for the listening practice were used rather rarely, and it should be taken into consideration, as in answers to another research question, older adults underlined listening as the most challenging language skill.

It was also interesting to observe the discrepancy between older adults answers regarding question seven, in which testing and their attitude towards it were investigated. Almost half of respondents admitted they were unwilling to take tests, and still many were in favor of testing and admitted they liked informal assessment in the form of revisions during the class with the teacher. In the research conducted so far (e.g., Słowik-Krogulec, 2019; Klimczak-Pawlak & Kossakowska-Pisarek, 2018) older adults were mostly unwilling to take tests. The various approaches of older adults from the current study prove that it is crucial to approach each group individually and conduct a needs analysis before starting the course, and even then it is more advisable to allow for various solutions rather than generalize for the whole group. Respondents also seemed to like receiving feedback regularly, but mostly from the teacher (many respondents were not open to feedback from other group members), and around a half of the participants admitted that language mistakes that they make cause them stress. Third-agers also highlighted the importance of receiving homework regularly and the willingness to use new technologies when learning English.

However, it is imperative to account for individual differences in relation to our study questions and hypotheses. Notable individual variation is a recognized phenomenon in gerontology, with studies revealing that "this age group exhibits the highest diversity among all age groups engaged in education" (Grotek, 2018, p. 128). Research has shown that cognitive ability and second language proficiency can fluctuate significantly within the same individual from day to day (Christensen, 2001). Furthermore, inter- and intra-individual variations are recognized to escalate across the lifespan (Christensen, 2001). Consequently, generalizing across individuals is

problematic, and defining a "typical" later-life language learner becomes increasingly complex.

4.6. Limitations

Although the present research project has surely contributed to a better understanding of later-life foreign language learning and its principles, it has some limitations. The primary limitation to the generalization of the results is the size of the research sample and the general problem with access to bigger groups of older adults learning English. It is true that language courses are becoming more and more popular among older adults; however, so is the research in the area of later-life learning. Many third-agers are unwilling to fill out surveys and take part in interviews, because they are quite often asked to do so.

What is more, some parts of the research were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and for many months the language courses at UTAs were put on hold and then changed into online or hybrid mode. The access to lesson observations was limited too for over a year. The focus of the current research is mainly qualitative; however, it may be hypothesized that a bigger sample size could have contributed to gaining a more detailed picture of the variables affecting students' performance or generally later-life learning, and additionally, the possible significant data might have indicated the importance of the demographic factors in shaping the needs of older adults.

In future studies, it would also be advisable to conduct more statistically focused analyses to observe the relationship between different variables. It would also be a good idea to interpret the questionnaire data through, e.g., a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to see which questions cluster together and what other themes might come out of the dataset then.

A further constraint is the general scarcity of research on older adults in Poland, which makes it more difficult to compare the present results to earlier studies. However, the current study aimed to gain a comprehensive grasp of language learning among older adults by focusing on a specific (positive) perspective. This allowed to deepen the knowledge and contribute to the broader discussion on the subject.

Chapter Five: Foreign Language Geragogy implications and future challenges

This study, in its broad conceptual, educational, and pedagogical scope, offers a proposal of a new foreign language geragogy approach, as well as practical suggestions regarding how to form contemporary methods of older adults' language education.

5.1. Key findings and implications for the educational context of later-life language learning

Taking into account the results of the current study, it can be concluded that later-life language learners are a fascinating and captivating group of individuals learning foreign languages, whose unique needs and preferences are crucial for organizing a language course for them. This becomes even more pivotal given the great increase in number of older adult language learners. Current applied linguistic theories have been mainly based on young language learner and, as such, explorations such as the current ones are much needed to chart outcomes of older age language learning trajectories as well as well as pedagogical needs for later life language learners. One of the current study's findings that underscores earlier investigations is that older adult language learners are a very heterogeneous group with diverse needs. These needs translate into specific expectations regarding the course (set-up), materials, and teachers. Another important issue, as already raised by Ramírez Gómez (2019), is the lack of methodology for teaching older adults, which is also connected to the heterogeneity of the group and the fact that the teaching methods may only be chosen and adjusted after conducting the above-mentioned needs analysis.

In what follows the key findings of this study as detailed in the various chapters are summarized. These findings complement existing research and may help to gain the much-needed insight into more effective later-life language learning. It is also crucial to point out here that these findings were obtained within the Polish context and they may assist in shaping later-life language learning in that context, but they can at a later stage help to shape later life language learning in other settings.

When it comes to lesson planning, materials, and methods, lesson observations showed a lack of goal-setting strategies, which is also connected to the need to make

older adults aware of the importance of setting reasonable goals for their learning. What is more, clearly stating and revisiting lesson objectives can significantly enhance clarity and focus, making lessons more goal-oriented and relevant for the students. This strategy could be incorporated into lesson plans to improve their overall effectiveness. Third-agers turned out to be aware of their learning needs and with clear preferences connected to their learning, including choice of topics, which are far from stereotypically associated with later-lifer learners. Maintaining an appropriate lesson pace and providing clear, concise instructions are crucial. It is advisable that the teachers are mindful of the learning speed of their students and ensure that transitions between activities are smooth and well-guided to prevent confusion. Also the choice of materials and methods could promote interaction and active participation. While course books provide a structured framework, incorporating diverse materials and interactive methods like group work and speaking exercises can significantly enhance engagement and language learning. To our knowledge, the study offered the first course book analysis for teaching English to third-agers and concluded that there are no suitable course books that would fully answer later-life learners' needs. Therefore, there is a need to supplement courses with worksheets prepared by the teachers. The research results serve as a basis for preparing such materials – no longer blindly, but by referring to specific data about the needs and expectations of Polish seniors. Fostering a collaborative learning environment might be particularly beneficial for older adults and encouraging group activities and discussions allows students to practice speaking frequently, receive feedback from peers, and feel more connected and supported in their learning journey. By implementing these strategies, educators can create a more effective and supportive learning environment for older adults, aligning with the principles of positive aging and lifelong learning.

In terms of language skills, the strong preference for speaking and listening among older adults, as revealed in this study, underscores the need for language courses tailored specifically to enhance these skills. Educational institutions and language course designers might consider placing a greater emphasis on oral communication and listening exercises to meet the unique needs of this demographic, which in turn could lead to more effective language learning and greater learner satisfaction. Older adults

may benefit from supportive and interactive speaking activities, opportunities for meaningful communication, and strategies for overcoming speaking anxiety to improve their oral proficiency.

Given that many later-life learners experience stress from making mistakes, but also value regular feedback, it is crucial for language instructors to provide corrections in a supportive and non-threatening manner. This could involve more positive reinforcement, peer support in a controlled environment, and the use of informal assessments rather than high-stakes testing. Furthermore, considering that a significant portion of learners prefer feedback directly from the teacher, instructors might focus on providing personalized, constructive feedback that builds confidence and reduces anxiety. It is equally important given that stress often arises from communication breakdowns, and instructors could incorporate practical exercises that enhance seniors' ability to effectively convey their messages, even when errors occur. They might also encourage older adults to view language learning as a journey that involves both successes and errors.

The diverse attitudes towards testing among older adults highlight the importance of offering a range of assessment options within language courses. For instance, while some learners may benefit from informal, formative assessments integrated into regular classroom activities, others might prefer more structured evaluations. Educators could consider offering alternative assessment methods, such as portfolio assessments or self-assessment tasks, that align with the learners' preferences and reduce the pressure associated with formal testing.

Educators could also consider implementing learning and communication strategies training to help their students learn in a more pleasant and effective way. To enhance motivation and facilitate the process of learning, Bosisio (2019) proposed the use of teaching materials that stimulate and broaden existing language knowledge, rather than solely focusing on acquiring new language skills. The study's findings that social interaction, communication during travel, and connecting with family are key motivators for third-agers, and so language courses could be designed to leverage these motivations.

An interesting observation coming from the current study is the connection between the motivation and engagement of later-life learners with relevant and interesting topics of language courses. Older adults want learning things that are important to them and can be immediately put into practice in their lives, and this is what language courses should offer them in order to ensure pleasant and effective learning. Including more real-life scenarios, role-playing activities, and opportunities for social interaction in the curriculum could increase engagement and provide a more meaningful learning experience. Additionally, by understanding the underlying motivations, educators may tailor the content to make it more relevant and enjoyable for the learners. This can be generally accomplished through an educational approach that focuses on the needs and interests of the students, incorporating familiar topics, practical experiences, pertinent knowledge, and the development of listening skills. In general, having knowledge of language teaching methods for older persons may enhance the chances of uncovering cognitive or psychosocial impacts that arise from learning a language in later stages of life, and can greatly advance the area.

In terms of older adults' expectations toward a language course, their answers may provide guidance for educators regarding the way language courses for third-agers could be designed. Most importantly, courses might incorporate group activities and social events to foster community building and peer connections. The identification of personal limitations, logistical challenges, and health-related issues as significant barriers to later-life language learning underscores the need for tailored curricula that accommodate these specific needs. Language courses designed for later-life learners could integrate flexible scheduling, accessible locations, and alternative learning formats (e.g., online or hybrid classes) to mitigate these challenges. Additionally, incorporating health considerations, such as frequent breaks or lessons designed to reduce cognitive load, could enhance learning outcomes for this demographic. Some ideas teachers could use in order to reduce cognitive load might be: break down lessons into smaller, manageable parts (e.g., introduce vocabulary in groups of 3-5 words instead of all at once) and provide brief breaks in between sections; use a lot of visual aids to support learning; or use multi-sensory approach, e.g., by incorporating activities

that engage different senses, like listening to audio, watching videos, or using tactile aids, as this reinforces understanding through various channels.

The mixed responses regarding the influence of past learning experiences on current language acquisition suggest that language instructors might adopt a more individualized approach to teaching older adults. By conducting thorough needs analyses and being sensitive to each learner's history, teachers can better align their methods with the students' preferences and previous experiences. This might involve blending traditional methods, like the grammar translation method, with more modern, communicative approaches to create a learning environment that is both familiar and engaging. It also seems worthwhile to implement sharing the rationale behind the choice of methodology with the older learners. This can both reduce their doubts or fears about the validity/effectiveness of methods they have not previously experienced while learning foreign languages, as well as develop a sense of decision-making in their language education process. The results concerning older adults' preferences for group work, particularly their interpretation of teacher-student interactions as group activities, call for further investigation into the dynamics of social learning in later life.

All the above-mentioned findings and their implications are crucial to designing and preparing tailored language courses that would cater to older adults' needs and preferences, making their language learning more pleasant and effective. Integrating these findings into the creation and organization of language programs tailored to older individuals can enhance the learning process so that it is more engaging and efficient. Not only does it enable older learners to enthusiastically engage in language learning, but it also highlights the significance of lifelong learning as a fundamental aspect of active and positive aging.

The results of this study represent a significant contribution to the field of applied linguistics, particularly in understanding how to teach English to this age group more effectively. Most research studies conducted so far have prioritized either the cognitive effects, proficiency level, or well-being individually rather than examining the combination of all three. However, considering the combination aligns more closely with theories of aging (Burke & MacKay, 1997), because later-life language learning is a multifaceted area of study that demands an interdisciplinary approach. Indeed, the

field of later-life language learning intersects with various domains, including linguistics, psychology, gerontology, education, and sociology. Understanding how older adults learn new languages by default requires an inclusion of not only the cognitive and linguistic aspects of language learning but also the psychological, social, and physiological changes that accompany aging. Furthermore, the integration of educational methodologies tailored to the unique needs of older learners requires insights from instructional design and adult education theories. Therefore, approaching later-life language learning from an interdisciplinary perspective is essential to comprehensively address the challenges and leverage the opportunities presented by this emergent and growing area of research. A holistic approach ensures that all relevant factors are considered, leading to more effective and inclusive strategies for supporting older adults in their language learning.

Since this study has focused on the Polish context, it is important to mention that currently, the status of seniors in Poland is greatly influenced by how they are perceived by society at large where stereotypes are prevalent. However, self-perception is much better – more and more seniors are taking advantage of the opportunity to actively engage in their older adulthood. Therefore, the priority need is to develop and promote a favorable picture of old age in aging societies (Straś-Romanowska, 2008). This perception should be based on a comprehensive awareness of the physical and mental transformations that take place during older adult stage of life. Preserving the dignity of older adults is also crucial. This may not only dispel harmful and inadequate misunderstandings about seniors, but also reduce anxiety about the natural aging process and one's own personal experience of age. As the level of fear and biases stemming from a lack of understanding rises, stereotypes are often the main source of information and the determining factor in one's actions (Świdarska & Kapszewicz, 2015; Grotek, 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to dedicate effort towards changing deeply ingrained yet incorrect beliefs to understand the aging process better and avoid the marginalization of later-life learners in Poland. What is more, by addressing gaps in the existing literature and offering a new perspective on connecting positive psychology and later-life language learning and teaching, this research has the potential to influence both theoretical and practical applications in foreign language geragogy. In addition to

its scientific importance, research on later-life language learning has the potential to contribute significantly to society.

Finally, when teaching older individuals, it is crucial to emphasize the positive aspects of learning during later adulthood and concentrate on the advantages that can be obtained through language learning in later-life. According to Arnold (1999), negative emotions such as worry, tension, or fear impede the process of learning, whereas positive emotions such as self-confidence, empathy, or motivation aid in facilitating it. The overarching goal of later-life language learning might then be neutralizing negative effects of aging, shaping more positive attitudes towards aging both among older adults themselves and other members of society and redefining old age in more positive ways.

5.1.2. Positive Foreign Language Geragogy – a new approach to later-life language learning

Connecting the principles of positive aging with the results from foreign language geragogy research is essential for fostering a holistic approach to lifelong learning. This approach not only addresses the cognitive and social needs of older adults but also empowers them to remain active, engaged, and intellectually stimulated, thereby promoting a more fulfilling and enriched later life. Based on this study's findings, therefore, I propose what I label Positive Foreign Language Geragogy, which integrates essential guidelines for teaching English to older adults that ensue from the current study while incorporating the principles of positive aging and positive psychology. It should also be mentioned that because the connection between positive psychology and education is growing, so the pillars may also be suitable for other age groups, however the focus of this section is to present them with the emphasis on later-life language learning. It is essential also because in the research so far positive psychology principles have not been applied to learning a foreign language in late adulthood.

1. Positive and supportive learning environment

For older adults to effectively learn a new language, creating a classroom environment that is positive, supportive, and non-judgmental is crucial. Unlike younger

learners, older adults may face unique cognitive, emotional, and physical challenges that can impact their learning experience. Therefore, it is essential that they feel respected, encouraged, and motivated in a way that acknowledges their life experiences and learning needs. This can be achieved through the use of encouraging language, celebrating even small achievements, and demonstrating patience. What is more, promoting mutual respect and fostering a culture of support within the classroom allows older learners to feel valued, which in turn enhances their self-confidence.

To cater to this specific demographic, instructors could regularly highlight individual progress and emphasize that mistakes are valuable learning opportunities, rather than sources of embarrassment. This is particularly important for older learners, who may have a higher fear of failure or frustration with perceived slow progress. By cultivating a growth mindset, teachers can help reduce this anxiety and keep learners engaged. Ensuring that the physical environment is tailored to their needs is equally important. Providing comfortable seating, good lighting, clear audio-visual aids, and accessibility for those with mobility or sensory challenges is not just an extra consideration but a necessity. These accommodations may significantly reduce anxiety and mental strain, making it easier for learners to focus and absorb information. A classroom that accounts for these factors not only improves cognitive functioning but also contributes to learners' overall well-being. When older adults feel physically comfortable and emotionally supported, they are more likely to engage actively, resulting in more pleasant and effective learning experiences.

This approach recognizes that learning in older adulthood is not just about acquiring new skills but also about maintaining dignity, autonomy, and cognitive vitality. For this reason, the importance of a positive and supportive learning environment is heightened in classrooms with older adults, compared to younger learners, as it directly influences both their emotional and cognitive engagement.

2. Personalized instruction and learner-centered approach

A learner-centered approach and personalized instruction are key elements of Positive Foreign Language Pedagogy. Tailoring the learning experience to the specific needs, interests, and life circumstances of older learners is crucial for their success and

engagement. Unlike younger learners, older adults bring a wealth of life experiences, unique motivations, and diverse learning preferences to the classroom, making a one-size-fits-all teaching model ineffective. Personalized instruction ensures that each learner feels seen, valued, and understood, which in turn boosts their confidence and investment in the learning process.

To achieve this, teachers should conduct thorough needs analyses at the start of the course to understand the individual goals, challenges, and preferences of each learner. This can include anything from personal learning objectives (such as using English for travel or communication with family) to addressing specific cognitive or physical limitations. By incorporating these insights into lesson plans, educators can design lessons that resonate with learners' personal lives, making the content more meaningful and relevant.

What is more, flexibility is a critical component of personalized instruction for older adults. Teachers could offer a variety of activities that cater to different learning styles, recognizing that some learners may prefer visual aids, while others thrive on discussion-based tasks or written exercises. Providing extra support where needed is essential, and flexible pacing allows learners to progress without feeling rushed or left behind. This is particularly important for older adults, who may need more time to process new information due to cognitive changes associated with aging. Offering additional tutoring sessions or self-study materials can provide an extra layer of support for those who want or need more practice.

By prioritizing a learner-centered and personalized approach, teachers not only address the diverse needs of older adults but also foster a sense of autonomy and empowerment. This approach helps to create a more engaging, respectful, and effective learning environment, where older adults can progress at their own pace and feel a deep sense of personal achievement. Personalized instruction is not merely a teaching strategy; it is an essential tool in maintaining motivation, cognitive engagement, and overall well-being in older adult learners.

3. Encouragement of lifelong learning and empowering seniors through enhancing learner autonomy

Empowering older adults to become autonomous language learners is a central aspect of Positive Foreign Language Geragogy. By fostering autonomy, teachers help seniors view language learning as a lifelong journey rather than a fixed goal, which aligns with their broader life experiences and personal growth. In order to help older adult students become autonomous language learners, teachers should empower them with specific learning and communicative strategies. Teachers could integrate the so-called strategy training into regular lessons and encourage learners to apply these strategies outside of the classroom. Strategy training could involve introducing methods like spaced repetition for vocabulary learning, encouraging the use of language diaries to track progress, and discussing techniques for improving pronunciation and fluency (O'Malley & Chamot 1990; Oxford, 1990)⁴⁷. Fostering a mindset of lifelong learning and encouraging learners to take control of their language learning journey is also crucial. By promoting self-assessment, goal setting, and providing resources for independent study and continuous learning, older adults may enhance their learning autonomy and take over the control of their learning process. It could be done by connecting language learning to learners' interests and past experiences when, for example, assigning projects that relate to learners' hobbies or previous careers, discuss topics of current events and global issues, and explore cultural aspects of countries where the target language is spoken.

4. Meaningful learning and building on older adults' knowledge

When teaching English to older adults on the basis of a positive aging approach, it is crucial to build on their previous knowledge and life experiences to create a more engaging and effective learning environment. Teachers should acknowledge the wealth of knowledge and experiences that older adults bring into the classroom and use these experiences as a foundation for learning new language skills. For example, instructors can draw on learners' (former) professional backgrounds, hobbies, and personal interests to create relevant and meaningful lessons.

⁴⁷ For more ideas regarding learning strategies training see: O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990).

It is also important to contextualize their language learning; teachers can integrate real-life contexts that are familiar and relevant to the learners. This could include using scenarios related to everyday activities, travel, healthcare, or social interactions. By contextualizing language education, older adults can more easily relate new vocabulary and grammar to their existing knowledge. What is more, promoting reflective practices that allow learners to connect new information with their prior experiences may be done by keeping journals, participating in discussions, and reflecting on how new language skills can be applied in their daily lives. Engaging students in relevant curriculum design is equally important. Instructors should use materials and activities that are intersecting and directly applicable to their lives by, e.g., use of songs, films, and news articles in the target language; role-plays, such as ordering food in a restaurant or booking a hotel room; or invite guest speakers to talk about cultural topics.

5. Focus on practical communication skills

Incorporating practical communication skills into the curriculum is particularly important for older adults learning English, as it enables them to engage effectively in real-life interactions that are meaningful and relevant to their everyday lives. For older learners, the focus should be less on abstract language theory and more on functional language that they can immediately apply in real-world contexts. This approach not only builds their confidence in navigating common situations but also enhances their sense of accomplishment, as they can quickly see the practical results of their learning. Emphasizing speaking and listening skills fosters immediate applicability, enhancing their ability to navigate everyday situations they may encounter in the target language with confidence and ease. To achieve this, the instructional approach could prioritize conversational practice, listening exercises, and the use of functional language. These methods ensure that learners are not only gaining theoretical knowledge about the language, but are also equipped to use the language in practical contexts. In other words, such practices ensure that older adults use to learn rather than learn to use language. It is a good idea that older adults are given a chance to practice speaking

drills, listen to audio materials from everyday contexts and practice dialogues for common situations like shopping or travelling.

By focusing on practical communication, older learners gain a sense of relevance and purpose in their language studies, as they are equipped to handle real-world interactions with greater ease. This approach may also reduce anxiety, as learners can see tangible progress in their ability to communicate, which in turn boosts their confidence and motivation to continue learning. Ultimately, focusing on practical communication skills ensures that older adults "learn to use" the language in a way that enriches their everyday experiences, making language learning both meaningful and rewarding.

6. Learning and communicative strategies training

Training in learning and communicative strategies is vital when teaching English to older adults, as it empowers them to become more effective, independent, and confident learners. Unlike younger students, older adults may not have been exposed to modern language-learning strategies earlier in life, making it crucial to introduce them to specific techniques that can enhance their language learning. It can facilitate more efficient learning and encourage learners to take control of their progress, fostering a sense of autonomy that is particularly important in later life.

In terms of learning strategies, teaching older adults how to guess meaning from context, use synonyms when they cannot find the exact word, and ask for clarification can greatly improve their ability to navigate conversations in real time. These strategies help learners feel more equipped to handle the unpredictability of spoken language, reducing frustration and anxiety, which can be barriers to effective communication for older learners.

Communicative strategies are equally important, as they enable learners to participate more fluidly in conversations. Techniques such as turn-taking, summarizing, and asking open-ended questions can be particularly valuable, as they provide structure and direction in conversations, making it easier for older learners to engage confidently. These skills also allow them to actively participate in dialogues, whether in class or in real-life settings, ensuring that they feel heard and understood.

To implement this in the classroom, educators can conduct workshops focused on effective language learning and communicative strategies. Role-playing conversations where learners practice these techniques in real-life scenarios, such as social gatherings or appointments, can help them apply what they have learned in a safe and supportive environment. Providing handouts or resources that summarize these strategies may also give learners tools for independent study and practice outside the classroom.

By equipping older adults with these learning and communicative strategies, teachers not only enhance their language proficiency but also empower them to take control of their own learning process. This autonomy is key to fostering lifelong learning and maintaining engagement, helping older learners feel more confident and capable in their language journey.

7. Cognitive engagement, mental stimulation and regular review

Cognitive engagement and mental stimulation are critical components of language learning for older adults, as it enhances language learning and also promotes cognitive health. As individuals age, maintaining mental sharpness becomes increasingly important, and language learning presents a valuable opportunity for cognitive stimulation. By incorporating mentally challenging activities, such as problem-solving tasks, puzzles, and memory exercises, educators can help older learners exercise their mental abilities while learning English in a stimulating and enjoyable way.

One particularly effective method for older adults is the use of retrieval practice, which involves frequent recall of information. This method addresses the memory challenges that many older learners face by strengthening memory retention and retrieval pathways in the brain. For senior learners who may experience age-related declines in memory, frequent repetition and recall are essential tools for consolidating new vocabulary, grammar rules, and conversational phrases. Retrieval practice not only supports language retention but also contributes to overall cognitive engagement. To make retrieval practice engaging and effective for older adults, educators can incorporate creative techniques. Wawrzusiszyn & Niewczas (2024b) proposed several interactive

methods, such as *walkabout bingo* and *cops and robbers*, as well as the use of a retrieval practice grid. These activities combine repetition with fun and movement, ensuring that learners stay mentally active while reinforcing language concepts. Such dynamic approaches make the learning process more enjoyable and align with the need for cognitive stimulation in later life.

Moreover, research (Bialystok, 2010; Bąk, 2014) has shown that continuous mental stimulation through activities like language learning can help maintain cognitive health and delay cognitive decline. By designing a learning environment that integrates repetition with cognitively engaging tasks, educators can address both the language learning needs and the cognitive well-being of senior learners. Combining frequent review, engaging methods, and mentally stimulating activities, may help create a language learning experience that is both effective and enjoyable for older adults. This holistic approach supports the development of practical language skills and fosters lifelong cognitive health, making it particularly suited to the unique needs of senior learners.

8. Social interaction and community building

Research has shown that older adults often enroll in language courses not only to acquire new skills but also for social reasons—such as meeting peers and engaging in meaningful, structured activities. For many, the language classroom provides a vital social outlet, where they can connect with others in similar life stages and develop a sense of community. Therefore, fostering social interaction is crucial in a geragogy-based approach to language learning. This can be achieved by incorporating more collaborative tasks such as pair and group work, where learners actively engage in conversations and support one another. Organizing social events, like conversation clubs, group outings, or field trips, adds an extra layer of connection by blending language learning with enjoyable social experiences. For instance, visiting a museum with a guided tour in the target language or arranging informal meet-ups where students can practice English in relaxed settings, reinforces both social ties and language use. Such activities create a sense of belonging and mutual support and as a result make learning more enjoyable and motivating for older adults. Additionally, group projects or

peer tutoring can empower learners to help each other, further strengthening community bonds and creating a more cooperative learning environment.

Incorporating social interaction and community-building activities is especially important for older adults, as it addresses the loneliness or isolation that some may face in later life. These social connections within the classroom can contribute to learners' emotional well-being, which is often closely linked to motivation and success in language learning. By recognizing the social dimension of learning, instructors can create a more holistic, supportive, and engaging environment that caters to the specific needs of older adults, something not as critical in more traditional, younger learner classrooms.

9. Non-stressful assessment and creating opportunities for success

As highlighted in Chapter Four, older adults often approach assessments with apprehension, many expressing an aversion to formal testing. For them, traditional exams can be overly stressful and even demotivating, as they may view formal assessments as unnecessary at this stage of life. Therefore, it is crucial to employ assessment methods that reduce anxiety and shift the focus towards personal progress rather than performance under pressure. Informal assessments, such as in-class reviews, peer-assisted learning, or self-assessment activities, can be highly effective. For example, having students create their own questions or engaging in revision-based activities during lessons offers a non-threatening way to assess understanding. Additionally, regular, personalized feedback from the teacher—both written and verbal—can replace traditional grading. An informal conversation at the end of a class, where the teacher highlights individual progress and achievements, offers a much more supportive and encouraging approach than formal testing.

Creating opportunities for success is particularly important when teaching older adults, as it builds their confidence, motivation, and overall engagement. For seniors, experiencing success in their language learning journey can be empowering, helping them stay committed and overcome challenges. It is essential to set realistic, achievable goals that align with their abilities and pace, ensuring that progress is tangible and meaningful. Instructors can incorporate success-oriented activities that focus on

learners' strengths, such as drawing on their life experiences or interests during lessons. Additionally, peer learning can foster a supportive, non-competitive atmosphere where learners feel valued and can share their knowledge with one another, which in turn reinforces their confidence.

Incorporating non-stressful assessment and creating opportunities for success is especially important in language courses designed for older adults, as it addresses their specific emotional and psychological needs. Older learners, who may not be driven by the same external pressures as younger students (e.g., passing exams for career purposes), benefit greatly from an approach that focuses on growth, personal achievement, and well-being. This approach contrasts with the performance-driven assessment models found in more traditional classrooms, making it particularly suited for later-life learning environments.

10. Use of technology and modern resources

As demonstrated by the study results, approximately 70% of older adult respondents expressed a willingness to use modern technology in their language learning journey. Many are already familiar with apps like Duolingo, which they regularly use to support their learning. This makes integrating digital tools and resources a promising strategy for language teachers working with older adults. By incorporating these technologies, teachers can enrich the learning experience and provide access to additional resources, making the learning process more flexible and engaging. However, it is crucial to consider the specific needs of older learners, many of whom may require some initial guidance in navigating these tools.

To ensure that technology is effectively integrated into their learning, teachers can introduce popular language learning apps such as Duolingo or Memrise, alongside other online resources like interactive exercises or multimedia presentations. Providing a short, hands-on technology training session will empower learners to use these tools with confidence, ensuring that they understand how to access, navigate, and benefit from the proposed digital resources. Additionally, creating a curated and regularly updated database of recommended online resources can serve as a valuable reference point for learners, who can access it at any time to reinforce their classroom learning.

Beyond individual apps and resources, building a digital community can significantly enhance the learning experience for older adults. For instance, creating a Facebook group for the class could facilitate homework sharing, resource exchange, and informal conversation practice in English. This not only supports learning but also fosters a sense of community and social interaction—an important aspect for older learners.

Using interactive platforms like Quizlet and Kahoot can also be particularly effective for vocabulary learning and review. Quizlet's collaborative nature allows students to create their own flashcard sets after a brief introduction from the teacher, providing them with an active role in their learning process. Similarly, Kahoot offers a fun and interactive way to revise vocabulary, creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment. Incorporating these tools not only enhances language acquisition but also encourages autonomy, giving older adults the opportunity to take charge of their own learning.

Introducing technology into the classroom offers numerous advantages for older adult learners, from increasing engagement to providing varied, accessible learning opportunities. However, it is essential that teachers remain mindful of potential challenges, such as varying levels of technological literacy, and offer ongoing support to ensure that every learner benefits fully from the resources. Technology, when implemented thoughtfully and inclusively, can play a powerful role in empowering older learners and enriching their language learning experience.

5.1.3. Lesson structure and thematic catalogue based on the PFLG principles

The language lesson plan presented below is a proposal that can be used by instructors working with seniors to create their own educational materials and plan their lessons with the use of positive foreign language pedagogy pillars described in section 5.1.2.

1) Warm-up:

Objective: Engage students and set a positive tone but also build a supportive learning environment (5 min)

Activities:

- Greet each student personally and create a relaxed atmosphere.
- Encourage them to share how they are feeling, perhaps with a short discussion on a light, familiar topic (e.g., hobbies, current events). This builds a positive connection and reduces anxiety about learning (pillar 1)

2) Homework check (10-15 min)

In an English class for older adults, checking homework can be an opportunity to reinforce learning in a supportive, non-stressful way while aligning with the principles of positive foreign language pedagogy. The teacher could start with a brief discussion on the homework tasks, ensuring that each student feels their efforts are valued, regardless of their mistakes (pillar 1). For practical engagement, the teacher might pair students for peer review, promoting social interaction and giving them opportunities to use the language in real-life contexts (pillar 5). Integrating simple technology, such as displaying examples on a smartboard or using apps like Kahoot, can make the process more interactive and engaging (pillar 10). Instead of making the homework check feel like an assessment, the teacher could focus on providing constructive feedback that highlights students' progress, helping them see mistakes as part of the learning journey. This might encourage lifelong learning and reduce anxiety (pillars 3 and 9). The teacher could also tailor feedback to each learner's needs, offering personalized instruction and strategies for improvement (pillar 2). This collaborative and supportive approach to homework review reinforces the idea that learning is both practical and continuous, keeping students motivated and engaged.

3) Revision (15-20 min)

This might be a good moment to focus on pillar 7 of PFLG (cognitive engagement, mental stimulation and regular review). In the form of a brief review of key points from the previous lesson, students can be engaged by asking them to recall vocabulary or practice phrases they have learned. Using supportive techniques such as group work to make the review collaborative and fun, encouraging recall without stress might be a good idea too. Revision of the material from previous lesson can also be done in the

form of speaking exercises (for example using the direct method e. g., students ask and answer questions, or translate sentences). Revision might take up to 20 min of the class and should contain materials from the last 1-2 lessons, but also coming back to grammar structures earlier introduced; this is also a good moment to use technology in class (e.g. Kahoot, Wordwall; pillar 10). To decrease the level of anxiety it might be a good idea to use grammar translation method that students are familiar with.

4) Presentation of Lesson Objectives (5 minutes)

Objective: Clearly communicate the goals of the lesson.

Activities:

- Write and explain the objectives on the board and underline what exactly they will be able to do after the lesson.
- Briefly discuss what will be covered and why it is important, so that they know they are learning in a meaningful way (pillar 4)

5) Introduction of New Material (15 minutes)

Objective: Introduce new vocabulary, grammar in a clear and accessible way.

Activities:

- Use visual aids, realia, or multimedia to introduce the new material.
- Present new material by connecting it to what the learners already know (pillar 4). For example, introduce new vocabulary that relates to their lives or past experiences (e.g., travel, family, hobbies). Offer personalized examples and explain how the new content is relevant to everyday communication (pillar 4)
- Present examples in context (e.g., sentences, dialogues).
- Encourage questions and provide explanations as needed.

6) Guided Practice (20 minutes)

Objective: Practice new material with the teacher's guidance and in accordance with PFLG principles.

Activities:

- Conduct interactive activities such as pair work, group discussions, or role-playing, so that first of all, the focus is on the practical communication skills, e.g. by pairing learners up to practice dialogues (e.g., asking for directions, shopping, or ordering food) or encouraging them to use the new vocabulary and grammar introduced earlier. The practice should emphasize functional language they can use in daily situations (pillar 5)
- This stage may also be good to focus on social interaction and community building (pillar 8) by e.g., planning a communicative group activity such as a role-play, problem-solving task, project or group discussion. For example, learners could plan a pretend trip together, discussing destinations, activities, and needs.
- Provide immediate feedback and support, try to include non-stressful assessment when needed (pillar 9). Learners' performance could be assessed in a non-threatening way by observing their progress in activities. The teacher could offer individualized feedback that is constructive and emphasizes their strengths. The teacher could also create opportunities for the learners to experience success, such as acknowledging small wins in the language use.

7) Independent, personalized Practice (10-15 minutes)

Objective: Allow students to apply new material independently and in a personalized way.

Activities:

- Assign individual tasks such as writing sentences about themselves with the use of new vocabulary of grammar chunks (pillars 2)

- Allow for pair-work or group work so that students can get to know their colleagues by asking them questions related to the topic (pillars 5,6)

This stage can also be a part of homework exercises if homework and revision stages take more time of the lesson, as it is important not to rush older adult students. They could then create a few sentences about themselves at home, which could later be checked during the next lesson.

8) Consolidation, including Student Feedback and Self-Assessment (5-10)

Objective: Reinforce what was learned and ensure understanding and encourage self-reflection and autonomous learning.

Activities:

- Summarize key points of the lesson
- Use drills or games to reinforce new vocabulary and grammar.
- Encourage students to ask questions and discuss any difficulties.
- Have students use self-assessment tools to enhance the learners' autonomy (e.g., checklists, "I can" statements) (pillar 3)
- Discuss how they feel about their progress and what they found challenging to encourage self-reflection
- To encourage lifelong learning attitude, now and also throughout the lesson, the teacher can reinforce the idea that learning is a continuous journey. Learners can be encouraged to embrace challenges and view mistakes as part of the learning process. They can also be empowered by discussing how their learning efforts help maintain cognitive engagement and contribute to personal growth (pillar 3)

9) Homework Assignment (5 minutes)

Objective: Provide additional practice and reinforce learning.

Activities:

- Assign relevant and manageable homework tasks to show the learners that their learning is meaningful and connected to what they have already learned (e.g., exercises from the workbook, listening to a podcast, practicing vocabulary). (Pillar 4)
- Explain the homework and its purpose clearly.

10) Reflection and wrap- up (2-3 minutes)

Objective: Conclude the lesson on a positive note and build anticipation for the next class.

Activities:

- The teacher can end the lesson by allowing learners to reflect on what they found useful or interesting, ask them how they feel about their progress and what they would like to focus on next (pillars 1,2)
- Personalize the approach by adjusting future lessons based on their feedback and goals (pillar 2)
- Encourage students to continue practicing and engage with English outside the classroom.
- Express appreciation for their participation and effort.

If needed, a short break may be organized during the lesson in a form of a short conversation or a quick physical activity/stretch.

In general, the structure will very much depend on the content of the lesson and sometimes of course more revisions will be needed and less of the new material. However, it is important that the lessons are built around steps listed above and are guided by a few rules:

- Tailoring the pace and content of the lessons to the needs and preferences of the students.
- Using praise and encouragement to build confidence and reduce anxiety.
- Fostering an interactive and participatory learning environment to keep students engaged.

- Incorporating self-assessment and feedback activities to promote independent learning skills
- Focusing on practical language skills that are immediately useful and relevant to the students' lives.

By following this structured approach, teachers can create a supportive and effective learning environment that caters to the unique needs and preferences of older adult learners.

In addition to the proposed lesson structure based on the principles of PFLG, it was also decided to present a sample thematic catalogue of topics that Polish seniors identified as particularly interesting for them in the context of foreign language classes. This catalogue will allow seniors to learn practical vocabulary that is not only interesting but also useful for their daily lives, while also supporting their engagement and motivation to learn English. The choice of suggested topics was made on the basis of the results of the analyzed questionnaire, so the responses are based on the respondents' preferences. It is also important that the catalogue is based on a pre-course needs and preferences analysis and can thus be adapted to suit individual older adult language learners and groups. Such a catalogue may serve as a guideline document for teachers and publishers, as still most course books lack topics important for older adults and include topics currently irrelevant for older individuals like career or raising children.

Topics	Points to introduce
Basic expressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Saying hello and goodbye - Introductions, getting to know other people - Basic expressions in everyday situations
Family and interpersonal relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describing family members - Discussing family celebrations
Everyday life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cooking and recipes -Household chores and cleaning -Doing grocery shopping

Hobbies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Free time and entertainment -Literature, music and art -Gardening -Foreign language learning and school memories
Traveling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planning holidays - Booking tickets and accommodation - Sightseeing and tourist attractions
Clothes and shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shops and shopping vocabulary -Clothes for different occasions -Online shopping
Food and restaurant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Booking a table at a restaurant - Ordering food - Describing restaurants
Health and healthy lifestyle, well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describing symptoms and illnesses - Doctor's appointment - Healthy lifestyle and well-being
Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Popular sports - Physical exercises for older adults - Discussing sporting events
Jobs and retirement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describing earlier career - Activities after retiring - Time management on retirement
Finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Managing household budget -Banking and personal finances -Investments and saving money
Technology and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Using computers and smartphones -Social media -Electronic and online communication

Environment and the ecology	-Environmental protection -Recycling -Ecological problems and issues
Social life	-Participation in communities and clubs -Volunteering and charitable activities -Local and global politics
Culture and history	-Important historical events -Famous historical figures -Cultural traditions and customs

Table 12. Thematic catalogue for later-life language courses

5.2. Directions for further development of the discipline and challenges for later-life language education theory and practice

5.2.1. The future of foreign language geragogy

In the past, social programs about old age have depicted older adults as weak and vulnerable individuals who require assistance. Nevertheless, there has been a significant change in the perception and understanding of *old age* in the past few decades. People are experiencing increased longevity and maintaining good health far into their elder years. Consequently, the initial stage of old age is currently regarded as a period characterized by being active, resourceful, and involved (Komp & Beland, 2012). Komp-Leukkunen & Formosa (2024) discussed a paradigm shift regarding old age. The observed shift should also be seen in the change of perception of third-agers in society and abandonment of the stereotypical views of this group. As far as future research is concerned, it would be an interesting idea to see how the stereotypes about older adults (and their abilities to learn foreign languages) are changing in Poland. Conducting longitudinal studies to track changes in self-perception among seniors engaged in language learning programs and assessing how these changes affect their language learning and overall engagement in learning are also fascinating topics.

Still, further investigation is needed to improve the learning experience and outcomes for older adults in the field of foreign language pedagogy. The mixed attitudes towards testing among later-life learners warrant further exploration into how different forms of assessment impact learning motivation and outcomes. Research could investigate the efficacy of alternative assessment approaches, such as self-assessment, peer-assessment, or portfolio-based assessments, and how these methods influence older adults' motivation and engagement in the language learning. Additionally, future studies should prioritize the exploration of evaluation and feedback techniques that would reduce anxiety and foster self-evaluation and reflection in later-life language learning. Creating and evaluating solutions that offer beneficial and anxiety-free feedback adjusted to the specific requirements of third-agers can greatly enhance their educational experience. These approaches should prioritize the use of positive reinforcement and provide learners with the means to assess their development within a nurturing setting. Research on the potential of digital platforms, applications, and e-learning technologies to improve language learning for older adults is also an interesting subject to explore in the future. It is crucial to examine the accessibility and usability of these technologies for later-life learners with different levels of technological expertise. For instance, studies could compare the effectiveness of traditional classroom instruction with blended learning models that incorporate language learning applications, online platforms, or virtual reality tools. Gaining insight into the ways in which digital tools might be enhanced for third-agers may help develop more efficient and inclusive language learning programs. It is also important to examine teachers' awareness of the potential for incorporating positive psychology into later-life learning and the possible advantages of it. After over ten years since the initial research was carried out in Poland, it is crucial to evaluate if there is sufficient assistance provided to instructors in the area of foreign language pedagogy. Conducting research in this field can help uncover deficiencies in teacher training and resources, which can then lead to the development of improved support systems that enhance the educational experience for seniors learning a new language. Another promising avenue for research involves investigating the impact of positive foreign language teaching methods on the development of the learner's autonomy and its indirect influence on the later-life

language learning process. Examining the integration of positive aging principles into foreign language pedagogy and their influence on learning outcomes is worth exploring, for example, by developing curricula that explicitly incorporate positive aging principles, such as fostering social connections, promoting mental agility, and enhancing life satisfaction. Gaining insight into the correlation between a favorable learning atmosphere and enhanced learner autonomy will assist in formulating strategies that enable older adults to gain more control over their learning and increase their overall satisfaction from learning. Given that past language learning experiences were identified as both facilitating and hindering factors in third-agers' current language learning, a longitudinal study could explore how these past experiences influence the learning process over time. This research could examine how initial attitudes shaped by earlier experiences evolve as learners progress through language courses designed for later-life language learners. Comparative studies could investigate how older adults in different cultural contexts approach language learning. This research could examine whether the motivations, preferences, and challenges identified in the Polish context are similar or different in other countries and cultures, providing insights into the universality or specificity of the findings. Most importantly, however, it is hoped that this study will encourage other researchers in the field of foreign language pedagogy in Poland to conduct interdisciplinary studies (including longitudinal ones) to get a holistic view of later-life language learning of other populations of seniors. A multitude of studies will allow for validating and updating applied linguistics models of learning and teaching, which nowadays mostly focus on younger learners.

5.2.2. Challenges

Teaching languages to older adults presents distinct challenges for educators, as this group of learners often requires different approaches compared to younger students. While older adults bring rich life experiences and motivation to the classroom, teachers must navigate several obstacles to facilitate effective language learning.

One of the most prominent challenges is **cognitive adaptability**. Many older adults may experience a decline in memory retention, slower information processing, and difficulty grasping new linguistic concepts quickly. Language learning relies

heavily on memory—whether for vocabulary, grammar rules, or pronunciation—and for older learners, these elements may take longer to absorb and apply. Teachers must adjust their instructional pace, often needing to repeat lessons more frequently or provide additional practice and review.

Another difficulty for language teachers is addressing **technological barriers**. Language learning often incorporates digital resources such as apps, online exercises, and multimedia tools. However, many older adults may struggle with using these technologies, especially if they have limited experience with computers or smartphones. Teachers may need to dedicate extra time to introducing and supporting the use of such tools, which can take away from core language instruction. Instructors must strike a balance between offering modern teaching aids and providing non-technical alternatives for students who are less comfortable with technology.

Pronunciation and auditory challenges also pose significant issues. As people age, their hearing may decline, making it difficult to distinguish sounds in a new language, especially if it involves unfamiliar phonetic patterns. Teachers may find themselves needing to emphasize pronunciation drills, use amplification systems, or provide written transcripts to ensure comprehension. These adaptations can slow the pace of learning and may require creative teaching methods to keep older learners engaged and motivated.

Additionally, **confidence and self-perception** can be barriers in language learning for older adults. Many older learners feel anxious about making mistakes, particularly when practicing speaking in front of others. Therefore it is advisable that teachers foster a supportive and non-judgmental environment that encourages active participation despite these fears. Overcoming the psychological barrier of fear can be just as important as overcoming linguistic hurdles, requiring teachers to focus on building learners' confidence alongside language skills.

Finally, **time constraints** and **physical limitations** can affect older learners' ability to attend regular classes or engage fully in the learning process. Health issues or mobility challenges might limit their participation in face-to-face sessions, requiring more flexible, individualized teaching approaches. Teachers often need to adapt lesson

plans to accommodate varying levels of attendance and engagement, which can complicate classroom dynamics.

For teachers, the key to overcoming these challenges lies in **patience**, **flexibility**, and a tailored, student-centered approach. By adjusting teaching strategies to meet the specific needs of older adults, instructors can create a more inclusive and effective language-learning environment.

A positive aging approach to later-life language learning. The Polish older adults' perspective. Abstract.

This dissertation investigates the teaching and learning of English among Polish older adults, focusing specifically on the notion of positive aging. Consequently, an applied linguistic approach integrates with a positive psychology framework, rendering this activity interdisciplinary, analogous to the process of learning in later life. The primary objective of the research project was to assess the current state of English teaching methodologies for Polish older adults and to analyze various facets of their language learning process, enabling it to be tailored to the needs, preferences, and abilities of this demographic. Conducting a needs analysis among later-life learners regarding their preferences, requirements, and cognitive abilities related to foreign language learning would facilitate the identification of the most appropriate methodologies and strategies for this age group. Therefore, a primary objective of the project is to conduct a comprehensive requirements analysis to provide targeted strategies and techniques for engaging older adults. The research also examines the impact of previous language education experiences on the current language acquisition process and the obstacles that older persons must confront in their learning journey.

The dissertation comprises five chapters.

Chapter 1 provides a detailed account of the theoretical framework pertaining to later life, along with an explanation of terms associated with the third-age, old age, and aging. It delineates aging and its classifications, and examines the biological, cognitive, and psychosocial changes impacting the aging body and mind. It also presents a multidisciplinary viewpoint on later life language learning, presenting recent findings in the field of foreign language geragogy, both in Poland and globally.

Chapter 2 examines the notion of lifelong learning in Poland, particularly emphasizing language learning in later adulthood. Furthermore, the prejudices prevalent in Polish society concerning older individuals are described, and the concept of positive education is presented as a means to combat the marginalization

of older adults in Poland. The distinctive characteristics of older persons as language learners, particularly within the Polish setting, are delineated.

Chapter 3 describes the research project and outlines the selected approach for the data collection and analysis. The research objective is presented, the participants are identified, along with the methodologies and instruments utilized to investigate foreign language learning in later life within our sample. A mixed-methods approach was selected for the study to assess the current state of English teaching methodologies among Polish seniors and to suggest enhancements for improved enjoyment and efficacy. The project consisted of four stages, all detailed in Chapter 3: course book analysis, lesson observations, focus group interviews, and a comprehensive survey targeting Polish older adults.

Chapter 4 delineates the study's findings in chronological sequence, commencing with the results of the course book analyses and concluding with the survey outcomes. A brief general discussion concludes the chapter, emphasizing the principal findings: older adults form a diverse and fascinating group with unique needs and preferences, crucial for designing effective language courses; lessons often lack clear goal-setting strategies, making it essential to establish and revisit objectives to enhance focus and relevance; older learners prioritize speaking and listening skills, highlighting the importance of designing courses that emphasize oral communication; social interaction, communication during travel, and connecting with family are key motivators, a holistic approach that integrates cognitive, psychological, social, and physical aspects of aging is essential for effective language teaching.

Chapter 5 presents the principal conclusions derived from the analysis of the study's results. Teaching implications are presented based on the overall conclusions. The notion of positive foreign language geragogy is introduced, together with its ten pillars, an example lesson format, and a thematic catalogue that may assist teachers conducting language courses for later-life learners. Chapter 5 closes by outlining the study's limitations and providing recommendations for future research directions.

Podejście pozytywnego starzenia się w nauczaniu języków obcych w wieku późnej dorosłości: perspektywa polskich seniorów. Streszczenie

Niniejsza rozprawa bada proces nauczania i uczenia się języka angielskiego wśród polskich seniorów w perspektywie koncepcji pozytywnego podejścia do okresu starzenia się. W rozprawie podejście lingwistyczne jest zintegrowane z założeniami psychologii pozytywnej, co sprawia, że projekt ma charakter interdyscyplinarny.

Głównym celem projektu był przegląd i ocena aktualnych metod nauczania języka angielskiego wśród polskich seniorów oraz analiza różnych aspektów procesu uczenia (się) tego języka przez osoby w wieku 60+. Przeprowadzono badania dotyczące potrzeb uczących się, co pozwoliło na identyfikację najodpowiedniejszych metod nauczania języka obcego, dostosowanych do preferencji i możliwości wybranej grupy wiekowej. Zbadano również wpływ wcześniejszych doświadczeń edukacyjnych obecnych seniorów na aktualny proces edukacji językowej. Analizie poddano również przeszkody, z którymi borykają się osoby w wieku senioralnym podejmujące naukę języka obcego.

Rozprawa składa się z pięciu rozdziałów.

Rozdział 1 skupia się na podstawach teoretycznych procesu starzenia się, dyskutowane są różne rozumienia późnej dorosłości, koncepcji trzeciego wieku oraz terminy proponowane w literaturze przedmiotu. W skrócie zaprezentowano także zmiany biologiczne, poznawcze i psychospołeczne, które zachodzą z wiekiem. Rozdział ten ukazuje multidyscyplinarną perspektywę w badaniach nad edukacją językową w późnym wieku oraz najnowsze wyniki badań z obszaru glottogeragogiki w Polsce i na świecie.

Rozdział 2 analizuje koncepcję uczenia się przez całe życie w Polsce, szczególnie skupiając się na nauce języków obcych w późnym wieku. Omawia także istniejące w Polsce uprzedzenia wobec starszych osób oraz koncepcję pozytywnej edukacji jako narzędzia przeciwdziałania marginalizacji seniorów. Podkreślono specyficzne cechy starszych osób jako uczących się, zwłaszcza w polskim

kontekście.

Rozdział 3 przedstawia projekt badawczy oraz wybrane podejścia badawcze. Opisano cel badania, próbę badawczą oraz metody i narzędzia użyte do zbadania przyswajania języka w późnym wieku. W badaniu zastosowano podejście mieszane, które miało na celu ocenę aktualnych metod nauczania języka angielskiego starszych Polaków oraz zasugerowanie innowatorskich rozwiązań dydaktycznych. Metodami badawczymi projektu były analiza podręczników, obserwacja lekcji, wywiady fokusowe i szczegółowa ankieta skierowana do polskich seniorów uczących się języka angielskiego.

Rozdział 4 przedstawia wyniki badań, zaczynając od analizy podręczników, a kończąc na wynikach ankiety. Rozdział kończy ogólna dyskusja podkreślająca główne ustalenia, do których należą: starsze osoby dorosłe stanowią zróżnicowaną i fascynującą grupę z unikalnymi potrzebami i preferencjami, które są kluczowe dla odpowiedniego projektowania kursów językowych; zajęciom często brakuje jasno określonych celów; starsi dorośli przywiązują dużą wagę do umiejętności mówienia i słuchania, co podkreśla znaczenie projektowania kursów koncentrujących się na komunikacji ustnej; interakcje społeczne, komunikacja podczas podróży oraz kontakt z rodziną za granicą są kluczowymi czynnikami motywującymi seniorów; holistyczne podejście, które integruje aspekty poznawcze, psychologiczne, społeczne i fizyczne procesu starzenia, jest niezbędne dla skutecznego nauczania języków.

Rozdział 5 prezentuje wnioski wynikające z analizy wyników, w tym sugestie dla praktyków nauczania. Wprowadzono koncepcję pozytywnej glottogeragogiki wraz z jej dziesięcioma filarami, przykładowym formatem lekcji oraz katalogiem tematów, które mogą wspomagać edukację językową polskich seniorów. Rozdział kończy się omówieniem ograniczeń projektu oraz rekomendacjami dotyczącymi przyszłych kierunków badawczych.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1 KARTA OBSERWACJI ZAJĘĆ

Nauczyciel:

Data:

Grupa, poziom:

Podręcznik:

Obserwacja zapowiedziana: tak / nie

Aspekt	Sposób realizacji	Komentarz
1) PLANOWANI E ZAJĘĆ/ realizacja		
Przedstawienie celów lekcji		
Tempo pracy		
Wykorzystane materiały		
struktura części ćwiczeniowej		
2) STRUKTURA LEKCJI		
lekcja posiada wyraźne wprowadzenie (rozgrzewka językowa oraz sprawdzenie pracy domowej)		

Prezentacja nowego zagadnienia		
Nowy materiał jest utrwalony i powtórzony		
równowaga między TTT i STT		
nauczyciel zadaje pracę domową (jaką?)		
czy podczas lekcji jest czas na podsumowanie i powrót do wyznaczonych na początku celów?		
3) METODY NAUCZANIA		
metody powtarzania materiału z poprzednich zajęć		
rodzaje stosowanych aktywności		
sprawności ćwiczone w trakcie zajęć		
używanie polskiego podczas zajęć		
rodzaje form pracy (indywidualna, grupowa, w parach)		

lekcja zbudowana w oparciu o już zdobytą wiedzę/ wiedzę z poprzednich zajęć		
polecenia wydawane w sposób jasny i zwięzły		
wykorzystanie gier/ zabaw lub nowoczesnej technologii		
4) RELACJE NAUCZYCIELA Z GRUPĄ		
udzielanie informacji zwrotnej przez nauczyciela		
chwalenie uczniów przez nauczyciela (jak często i w jaki sposób)		
nauczyciel tworzy atmosferę zaufania i szacunku		
nauczyciel zachęca wszystkich uczniów do uczestnictwa w zajęciach		
nauczyciel jest otwarty i życzliwy		

5) POPRAWIANIE BŁĘDÓW		
Metody/ strategie poprawiania błędów stosowanie przez nauczyciela		
reakcja nauczyciela i uczniów na popelniane przez nich błędy		
reakcja uczniów na popelniane błędy		
6) ZARZĄDZANIE KLASĄ/ GRUPĄ		
Problemy z dyscypliną w trakcie zajęć		
organizacja i efektywne wykorzystanie przestrzeni w sali lekcyjnej		
indywidualizacja podejścia i uwzględnianie indywidualnych potrzeb uczniów w trakcie zajęć		
nauczyciel monitoruje pracę uczniów (w jaki sposób?)		

7) AUTONOMIA UCZNIA		
Uczniowie decydują o pewnych aspektach lekcji (wybór)		
Nauczyciel wykorzystuje narzędzia umożliwiające auto ewaluację pracy przez ucznia		
uczniowie są zachęceni do pracy poza salą lekcyjną		
8) POSTAWA UCZNIÓW		
Uczniowie wykonują polecenia nauczyciela		
Uczniowie wykazują zainteresowanie lekcją		
Uczniowie używają języka obcego		
Uczniowie są przygotowani do zajęć		
Uczniowie są tolerancyjni wobec stylu i tempa pracy innych osób		

APPENDIX 2

Pytania do wywiadu grupowego z seniorami:

- 1) Co sprawiło, że zdecydował(a) się Pan(i) na naukę języka angielskiego w wieku senioralnym?
- 2) Które sprawności (pisanie, mówienie, czytanie, słuchanie) z Pan(i/a) perspektywy są w nauce języka najważniejsze?
- 3) Co Pan(i/u) sprawia największą trudność w nauce języka angielskiego?
- 4) Jaka jest rola nauczyciela na kursie językowym dla seniorów? Czy różni się od roli nauczyciela w pracy z innymi grupami wiekowymi (dzieci, młodzież, młodzi dorośli)?
- 5) Czy wcześniejsze doświadczenia w nauce języków obcych wpływają na Pani/ Pana obecną naukę?
- 6) Jakie formy pracy na zajęciach najbardziej Pan(i/u) odpowiadają? (praca indywidualna, w parach, w grupach) Czy preferuje Pan(i) zajęcia indywidualne czy grupowe?
- 7) Z jakimi materiałami najbardziej lubi Pan(i) pracować i w jaki sposób? (podręcznik, piosenka, film, materiały audio, interaktywne materiały- aplikacje, gry itp.)
- 8) Jaka forma testowania wiedzy na zajęciach najbardziej Pan(i/u) odpowiada? Czy testowanie jest dla Pan(i/a) stresujące?
- 9) Co jest dla Pan(i/a) najważniejsze w kursie języka obcego? (kontakty z innymi seniorami, uczenie się nowych rzeczy, osoba lektora itp.)

Nauka języków obcych w wieku senioralnym - perspektywa uczących się

Ankieta do badań w ramach projektu doktorskiego mgr Sylwii Niewczas dotyczącego uczenia (się) języków obcych seniorów w Polsce.

Projekt jest realizowany w Szkole Doktorskiej KUL

ANKIETA

Wiek:

Płeć: a) kobieta b) mężczyzna

Miejsce zamieszkania (proszę zaznaczyć właściwe):

- a) wieś
- b) miasto do 50 tys. mieszkańców
- c) miasto powyżej 50 tys. mieszkańców

Wykształcenie:

- a) podstawowe
- b) średnie
- c) wyższe (jakie? – kierunek)

Zawód (zawody) wykonywany w okresie aktywności zawodowej:

.....
.....

1a) Jakich języków uczył(a) się Pan(i) w swoim życiu?

- w czasie edukacji szkolnej:

.....

- w dorosłym życiu:

.....

1b) W jaki sposób uczył(a) się Pan(i) języków do tej pory? (proszę postawić znak + przy wskazaniach, które Pani/Pana dotyczą)

- na kursach w szkole językowej
- w pracy
- samodzielnie
- na prywatnych lekcjach indywidualnych

Proszę krótko opisać, z czego wynikał wybór określonej formy nauki:

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1c) Dlaczego zdecydował(a) się Pan(i) na naukę języka obcego w wieku późnej dorosłości? Proszę zaznaczyć znakiem + wszystkie czynniki, które Pani/Pana dotyczą:

- z ciekawości
- ponieważ uczyłam się tego języka w młodości
- uczenie się języków to moje hobby
- mam rodzinę za granicą
- często podróżuję za granicę
- znam ten język i nie chcę go zapomnieć
- znajomość języka jest wymagana w mojej pracy zawodowej
- mam dużo wolnego czasu
- dzięki znajomości języka mogę poznawać nowe osoby i nowe kultury
- uczenie się języka obcego jest modne
- inne powody:

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2) Co utrudnia Pani/Panu naukę języka angielskiego? Proszę zaznaczyć znakiem + wszystkie stwierdzenia, z którymi się Pan/i zgadza:

- obawa o zabieranie głosu na zajęciach, ponieważ jestem nieśmiały/a
- obawa o pogarszający się słuch
- obawa o pogarszający się wzrok
- obawa o pogarszającą się pamięć
- obawa przed porażką
- gdy brak samochodu lub słaba komunikacja miejska uniemożliwiają mi dojazd na zajęcia
- gdy brakuje mi czasu na samodzielną naukę
- gdy konieczność opieki nad wnukami uniemożliwia mi uczestnictwo w zajęciach lub naukę własną
- gdy konieczność opieki nad chorym współmałżonkiem uniemożliwia mi uczestnictwo w zajęciach lub naukę własną
- gdy mam negatywne doświadczenia z przeszłości związane z nauką języków (np. bardzo stresująca atmosfera zajęć)
- gdy własne przekonania dotyczące nauki języka obcego utrudniają mi naukę obecnie
- gdy podręcznik nie jest dostosowany do moich potrzeb i możliwości
- gdy materiały poruszają tematy, które mnie nie interesują

- gdy naukę utrudnia mi hałas panujący w sali
- gdy kurs prowadzony jest bez głównego podręcznika
- gdy muszę występować na forum (czuję się niekomfortowo)
- gdy oświetlenie sali jest niewystarczające
- gdy częste problemy zdrowotne-uniemożliwiają mi systematyczne uczestnictwo w zajęciach
- gdy zajęcia prowadzone są przez native speakera niemówiącego po polsku
- gdy zapis usłyszanych słów jest dla mnie trudny/ sprawia mi problem
- gdy wymowa nowo poznanych słów jest dla mnie trudna/ sprawia mi problem
- gdy tempo słuchanych na zajęciach nagrań jest za szybkie
- gdy muszę czytać długie teksty z wieloma nowymi słowami
- gdy nie mam możliwości używania języka poza zajęciami
- gdy nauczyciel zadaje pracę domową z użyciem nowoczesnych technologii
- gdy nauczyciel wykorzystuje nową technologię, niedostatecznie tłumacząc, jak działają pewne aplikacje
- gdy nauczyciel podczas zajęć rozmawia nie na temat
- gdy uczniowie podczas zajęć rozmawiają nie na temat
- gdy atmosfera podczas zajęć jest zbyt luźna
- gdy atmosfera podczas zajęć jest zbyt surowa/szkolna
- gdy pora zajęć jest zbyt wczesna
- gdy pora zajęć jest zbyt późna
- gdy brakuje mi funduszy na dodatkowe materiały czy lekcje
- gdy szybko tracę motywację do nauki
- gdy nie mam wsparcia rodziny/gdy członkowie rodziny negatywnie podchodzą do mojej nauki

3a) Jaka forma nauki jest Pani/a zdaniem najbardziej efektywna dla osoby starszej? (proszę postawić znak + tam, gdzie się Pan/Pani zgadza)

- samodzielna nauka w domu
- kurs korespondencyjny
- kurs online
- indywidualne lekcje w domu z prywatnym nauczycielem
- płatny kurs j. obcego zorganizowany przez szkołę językową
- zajęcia w UTW lub innej placówce dla seniorów

3b) Jaki styl pracy podczas zajęć języka obcego najbardziej Pan(i) odpowiada? (proszę postawić znak + tam, gdzie się Pan/Pani zgadza)

- praca indywidualna
- praca w parach
- praca w grupach

3c) Co wspomaga Pani/ Pana naukę w trakcie zajęć? (proszę postawić znak + tam,

gdzie się Pan/Pani zgadza)

- uważne przysłuchiwanie się
- sporządzanie notatek
- dopytywanie nauczyciela/wyjaśnianie problemów i trudniejszych zagadnień
- uczestnictwo w projektach grupowych
- korzystanie ze słownika (online lub tradycyjny drukowany)
- dopytywanie innej osoby z grupy
- inne:

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3d) Jaki zakres tematyczny prowadzonych zajęć byłby dla Pani/Pana odpowiedni? (można wskazać więcej tematów)?

- kultura (teatr, film, muzyka, architektura itp.)
- zdrowie i choroby
- polityka
- jedzenie i gotowanie
- podróże
- aktualne wydarzenia w kraju i za granicą
- sport
- życie codzienne (zarówno w Polsce, jak i kraju anglojęzycznym)
- tematyka świąt, tradycji i obyczajów krajów angielskiego obszaru językowego
- scenki dotyczące sytuacji w życiu codziennym np. u lekarza, w sklepie, na lotnisku,
- hobby (jakie?):
- inne:

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4a) Które działania językowe (czytanie, pisanie, słuchanie, mówienie) są dla Pani/Pana najważniejsze w nauce języka obcego? Proszę krótko uzasadnić:

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4b) Które działania językowe (czytanie, pisanie, słuchanie, mówienie) są dla Pani/Pana najtrudniejsze w nauce języka obcego? Proszę krótko uzasadnić:

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4c) Które działania językowe (czytanie, pisanie, słuchanie, mówienie) są dla Pani/Pana najłatwiejsze w nauce języka obcego? Proszę krótko uzasadnić:

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4d) Które zagadnienia na poziomie gramatyki uważa Pan(i) za najważniejsze? Proszę krótko uzasadnić.

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4e) Które zagadnienia na poziomie gramatyki uważa Pan(i) za najtrudniejsze, a które najłatwiejsze? Proszę krótko uzasadnić.

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4f) Które elementy leksyki i frazeologii uważa Pan(i) za najważniejsze? Proszę krótko uzasadnić:

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4g) Które elementy leksyki i frazeologii uważa Pan(i) za najtrudniejsze, a które najłatwiejsze? Proszę krótko uzasadnić:

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4h) Które aspekty wymowy uważa Pan(i) za najtrudniejsze? Proszę krótko uzasadnić.

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5a) Jakie materiały są używane na kursie języka angielskiego, na który Pan(i) uczęszcza?

- podręcznik (jeśli tak, jaki?):

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- materiały audio i wideo (nagrania, filmy itp.)
- gry i aplikacje do nauki języków obcych
- prezentacje multimedialne
- karty pracy przygotowane przez nauczyciela
- inne (jakie?):

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5b) Które spośród wymienionych materiałów najbardziej Pani/Panu) odpowiadają? Proszę krótko uzasadnić wybór:

- podręcznik
- materiały audio i wideo
- gry i aplikacje do nauki języków obcych
- prezentacje multimedialne
- karty pracy przygotowane przez nauczyciela

- inne (jakie?)

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6) Co pozytywnie wpływa na efektywną naukę w Pani/Pana przypadku?
Proszę zaznaczyć wszystkie stwierdzenia, z którymi się Pan/i zgadza:
-moje dotychczasowe doświadczenia w nauce języków obcych (jakie na przykład?)

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- gdy mam wsparcie rodziny
- gdy w pracy zawodowej mam kontakt z językiem obcym
- gdy uczę się codziennie (intensywnie)
- gdy uczę się samodzielnie w domu
- gdy nauczyciel jest osobą młodszą pokoleniowo ode mnie
- gdy nauczyciel jest w zbliżonym wieku do mojego
- gdy nauczyciel dostosowuje tempo pracy do grupy
- gdy tempo zajęć jest szybkie
- gdy nauczyciel mówi głośno i wyraźnie
- gdy zajęcia prowadzone są w formie wykładu
- gdy jest dużo powtórzeń materiału podczas zajęć
- gdy nauczyciel jest native speakerem
- gdy nauczyciel wykorzystuje różne techniki wizualne (tablica, plakaty, rzutnik, telewizor)
- gdy w trakcie zajęć jest dużo ćwiczeń na słownictwo
- gry w trakcie zajęć jest dużo ćwiczeń na rozumienie ze słuchu
- gdy w trakcie zajęć jest dużo ćwiczeń na mówienie
- gdy nauczyciel używa tylko języka obcego podczas zajęć
- gdy nauczyciel używa również języka polskiego na lekcjach
- gdy zagadnienia poruszona na zajęciach są bliskie mojemu życiu
- gdy oglądam tv w języku obcym między zajęciami
- gdy między zajęciami słucham radia w języku obcym
- gdy przeglądam strony internetowe w języku obcym
- gdy słucham podcastów anglojęzycznych
- gdy wyjeżdżam do krajów, gdzie mogę używać języka
- gdy w grupie językowej są moi bliscy znajomi
- gdy w grupie przeważają osoby młodsze ode mnie

- gdy w grupie są osoby w moim wieku
- gdy w grupie przeważają osoby starsze ode mnie
- gdy grupa na kursie językowym jest liczna
- gdy grupa na kursie językowym jest niewielka
- inne:

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7a) Czy Pani/Pana zdaniem testowanie w uczeniu się języka obcego seniorów jest potrzebne? Proszę krótko uzasadnić:

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7b) Jakie formy testowania/ sprawdzania wiedzy podczas zajęć odpowiadają Pani/Panu najbardziej?

- odpytywanie ustne
- testy pisemne z każdego rozdziału podręcznika
- testy pisemne z większej partii materiału
- krótkie quizy lub testy z jednego zagadnienia
- wspólne powtórki z nauczycielem podczas zajęć
- wypowiedź pisemna z użyciem nowych struktur czy słownictwa

7c) Jaki sposób udzielania przez nauczyciela informacji zwrotnej najbardziej Pani/Panu odpowiada?

- indywidualna rozmowa,
- pisemny komentarz
- komentarz przy grupie
- inny (jaki?)

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8a) Czy nauczyciel na kursie językowym na który Pan(i) uczęszcza zadaje pracę domową? (proszę zaznaczyć odpowiednią odpowiedź)

TAK NIE

8b) Jakie zadania domowe najczęściej Pan(i) otrzymuje?

- ćwiczenia z podręcznika
- ćwiczenia z zeszytu ćwiczeń
- ćwiczenia na rozumienie ze słuchu
- przygotowanie wypowiedzi pisemnej
- przygotowanie wypowiedzi ustnej
- kartę pracy przygotowaną przez nauczyciela
- ćwiczenia w aplikacji do nauki języka obcego
- ćwiczenia gramatyczne
- tłumaczenie zdań/ tekstu
- ćwiczenia leksykalne
- różne rodzaje ćwiczeń
- inne (jakie?)

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8c) Jakie zadania domowe najchętniej Pan(i) wykonuje?

- ćwiczenia z podręcznika
- ćwiczenia z zeszytu ćwiczeń
- ćwiczenia na rozumienie ze słuchu
- przygotowanie wypowiedzi pisemnej
- przygotowanie wypowiedzi ustnej
- kartę pracy przygotowaną przez nauczyciela
- ćwiczenia w aplikacji do nauki języka obcego
- ćwiczenia gramatyczne
- tłumaczenie zdań/ tekstu
- ćwiczenia leksykalne
- różne rodzaje ćwiczeń
- inne (jakie?)

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9a) Czy popełniane błędy językowe wpływają na Panią/Pana stresująco?
Proszę krótko uzasadnić:

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9b) Czy oczekuje Pan(i) korekty swoich błędów od lektora? Jeśli tak, to w jakiej formie?

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9c) Czy akceptuje Pan(i) korektę błędów dokonywaną przez uczestników zajęć? Proszę krótko uzasadnić:

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10) Czego oczekuje Pan(i) jako efektów uczestnictwa w kursie językowym?

- nawiązania kontaktu z innymi seniorami
- możliwości opanowania języka na poziomie umożliwiającym komunikację podczas podróży za granicę
- ciekawego sposobu spędzenia wolnego czasu
- rozwoju osobistego
- możliwości opanowania języka, aby kontaktować się z rodziną za granicą
- rozumienia tekstów w języku obcym
- inne:

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11) Czy lubi Pan(i) korzystać z nowych technologii w nauce języka obcego? Jeśli tak, proszę wymienić przykładowe. Jeśli nie, proszę uzasadnić dlaczego.

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Szanowna Pani! / Szanowny Panie!

Bardzo dziękuję za czas poświęcony na wypełnienie ankiety. Pani/Pana opinie i przekonania oraz doświadczenia będą bardzo cennym wkładem do prowadzonych przeze mnie badań, a finalnie – do przygotowywanej przeze mnie rozprawy doktorskiej.

**Z wyrazami szacunku,
 Sylwia Niewczas**