

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.

14.01.2025
Sylvia McNicholas