

Developing motivation among senior learners in the foreign language classroom

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Abstract

The world is aging and life expectancy is extending among world societies. These phenomena are undoubtedly create new challenges and result in transformation of the world as we know it. One of the spheres that needs a new approach is education which has to be adjusted to senior learners who are over 55 years old. Lifelong learning is not a new concept, as it originates from ancient Greece. However, the new type of students requires a new approach and modifications in the educational process. For senior learners, being able to continue education often has compensatory features such as making up for missed opportunities, meeting people and maintaining or developing social contacts. They decide to take advantage of opportunities for education at an older age simply to have their brain stimulated. Furthermore, older learners may have already developed learning strategies that have served them well in other contexts. The paper presents the concept of lifelong learning and selected issues related to senior education in the context of learning foreign languages. The study aimed at investigating motivational and demotivational factors in senior foreign language education. The results point to affective (e.g., anxiety, self-esteem) and social (e.g., opinions of other learners, public performance) factors as crucial variables in the motivational process.

Keywords: senior; language learning; motivation; lifelong learning; senior education

1. Introduction

As Jaroszevska (2013, p. 10) writes in the introduction to her monograph: „since the end of the second world war, modern Europe has been constantly evolving.” A phenomenon which is closely related to the evolution of our continent and brings about deep transformations in almost every sphere of our existence is the continuous aging of the European societies (Jaroszevska, 2011; Kowalewski & Szukalski, 2008; Thieme, 2008; Victor, 2005; Weinke, 2009). A similar opinion has been presented by Giannakouris (2008), according to whom, ageing is one of the greatest social and economic challenges to European societies in the 21st century. It will not only affect all the Member States, but it will also affect nearly all European Union policy domains. By 2025 more than 20% of Europeans will be 65 or over that age, with a particularly rapid increase in the number of citizens over 80 years old. Life expectancy at birth is over 80 now in thirty-three countries. Japan has a population of seniors accounting for more than 30% of its entire population but by 2050, 64 countries are expected to be in a similar situation (<http://www.helpage.org/silo/files/ageing-in-the-21st-century>). In one of the documents, issued by the United Nations, one can read that: “with one in nine persons in the world aged 60 years or over, projected to increase to one in five by 2050, population ageing is a phenomenon that we can no longer ignore” (United Nations, 2019). Furthermore, increasing longevity needs to be perceived as one of the humanity's greatest achievements and opportunities that a socially and economically active, secure and healthy ageing population can bring to society seem to be infinite.

Such trends have important and far-reaching implications for all aspects of society since around the world, two people celebrate their sixtieth birthday every second – an annual total of almost 58 million sixtieth birthdays. One of the social domains influenced by these changes is undoubtedly education which today has been presented with new challenges such as how to adapt older generations to new, dynamic living conditions. What is more, since the world around us is becoming smaller due to technological inventions, elder members of the society should be provided with the opportunity to develop their intercultural, linguistic, as well as technological competences. These competences are the foundation for intercultural dialogue, which with time, needs to be transformed from a political statement into indispensable and anticipated dimension of contemporary reality (Jaroszevska, 2013).

Keeping the above in mind, it seems natural to assume that educational institutions which aim at teaching senior students (55+ years old or retired) need to address their courses to exactly this target group which is probably not aiming to get a degree or to improve their career opportunities. Such an approach requires application of different methodologies as well as the development of specially designed

courses, activities and materials. If one assumes that the main aim of senior education is to increase senior learners' well-being and quality of life, teaching should be perceived as a socio-educational activity where more formal, non-formal and informal activities are blended. The knowledge students acquire is important, but other skills, attitudes and aims should not be forgotten, such as socialization, integration with society, active citizenship, etc. (Escuder-Mollon & Esteller-Curto, 2013, p.7). A similar opinion is presented by Berndt (2000), who claims that foreign language (FL) education often has compensatory features for older learners, such as making up for missed opportunities, meeting people and maintaining or developing social contacts. Many seniors attend different classes in older age simply to have their brain stimulated.

However, despite seemingly little pressure and limited educational expectations, senior learners are often anxious and demonstrate low self-esteem while learning. Moreover, such learners often express doubts about the quality of their memory and learning skills. As a result, educators who work with this particular age group need to apply any available device to make senior learners more self-confident and motivated. Therefore, the present author focuses on selected motivational strategies that can be used while working with senior learners in the FL classroom as well as presenting the results of a study that examined senior learners' motivation in this context.

2. The concept of lifelong learning

The philosophy of learning throughout life is anything but modern since "ancient societies all over the world have emphasized the need to learn from the cradle to the grave" (Medel-Añonuevo et al., 2001, no page). Lifelong learning was firmly embodied in the works of the ancient Greeks, such as Plato and Aristotle, who described a process of learning for philosophers which extended over a lifetime. The Greek notion of a *paideia* comprised the development of dispositions and capabilities which motivated a person to engage in permanent scholarship. However, within the context of the Greek philosophers, lifelong learning was reserved for the elite social class and it was not associated with occupation or making a living, but, rather, with the engagement in philosophic speculative inquiry. Furthermore, Plato recommended that every adolescent should study mathematics as groundwork for abstract thinking. Moreover, he felt the study of philosophy should best begin at about the age of fifty. Down through the ages, the idea that the person would be self-motivated to seek a life of continuous learning and would be empowered to be his or her own teacher has been a theme among a long line of educational thinkers and reformers (cf. Bosco, 2007).

A similar approach to obtaining knowledge and experience may be found in ancient Japan where in 1716, Yamamoto Tsunetomo wrote *Hagakure – The*

Code of the Samurai. It is a manual which consists of a series of short anecdotes and reflections for the samurais. One of the entries in that book reads (Tsunetomo, 1716, p. 37):

A certain swordsman in his declining years said the following: "In one's life, there are levels in the pursuit of study. In the lowest level, a person studies but nothing comes of it, and he feels that both he and others are unskillful. At this point he is worthless. In the middle level he is still useless but is aware of his own insufficiencies and can also see the insufficiencies of others. In a higher level he has pride concerning his own ability, rejoices in praise from others. This man has worth. In the highest level a man has the look of knowing nothing. These are the levels in general. But there is one transcending level, and it is the most excellent of all. This person is aware of the endlessness of entering deeply into a certain Way and never thinks of himself as having finished. He truly knows his insufficiencies and never thinks that he has succeeded. Throughout your life advance daily, becoming more skillful than yesterday, more skillful than today. This is never-ending.

Three centuries have passed and today lifelong learning has become a worldwide issue. In 1990 Japan established the *Promotion of Lifelong Learning Law and a National Learning Council*. In 1996, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) initiated a research and development program which was intended to make lifelong learning a reality for all and in UNESCO's International Commission on Education for the 21st Century made lifelong learning its core unifying theme. In June of 2006, at a Moscow meeting of education ministers held in conjunction with the Russian presidency of the G8, the ministers issued a communiqué with 18 points, one of which focuses specifically on the need to develop comprehensive systems of lifelong learning, from early childhood through adulthood (cf. Bosco, 2007).

Medel-Añonuevo et al. (2001) state that in the beginning of the 21st century European Union (EU) and its member states, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and even the World Bank advocate the need to learn throughout life. Given their ideological, political and economic dominance vis-à-vis the rest of the world, it is not surprising that they are gaining adherents in other regions of the world. Asian countries have followed this line of thinking and have developed modern policy discourses on lifelong learning, transforming in the process their own traditional philosophies (e.g., Confucianism, Buddhism) which have for centuries promoted continuous learning. The predominantly economic interpretation of lifelong learning in the last ten years, however, has become problematic for many educators and practitioners who have come forward with such terms as *lifelong (l)earning* and *learning to earn* as their succinct criticism of the way the term is being promoted.

What is understandable is that the context of lifelong learning has changed significantly and necessary guiding and organizing principles of education reforms need to be introduced. Lifelong learning is recognized today as an indispensable tool to enable education to face its multiple current and emerging challenges. As information and communication technologies (ICTs) infuse our societies and communities, the role of the individual learner is highlighted. Globalization has produced outcomes and processes which make the learning of new skills and competencies of paramount importance. In the past, however, a more holistic interpretation of lifelong learning used to be promoted, as can be seen in the *Faure Report: Learning to Be*, from 1972. This report sought to institutionalize the concept of lifelong education, and advocated for the right and necessity of each individual to learn for his or her social, economic, political and cultural development (Medel-Añonuevo et al., 2001). The report acknowledged the existence of lifelong education practices in diverse cultures and emphasized that lifelong education needs to be enshrined as a basic concept in educational policies. The authors of the *Faure Report* claimed that every person must have the opportunity to keep learning throughout his or her life. Furthermore, the concept of lifelong learning should be seen as the cornerstone of every learning society as it encompasses every aspect of education, embraces everything in it, with the whole being more than the sum of its parts. For the authors of the report, lifelong learning is not just an educational system but “the principle in which the over-all organization of a system is founded, and which accordingly underlies the development of each of its component parts” (Medel-Añonuevo et al., 2001, p. 2).

Recurrent Education: A Strategy for Lifelong Learning, issued in 1973, re-framed the lifelong learning discussion in largely economic and employability terms. In the same year, UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) approved a research project on lifelong education which resulted in several publications such as: *Foundations of Lifelong Education* by Dave (1976), in which three main directions for lifelong education are identified: expansion, innovation and integration. As Medel-Añonuevo et al. (2001, pp. 4-5) explain, “Expansion refers to the fact that lifelong education encompasses the learning process in time, both in the range and content of learning and in the multiplication of learning situations, and in so doing creates new motivations and offers all kinds of opportunities. Innovation refers to the creation of alternative structures and patterns of learning in response to multiple and diverse learning opportunities. Finally, integration facilitates the process of expansion and the introduction of innovation through adequate organization and meaningful linkages.”

Twenty-eight years after the publication of the *Faure Report*, UNESCO's (1996) the *Delors Report* acknowledged the need to “rethink and update the concept of lifelong education so as to reconcile three forces: competition, which

provides incentives; co-operation which gives strength; and solidarity, which unites" (p. 18). Furthermore, in the same report one can read: "There is a need to rethink and broaden the notion of lifelong education. Not only must it adapt to changes in the nature of work, but it must also constitute a continuous process of forming whole beings – their knowledge and aptitudes, as well as the critical faculty and ability to act. It should enable people to develop awareness of themselves and their environment and encourage them to play their social role and work in the community" (p. 21).

Recent research has shown the importance of lifelong learning as a psychosocial activity for better quality of life. Learning can be seen as an activity that keeps individuals active, but also enables them to increase their creativity, personal development, personal skills and life satisfaction (Brockert, 1985; Ladmin, 1997; Schuller, 2004). Lifelong learning is therefore a powerful tool that is frequently part of the personal development dimension (Shalock & Verdugo, 2002). It promotes the development of knowledge and competences that will enable adaptation to the knowledge-based society and also valuing all forms of learning. Lifelong learning concerns acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications from the pre-school years to post retirement (Soni, 2012).

3. Barriers in senior education

Senior learners are often associated with a steady decrease in their social adaptability. Additionally, during their learning process they seem to appreciate educational content which is in accordance with their already existing knowledge, being reluctant to learn material which is not compatible with their previous experience. Such knowledge is usually acquired through rote learning, mechanically, but it is not internalized and quickly forgotten. As has been already mentioned, adult learners often base their learning experience on schemata developed earlier in life; therefore, they are frequently dependent on the environment and are characterized by low critical awareness. In effect, it may happen that people develop low self-esteem as a result of faux feedback from the environment. In adult life, such opinions may function as a self-fulfilling prophecy resulting in averting perilous and more difficult educational challenges in order to evade expected failure. Moreover, as a consequence of their predetermined social schemata, seniors are more likely to reject new information than change the schemata. Such an approach leads to repeating the same, ineffective scheme believing that it must eventually prove to be efficient. Lack of expected changes may lead to passive behavior and apathy (Baltes, 1992; Friebe, 2012; Lehr, 2005; Mezirow, 1991).

A question arises as to how the negative characteristics described above may influence the educational process of senior learners and create potential

learning barriers? First of all, these traits may result in low self-assurance and the feeling of insecurity. Fear of failure and ridiculousness may significantly diminish senior learners' motivation and involvement in the learning process. Sometimes senior learners do not want to participate in selected educational activities either because they do not believe in themselves ("I will never learn it," "I am too old to learn it"), or because they believe that they are experts ("I have been doing it for so long that I do not need any new knowledge"). Furthermore, because of their social status outside the classroom (e.g., high position, important social role), learners may perceive some activities as immature. Therefore, in order not to lose their authority and social status, they may be reluctant to involve themselves in the learning process. Such behavior is often accompanied by intrinsic anxiety connected with the feeling of professional significance. Finally, senior learners' previous educational experiences may have a negative influence on their educational performance (Lehr, 2005; Smith, 1984).

Apart from existing social barriers, senior learners may also experience physical and mental obstacles such as general recession of active behavior. Elo-niemi-Sulkava (2013, p. 51) explains this in the following way:

There may be potential difficulties in hearing and sight since risks of these are increased in ageing. Furthermore, aged people are at risk to losses, e.g. loss of functional capacity and loss of spouse and friends. Without illnesses a person can have good functional capacity up to 90 years. However, the risk of health problems increases with age and threatens functional capacity. Declined functional capacity affects motivation and learning but is not a barrier to lifelong learning. Ageing is a complex but an extremely heterogeneous process. There may be two generations of people among senior learners (e.g., ages between 65 and 90).

Physical changes do not hinder learning; however, there is a close connection between physical abilities and the pace of intellectual reactions as well as the level of cognitive abilities. These changes undoubtedly influence the quality of senior learners' educational process. More specifically, senior learners may experience hearing impairment such as less acute hearing which may have a direct influence on the results and hinder intellectual processes. Additionally, there is a strong connection between hearing impairment and learning abilities, such as, for example, problems with hearing high frequency sounds or background noises which may significantly reduce listening skills during conversations. Educators may compensate for such problems by reducing background noises, speaking clearly, loudly and slowly, incorporating visual materials, and standing in good lighting with the mouth in clear view. Another type of disability is connected with sight and eye accommodation, which usually results in less acute perception of images (presbyopia). This in turn may, for example, influence senior

learners' computing skills. Educators may help their learners by providing adequate lighting and avoiding glare. They may also use larger print (at least 14 point font size), avoid wavy lines and dots or combine upper- and lower- case letters. Other types of barriers may be connected with muscle disorders or blood circulatory disorders which do not allow for extended stillness during lessons (Mezirow, 1991; www.clese.org, 2000).

Memory can also begin to fail. However, memory problems are not associated with being elderly but with brain related diseases and illnesses (such as dementia). It is true that when a person becomes older, he or she can lose some cognitive and physical skills. Escuder-Mollon (2013) argues that, in the classroom, learning completely new tasks that require the use of complex rules of logic (such as ICT) or transversal and complex skills like language learning can be challenging. A similar opinion is presented by Eloniemi-Sulkava (2013), according to whom, from middle-age on cognition (e.g., perception, memory, attention, comprehension) starts to decline. All aspects of cognition manifest loss with similar trajectories as individuals' age. Furthermore, dementia and decline in memory functions are some of the biggest fears of aged people. However, as she also claims, a distinct decline in memory and other cognition functions is not part of the normal ageing process, but may be a sign of a pathological syndrome of dementia or depression. In normal ageing, long-term memory is usually well preserved. In addition, there is deterioration in working memory which is part of short term memory, which may be caused by the slowing down process in ageing.

4. Senior education

According to Eloniemi-Sulkava (2013), there is an increasing number of elderly people (65+) in Europe who tend to live longer, are more educated and have better functional capacity compared with the previous generation of 65+. As a result, educational institutions should provide senior learners with a variety of opportunities to satisfy various needs of this heterogeneous group. Consequently, such institutions need to offer a wide range of courses, seminars, excursions, workshops, and other kinds of physical and psychosocial activities in order to meet the needs of senior learners. Some seniors are interested in ageing and health issues, while others wish to extend their knowledge of, for example, information technology, history or geography. Another group of seniors loves travelling, in the classroom or in real life, and often likes to study languages. Furthermore, educators need to become aware of the fact that there are a lot of preconceptions and false assumptions regarding all dimensions of the ageing process and aged people. Even a person with high age (over 85+) has the ability to learn and enjoy learning. There is a decline in some areas of cognitive

capacity but cognition on the whole is well preserved and makes it possible to continue a normal good life and engage in lifelong learning. Active seniors today are aged from 65+ years to even over 90 years, which means that the group encompasses two generations which may come from different social backgrounds. They should be seen as individuals with their own personalities, educational backgrounds, life histories, interests, hobbies, a wide range of life experiences and multicultural backgrounds (Eloniemi-Sulkava, 2013).

However, senior learners may sometimes be reluctant to participate in the educational process due to negative stereotyping, as is the case in Poland where senior citizens undergo marginalization as they face limited access to information (Rejman, 2012). Such an approach also stems from such factors as “conviction of one’s own social inferiority, fear of derision on the part of others, fear of the unknown, unwillingness to attend school or to learn, shortage of financial resources, physical and mental conditions, uncertainty surrounding of learning, objections on the part of the family, no conditions for education, inaccessibility of educational institutions or their not meeting the expectations of the elderly” (Gil et al., 2013, p.116). If, on the other hand, the attitude towards senior education is more positive, senior learners may decide to continue their education for such reasons as the willingness to acquire new skills and information as well as the improvement of already developed skills. Senior learners may also continue their education as a result of other triggers such as: preparation for work in a new position, productive use of spare time, the desire to meet new, interesting people, achieving greater efficiency, expected social or professional promotion, personality development, improvement of interpersonal bonds, developing physical fitness, or an attempt to increase one’s self-esteem (Gil et al., 2013).

As Jaroszewska (2011) writes, the motives for the elderly learners to start their education are associated with *interpersonal contacts and internal needs*. These include independence during travels, exchanging opinions with foreigners, contact with other members of the group as well as the educator, acceptance and appreciation, being among other people, making new friendships and impressing other family members, opportunity to exchange opinions among peers and helping others to learn. Elderly learners are also willing to participate in various forms of physical activity which makes them feel younger. Another motive is *organizing free time and realizing dreams*. Learning a language as a way to organize free time, realizing the ambition to learn a new language which may have been impossible in the past, course participation as a way to avoid loneliness and everyday problems, or the development of language proficiency as a reflection of success. *Self-assessment and development of intellectual abilities* represent the next motive which encompasses using an FL as a professional necessity, the need for intellectual challenges, comparing one’s own

language competence with those of other learners, or learning a language as a memory training. Also important is *association with previous language experience*, which is related to recalling previously learnt FLs, language learning as a family tradition, finding out more about the native language of the deceased spouse, as well as assessing FL competence acquired during war. The penultimate motive includes *interest in other cultures*. This motive encompasses pleasure and satisfaction resulting from discovering new countries, nationalities and the possibility to participate in their culture, understanding and being closer to other parts of human population, the need to enrich one's international contacts by extending social relations, partaking in various cultural events connected with a particular language, as well as listening to songs, watching movies and reading books in original. Finally. One cannot underestimate the importance of *linguistic interest*, which includes fascination with a particular FL, the need to develop and continue a previously "rooted" passion for investigating linguistics, enjoyment resulting from the way in which a particular language sounds, or interest in languages, especially comparing linguistic and etymological aspects.

Taking into consideration the scantiness of publications dedicated specifically to issues concerning the teaching and learning of foreign languages to senior learners, presenting the characterization of this age group poses somewhat of a challenge. Tusting and Barton (2006) discuss seven aspects of adult and senior learning which include:

1. *Motivation*: Elderly learners have their own learning motivation. They base their learning on the already acquired knowledge and experience. First, they adjust learning to their personal goals and afterwards they engage. Their learning aims are often connected with the roles they assume outside educational context.
2. *Initiative*: Elderly learners are more prone towards self-education and try to develop their autonomy. Teachers are responsible for providing a stress-free and safe learning environment.
3. *Specificity of the learning process*: Elderly learners are able to recognize their learning styles and improve them through discussion and analysis.
4. *Everyday learning*: This is understood as a quality of elderly persons' everyday activity. Older learners learn through involvement and support which can result in development of new competences.
5. *Experience*: Older learners base their experience on personal experiences and undergo reflection which is often generated by problem-based situations.
6. *Incidental and informal nature of learning*: Most of the learning process is incidental and idiosyncratic, and thus cannot be planned in advance.

Reflective learning based on personal experience may be initiated but there is no assurance it will take place.

7. *Transformational potential*: Reflective learning enables reorganization of personal experience and allows seeing things from a new perspective. It may result in personal and social transformation of a learner.

A similar classification is presented by Nizińska (2013, pp. 9-10), who introduces a set of rules for working with senior learners. According to the author, senior education should be based on observation and practical activities because learners may not have the necessary set of images and information indispensable for efficient learning. Nizińska (2013) refers to this rule as the *rule of perception*. The *rule of accessibility* focuses on gradual increase of difficulty and states that the process of learning should move from what is familiar, easier and closer for the learner towards less familiar, more distant and more difficult concepts. The rule implies that new knowledge should be based on the learners' life and professional experience, the language of instruction should be clear and comprehensive and, finally, expectations should not be too demanding for the learners. Another rule is called the *rule of active participation* and is considered as the most important rule in teaching adult learners. It is based on the assumption that learners should be able to comprehend educational aims and become actively involved in the process of formulating these aims. The *rule of systematicity* assumes that the condition for effective learning is establishing the level of already existing knowledge and attempting to systematically increase that knowledge. Therefore, every conducted lesson should be carefully thought over and prepared. Furthermore, during lessons learners should be required to plan and express their thoughts in spoken or written form. The *rule of operational knowledge and skills* is based on the assumption that learners expect to obtain knowledge that can be used in various contexts different from the classroom context. Additionally learning should be problem-based, with the effect that learners need to be involved in activities which require analysis and synthesis of information (Nizińska, 2013).

Efficient learning is based on the connection between theory and practice. Learners need to be able to use theoretical knowledge to obtain practical goals and perform in various everyday life situations (i.e., *theory-practice rule*). What is more, the learning process should develop in learners the need for constant upgrading of their knowledge and invariable self-development. According to this *self-development rule*, learners need to comprehend the role of knowledge in a person's life and work as well as to develop skills for monitoring their knowledge increase, critical assessment, and creative approach towards ongoing changes. The penultimate *rule of individual and collective work* focuses attention on individual

abilities of learners as well as the significance of efficient teamwork which are closely connected with individualization. In senior education, educators often assume the roles of counselors, advisers and helpers. Therefore, they need to have extensive knowledge about the whole group as well as every individual learner. Finally, the *rule of stable knowledge* highlights the significance of a meaningful and practical learning process which allows learners to use the knowledge they gain in practical contexts. Provided information should be kept simple, clear, repeated, and based on learners' existing knowledge (Nizińska, 2013).

A similar set of rules for teaching elderly learners is presented by Matlakiewicz and Solarczyk-Szewc (2005), according to whom, the uniqueness of senior education results from precise analysis of learners' characteristics. Learners' abilities, expectations, educational biography, limitations, etc. should thus all taken into consideration. Therefore, educators need to identify the characteristics of a group as well as every individual learner, which requires flexibility and well developed educational intuition. Furthermore, educators working with senior learners need to adjust the level of linguistic abstractness to the level of learners' comprehension abilities and move towards mutual understanding and respect. In addition, the teaching of senior learners should be based on consequent realization of educational aims. These aims may result from global educational policy or from the curriculum. They may be also verified by the teacher or they may be the outcome of teacher-learner adjustments.

In senior education emphasis is specifically placed on "partner-based" aim formulation. Senior learners need to be familiarized with learning mechanisms such as learning styles and strategies as well as meaningful reflection, which results in increased awareness about learner's weak and strong points. While working with senior learners educators need to remember that for majority of learners education becomes an integral part of their everyday life which is often adjusted to the educational timetable. Therefore, they need to be actively involved in the process of decision making and be treated like partners not just passive in-takers of the presented knowledge and skills. Such an approach requires from the teacher to become an advisor and a facilitator who monitors the learning process. Affective factors such as motivation and self-confidence are very important in FL learning. Many older learners fear failure more than their younger counterparts, maybe because they accept the stereotype of the older person as a poor language learner or because of previous unsuccessful attempts to learn an FL. When such learners are faced with a stressful, fast-paced learning situations, fear of failure only increases. The older person may also exhibit greater hesitancy in learning. Thus, teachers must be able to reduce anxiety and build self-confidence in the learner. Finally, senior learners expect the teacher to be extremely professional, just and friendly towards his/her learners (Matlakiewicz & Solarczyk-Szewc, 2005; Matulka, 2014; Schleppegrell, 1987).

5. Senior language education

According to Nizegorodcew (2016), the strengths and weaknesses of senior learners with respect to foreign language relearning "(. . .) depend not only, and not primarily on how old they are, but on their study objectives" (p. 90). When it comes to foreign language education, it seems that the greatest impediment to senior language learning may be doubts that older adults can learn a new language. Such thoughts may exist in the mind of the teacher and the learner as well. Most people may follow a well-known concept that the younger the learner is the better. However, studies comparing the rate of second language acquisition in children and adults have shown that although children may have an advantage in achieving native-like fluency in the long run, adults actually learn languages more quickly than children in the early stages (e.g., Krashen et al., 1979). These studies indicate that attaining a working ability to communicate in a new language may actually be easier and more rapid for the adult than for the child. Studies on aging have also demonstrated that learning ability does not decline with age. If older people remain healthy, their intellectual abilities and skills do not decline. Adult learners learn differently from children but no age-related differences in learning ability have been found for adults of different ages (Schleppegrell, 1987). In fact, if one decides to compare older learners with their younger counterparts some advantages of senior learners may come to the fore which are as follows (Johnstone, 2002, p. 12):

- They may be able to plot their new language onto concepts about the world which they already possess in their first language. This can help greatly in vocabulary acquisition (cf. Ausubel, 1964) and in making inferences about meaning. Younger learners by contrast may have to acquire these concepts as well as learn how to express them in both their first and their additional languages.
- They may be more experienced in handling the discourse of conversations and other language activities, and thus may be more adept at gaining feedback from native speakers or teachers and in negotiating meaning.
- They are likely to have acquired a wider range of strategies for learning, such as, for example, note-taking, use of reference materials, searching for underlying pattern. This, allied to their established literacy in their first language, may help them become more efficient learners.
- They may have a clearer sense of why they are learning an additional language and may therefore be able to work purposefully towards objectives of their own choosing.

6. The study

Contradicting existing stereotypes, seniors can be successful language learners. Unfortunately, one major obstacle that hinders them from taking up language education is their low self-esteem concerning their learning abilities. Obviously, old age carries with it some limitations which, however, may be overcome by proper adaptation of the classroom context. Furthermore, positive classroom atmosphere has fundamental significance for learners' self-confidence and their willingness to participate actively in the FL learning process. This certainly applies to senior learners. Therefore, such language learners should be able to learn in a friendly and anxiety-reducing environment. They should also feel continuous support and trust from their teachers throughout the whole learning process. The main aim of the study reported below was to find out more about motivational and demotivational factors which have a direct or indirect influence on senior learners' FL learning process.

6.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 47 learners, 45 females and 2 males, recruited on a voluntary basis from two groups attending courses in English as a foreign language. They were enrolled in the first semester and were taught by two teachers of English, who differed considerably with respect to their experience in teaching English. All of the participants could be described as senior language learners taking into account the criteria adopted for the purpose of this study (i.e., 55 years of age or older), with the precise breakdown being the following: three learners between the ages of 55 and 60, 22 students between the ages of 61 and 65, and 22 students at the age of 67. As regards to their education, 34 participants claimed to have graduated from a university and 13 participants did not have higher education. When it comes to their command of the target language, they self-assessed themselves with the average of 2.6 on a 6-point scale, which may indicate that they were not very confident about their command of English. The participants were also asked whether they knew languages other than English. Most of them mentioned Russian, which should not be surprising since the learning of Russian had been mandatory when they had attended primary and secondary school. Two participants spoke French and four German.

6.2. Instruments and procedures

The data were collected during a series of group interviews conducted during the period of one week. Each of the interviews lasted sixty minutes and was not

recorded due to the participants' negative feedback. During both interviews the researcher could only make notes. Although, participation in both interviews was completely voluntary, all the senior learners attended each of them. For the convenience of the participants the interviews were conducted in Polish and did not have any fixed format; therefore, the participants could freely express their opinions. In the preliminary stage of each discussion, the researcher initiated a general exchange of ideas and after some time the discussion was directed towards the topic of motivation. Sometimes the exchange of the opinions was stimulated by the researcher who asked general questions, such as: "What motivates or demotivates you to study?" or "What motivates you to study English?" However, the participants were very active and the interviews did not require frequent interventions. No other instruments apart from interviews were used during the study due to the reluctance of the senior learners who explicitly refused to fill in questionnaires, be observed, or write journals.

6.3. Results and discussion

When the senior students were asked about their motives for joining the third age university and starting their education all over again they pointed to social factors such as their family members' encouragement, the chance to leave the house for a few hours and meet people in their age, introducing changes in their lives, as well as, a general change in their lifestyle. These answers mirror those that were reported in previously studies (e.g., Jaroszewska, 2013; Nizęgorodcew, 2016).

Additionally, the obtained results clearly indicate that the participants did not pursue any specific, clearly-defined aims in learning English. The senior FL learners most often expressed the opinion that learning English was predominantly considered as a hobby and stressed the fact that it constituted a way of staying active and mentally agile, practicing their memory and developing new skills. The majority of the respondents pointed to social factors as those which were considered as the most motivating for them while deciding to participate in a language course (e.g., "I have contact with other people. I made new friends"). These factors included having family members abroad and the possibility to travel abroad with skills allowing to communicate effectively with members of other cultures (e.g., "I managed do get by during my trip to the USA. I am proud of myself"). Other participants claimed that they had always wanted to learn English or expressed the necessity to know English as lingua franca of the contemporary world. However, there were also answers related to the course itself such as a high level of classes or a friendly and well-prepared teacher. Among other course-related motivating factors, the respondents pointed to friendly atmosphere, appraisal from the teacher or other students, as well as well written test. Furthermore,

some senior students emphasized the significance of socio-affective issues such as cooperation with other students as a motivating factor.

However, almost every participant taking part in the study talked about the feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment resulting from FL learning. Some of their opinions are presented below:

I didn't believe I could learn a language at my age. I am motivated and I already know a lot.

Assuming that I had contact with English in such an advanced age I consider myself to be successful and not give up my language learning.

I took up a challenge and I signed up for the course, met new people. Now I feel great.

I feel younger because I am still studying and I made new friends.

I overcame my weaknesses and met new people my age.

Overcoming personal apprehensions and increasing self-confidence seem to be prevailing motives for learning English among the senior learners who wanted to prove to themselves and others that they are still competent enough to successfully embark on new educational challenges. In these comments, one can easily detect joy and satisfaction resulting from the fact that the participants are still active members of the society.

Unfortunately, the written text does not show the mimics and the tone of the voice which were present during the interviews. When commenting on their achievements, the participants were explicitly satisfied and their faces and voices were full of delight and happiness. The reason for such contentment stemming from participating in the educational process may result from the fact that in contemporary European societies it has become common to distinguish emotional and social loneliness (Drennan et al., 2008; Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007). Following Weiss (1973), emotional loneliness is missing an intimate attachment, such as a marital partner, and is accompanied by feelings of desolation and insecurity, and not having someone to turn to. Therefore, the problem of social loneliness and lacking a wider circle of friends and acquaintances may be overcome by joining educational activities which can provide a sense of belonging, companionship and being a worthy member of a community.

The respondents also pointed to demotivating factors in their learning of English, such the fast pace of the lesson and too many words to memorize, which were mentioned the most often during the interviews. These answers are not surprising since the cognition of people is fully developed at the age of 25 and from middle-age it starts to decline. All aspects related to cognition demonstrate loss with similar trajectories as people age. Furthermore, serious decline in memory functions is usually a sign of dementia and depression. Therefore,

senior learners should know that their memory skills can be exercised, classroom activities should be adjusted to their motivation and a positive learning atmosphere should be fostered. The optimal level of cognition requires enough sleep, a good level of nutrition and physical exercise (Suutama, 2010).

Additional demotivating factors, evident from in statements as “mistakes made in the presence of other students” and “being the only student who does not comprehend” seemed to be interconnected with the students’ anxiety caused by the way they are perceived by others. Since FL learning is predominantly associated with social context, it seems natural that senior students are anxious when their positive public image is being threatened. This further depends on their self-perception and whether they see themselves as active designers of their own environment or as powerless victims of their fate (Friebe & Schmidt-Hertha, 2013; Schmidt, 2010). Finally, the respondents pointed to situations during which they had to speak English in front of the other students in the group or during language tests.

7. Conclusions

Contradictory to some exiting stereotypes, senior learners can not only successfully participate in the FL learning process, but even more importantly, this process can help them increase their self-esteem, make new friends, develop a sense of belonging, and prove themselves capable of achieving personal goals. Seniors are efficient FL learners provided they are provided with a friendly and supportive atmosphere. Therefore, educators should pay attention to affective factors while working with senior learners. Positive reinforcement and constant support may result in increased participation and well-being of the senior learners. Learners should be encouraged to freely express their opinions, since their experience and knowledge of the outside world undoubtedly surpasses those of other age groups. Educators working with senior learners should bear in mind that class activities should include large amounts of oral repetition and extensive pronunciation correction. Furthermore, providing opportunities for learners to work together, focusing on understanding rather than producing language, and reducing the focus on error correction can build senior learners’ self-confidence and promote language learning. Educators need to emphasize the progress learners make and provide opportunities for them to feel successful. Finally, it needs to be remembered that senior learners have already developed efficient learning strategies that have been used in other contexts. Therefore, educators should be flexible enough to allow different approaches to learning tasks in the classroom. However, sometimes older learners with little formal education may need to be introduced to strategies for organizing information. At the same time, many successful strategies used by senior learners have been

identified and may be incorporated into foreign language learning programs in order to provide a wide range of possibilities for senior learners.

It would be certainly be helpful to conduct more research on the motivation of senior FL learners and the affective and cognitive strategies they employ in the language classroom. Such data would provide valuable insights into older learners' behaviors and their approach to themselves and the entire learning process. It also seems advisable to consider introducing changes into teacher training which would involve devoting more time to senior education and adjusting the educational process to specific expectations of senior FL learners.

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