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Handbook Language Course Teaching Methods for Senior Citizens



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



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Impressum

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Preface

The Commission's 2006 Communication *Adult learning: It is never too late to learn* stressed the importance of lifting the barriers to participation in lifelong learning and investing at ageing society.

"Europe is facing unprecedented demographic changes that will have a major impact on society and on the economy - and consequently on education and training provision and needs. The European population is ageing: over the next 30 years the number of younger Europeans (up to 24 years) will fall by 15%. One in three Europeans will be over 60 years old, and about one in ten will be over 80"¹

Currently lifelong learning is mainly applied to professional trainings and Europe wide senior citizens are to a large extent excluded from this educational system. Participation in adult education remains still unequal. Barriers to participate in lifelong learning can be various, from policy, information access, providers, cultural and economical situation, personal situation and educational experiences of the potential participant.

Finding new ways to motivate and involve excluded groups is a high priority for policy, research and funding.

Therefore it is a paramount importance to offer this age group the educational programmes of LLL, to motivate older people to make the best out of their lives, to encourage them to pass on their experiences and to realize their requests. Gerontological researches have identified education as one of the most important factors of stabilising health. Furthermore learning promotes the understanding among the generations and reduces the social generation gap.

According to project analysis concerning the participation of senior citizens in adult learning, especially in languages courses, this group is under-represented; also the learning offers are not so common for senior citizens. The specific needs of language teaching senior citizens have not been sufficiently taken into account by language trainers, teachers and generally education providers.

The teaching methods often disregard the principles and characteristics of senior learners' acquisition and seem to neglect senior learners' needs and motivation.

Working as a language teacher for senior learners demands on the teacher's didactical, methodological and social skills.

In order to improve the quality of senior learners' language teaching, introduce new learning contents; bring a new methods and techniques, the project partnership worked out the Handbook with toolbox for language teachers training use.

The handbook reflects the background of learning by senior citizens and

¹ Communication from the Commission *Adult learning: It is never too late to learn*
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comprises theoretical, conceptual aspects and target group oriented aspects.

The first module describes the theoretical and conceptual aspects of ageing population, theories of physical aging and physiological changes.

The second module focuses on characteristic of languages learning senior citizens, taking into account aspects of motivation, possible learning difficulties and social aspects of learning.

The third module focuses on didactics and methodology of languages teaching. What are the principles, what is the learning environment, etc.

The handbook is a basis material for the curriculum and tools developed by the partnership.

Module 1 Introduction

Introduction

This module focuses upon describing the situation for the older population by describing the ageing population in our world and addressing the lifespan psychology for older adults. These aspects are important for teachers that work with older adults in order to conduct a successful teaching.

1.1 The Ageing Population

Number of persons aged 60 years or over

The number of persons aged 60 years or over is estimated to be 688 million in 2006 and is projected to grow to almost 2 billion by 2050, at which time the population of older persons will be larger than the population of children (0-14years) for the first time in human history. The majority of the world's older persons reside in Asia (54 per cent), while Europe has the next largest share (22 per cent).

Population aged 60 years or over as percentage of total population

One out of every 9 persons is now aged 60 years or over; by 2050, the United Nations projects that 1 person out of every 5, and by 2150 1 out of every 3, will be aged 60 years or over. The percentage of older persons is currently much higher in the more developed than in the less developed regions, but the pace of ageing in developing countries is more rapid, and their transition from a young to an old age structure will occur over a shorter period.

The oldest old

The older population is itself ageing. Currently, the oldest old (aged 80 years or over) make up 13 per cent of the population aged 60 or over. The oldest old are the fastest growing segment of the older population, and by 2050, 20 per cent of the older population will be aged 80 years or over. The number of centenarians (aged 100 years or over) is projected to increase 13-fold, from approximately 287,000 in 2006 to 3.7 million by 2050.

Life expectancy at age 60

The world has experienced dramatic improvements in longevity. Life expectancy at birth has increased about 20 years since 1950, to its current level of 66 years. Of those surviving to age 60, men can expect to live another 17 years and women an additional 21 years. However, there are still large differences in mortality levels



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between countries. In the least developed countries, men reaching age 60 can expect only 15 more years, and women, 17 years, while in the more developed regions, life expectancy at age 60 is 19 years for men and 23 years for women.

Sex ratio

The majority of older persons are women. Because female life expectancy is greater than male life expectancy, among older persons there are 82 men per 100 women. Among the oldest old, there are only 55 men for every 100 women. The ratio of men to women at older ages is lower in the more developed regions (72 men per 100 women) than in the less developed regions (88 men per 100 women) because there are larger differences in life expectancy between the sexes in the more developed regions.

Percentage of older persons currently married

Older men are more likely than older women to be married. While 80 per cent of older men are currently married, the corresponding figure for older women is 48 per cent. Most of older persons without a spouse are widowed. Women are more likely to outlive their spouses because they live longer and are, on average, younger than their husbands.

Percentage of older persons living alone

Although many older persons who live alone are socially active and materially secure, those who live alone are more likely to need outside assistance in the case of illness or disability and are at greater risk of social isolation and poverty. An estimated 14 per cent of the world's older persons live alone. The proportion is lower for men (8 per cent) than for women (19 per cent) because women are more likely to be widowed. The proportion is lower in the less developed regions (7 per cent) than in the more developed regions (24 per cent).

Potential support ratio

The potential support ratio (PSR), that is, the number of persons aged 15 to 64 years per person aged 65 years or over, indicates the dependency burden on potential workers. The impact of demographic ageing is reflected in the PSR, which fell between 1950 and 2006 from 12 to 9 people in the working ages per person aged 65 years or over. By 2050, the PSR is projected to fall to 4 persons of working age per person aged 65 years or over. PSRs have important implications for social security schemes, particularly traditional pay-as-you-go systems, in which current workers pay for the benefits of current retirees.

Statutory retirement age

Men become eligible for full pension benefits at age 65 or over in more than half of all developed countries, while the most common official retirement age for women is between 55 and 60 years in developed countries. The official retirement age in developing countries is often lower than in developed countries, most commonly between 55 and 60 years for both men and women. The differential between developed and developing countries reflects differences in life expectancy, which is lower in developing countries.

Percentage of the older population in the labour force

Countries with high per capita incomes tend to have lower labour-force participation rates among older persons. In more developed regions, 22 per cent of men aged 60 years or over are economically active, compared with 50 per cent in less developed regions. In more developed regions, 11 per cent of older women are economically active, compared with 19 per cent in less developed regions. Older persons in less developed regions participate to a greater extent in the labour force, largely owing to the limited coverage of social security schemes and the relatively low incomes they guarantee when they exist.

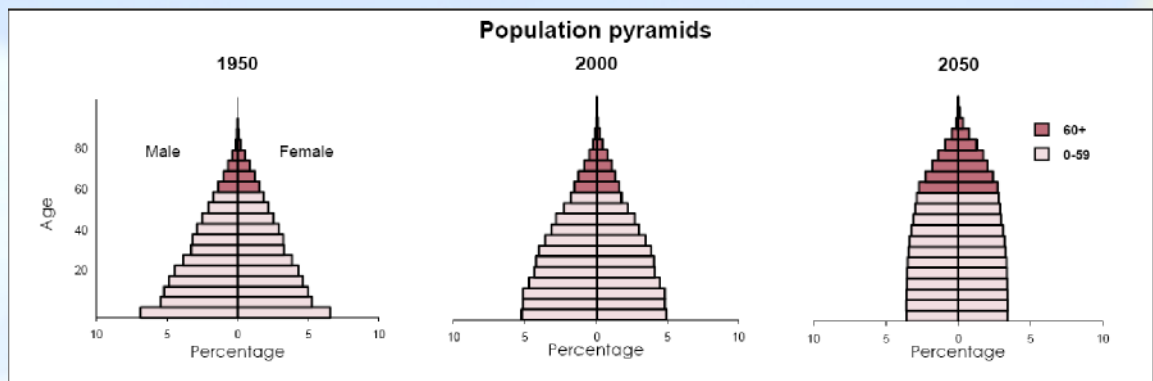


Figure 1: World (Population Division, DESA, United Nations)

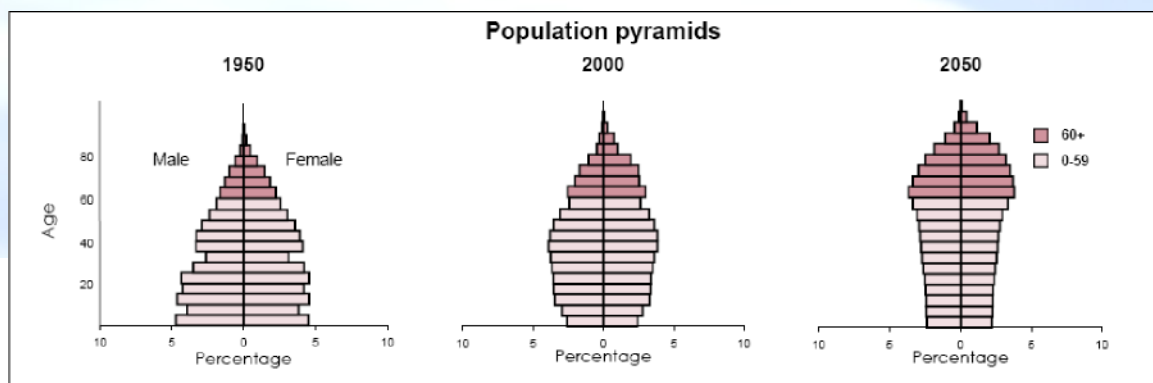


Figure 2: Europe (Population Division, DESA, United Nations)

1.2 Lifespan psychology

What Are Older Adults Like?

Longevity is the number of years a person can expect to live. This is determined by genetic and environmental factors.

Three types of longevity.

- Average life expectancy is the age at which half the people born in a particular year will have died.
- Useful life expectancy is the number of years a person is free from debilitating chronic disease.
- Maximum life expectancy is the oldest age to which any person lives.

Genetic and Environmental Factors in Life Expectancy

- Heredity is a major factor in longevity.
- Environment plays a role by the effects of disease and toxins.
- Social class plays a role because certain conditions are related to lack of access to health care

Ethnic and Gender Differences in Life Expectancy

- Life expectancy is complex and varies among ethnic groups.
- European American life expectancy is longer than that of African Americans', but not as long as for Hispanic Americans.
- Life expectancy varies at different ages.
- Women live longer than men by about 7 years. For those who live to 85, the difference is only 1 year.
- Men are more susceptible to infectious diseases and other conditions that are likely to be fatal.
- While many explanations have been offered, no consistent finding has been found that supports one theory.

The Third-Fourth Age Distinction

Third Age adults are between the ages of 60 to 80.

- Many advances in knowledge and technology have contributed to the better quality of life for this group.

Fourth Age adults are over 80.

- Few interventions have been developed to hold back cognitive and physiological declines in this group.

1.3 Physical Changes and Health

Lifespan

The term lifespan refers to the biological limit to life within a species, while life expectancy refers to the average lifetime of a species.

- The human lifespan is about 115 years, while the human life expectancy is about 75 years.
- Health habits, lifestyle choices, diseases, and other factors affect life expectancy, with females of almost all species having longer life expectancies than males.
- Investigations of claims of extraordinary age have revealed no evidence to support the claim to longer lifespans but have shown that some communities have higher-than-average life expectancies.
- Regions with exceptional life expectancies share several commonalities, including moderate diets high in fiber and low in fat, active involvement in work throughout adulthood, intergenerational family and community activities, and routine exercise and relaxation.
- As life expectancy has increased worldwide, the greater proportion of older adults in the population has resulted in the demographic pyramid shifting to a more rectangular shape.

1.4 Theories of physical aging

Aging has two components: primary aging (internal, biogenetic factors) and secondary aging (external, environmental factors).

- Improvement in dealing with secondary aging has resulted in increased life expectancy.
- An understanding of primary aging may eventually lead to increasing the lifespan.

Biological Theories of Aging

- Wear-and-tear theory suggests that the body simply wears out.
- Cellular theories focus on the build up of toxic cellular substances and subsequent deterioration.

Some research indicates that cells have an absolute limit on the number of times they can divide. Hay flick limit, cells are programmed to divide only about 50 times before they die. Cancer cells, unlike normal body cells, appear to be able to divide an unlimited number of times. Other approaches concentrate on free radicals-chemicals produced by cell division that cause cell damage.

Cross-linking is an explanation that suggests that certain proteins interact with body tissue, which results in stiffer tissues. Heart, muscle, and arteries can be affected.

Metabolic Theories

- These theories examine the interaction between caloric intake and stress.

Programmed Cell Death Theories

- This approach points to evidence that aging is genetically programmed.
- Recent information about human genetics is contributing to these explanations.

1.5 Physiological Changes

Changes in the Neurons

- The fibers in the axon form spiral-shaped masses called neurofibrillary tangles, which interfere with transmission of signals.
- Damaged or defective neurons collect and form neuritic plaques, which interferes with other, healthy neurons.
- Structural and functional imaging show age-related changes in the brain associated with cognitive processes.

Cardiovascular and Respiratory Systems

- Cardiovascular diseases increase dramatically with advancing age.
- By young adulthood collection of fat in the arteries and in and around the heart decrease the efficiency of the circulatory system.
- These changes increase the chances of cerebral vascular accidents (CVAs), which results in hemorrhage

Older adults may experience transient ischemic attacks (TIAs), or interruptions of blood flow which can be warnings of stroke.

Older adults may have many smaller CVAs, resulting in vascular dementia.

The most common respiratory disease in older adults is chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) such as emphysema caused by smoking.

Physical health

The majority of older adults consider their physical health to be good or excellent, but a majority also has at least one chronic health condition.

- The most common chronic disorder is heart disease.
- Osteoporosis, the loss of bone mass, affects many postmenopausal women, appears to involve hereditary factors, and can be best treated

with preventive measures, such as maintaining adequate calcium levels from childhood on, engaging in regular exercise to strengthen bones, and receiving estrogen replacement therapy.

- Older adults have fewer accidents than children but are more likely to die or experience disabilities as a result of their accidents.
- The more risk factors that elderly persons have for falls, the greater the likelihood that they will accidentally fall.

Sensory Changes

- A decrease in the amount of light admitted to the eye results in the need for increased light for reading.
- Presbyopia is the age-related decline in the ability to see close objects clearly.
- The ability to discriminate colours decreases during the later years, with greens and blues fading the most and reds the least.
- Cataracts, or opaque spots in the lens of the eye, may develop. Also, glaucoma, or an increase in the pressure of the fluid in the eye, may cause loss of vision.
- Retinal changes such as those caused by diabetes and macular degeneration increase in older age.

Structural changes in the eye may result in loss of visual acuity, or the ability to see detail, especially in low lighting.

Hearing loss is one of the most common normative changes in older adults.

The most common age-related hearing problem is presbycusis, which is caused by the cumulative effects of noise and age-related changes. This results in the loss of the ability to hear low-pitched sounds.

Taste, touch, temperature, and pain sensitivity do not decline as significantly in older years.

The ability to detect and distinguish smells declines after the age of 70 in many people.

Older people fall more often due to changes in the sense of balance.

Health Issues

- Sleep is often problematic in older ages, disrupting the circadian rhythm, or sleep-wake cycle.
- Total night sleep decreases in the elderly and is characterized by frequent wakings, with a third of older adults experiencing insomnia and other sleep problems.
- Older adults may experience nutritional deficits because of declining

health and eating patterns.

- The incidence of cancer increases with age and suggests the importance of screenings.
- Additional internal changes include decreased breathing capacity, reduced digestive functions, reduced bladder capacity, and slowed kidney functions.

1.6 Cognitive Processes

Cognitive aspects of aging

~ Age-related changes in the hippocampus and cerebellum of the brain may produce detectable learning and memory deficits for older adults but do not prevent most older persons from learning many practical things in their later years.

- Younger and older persons do not differ in their ability to learn new things, but older adults exhibit slower performance of learned responses.
- In logical, problem-solving studies, in which elderly subjects usually do worse than younger subjects, the difference may be due more to educational background than to aging.
- Elderly adults appear to be quite capable of learning new problem-solving strategies, but the strategies they normally use cause them to make more errors of omission, while younger subjects make more errors of commission.

~ Memory capabilities of older adults remain remarkably good, despite the emphasis on forgetfulness as a sign of aging.

- While recognition memory remains relatively stable, changes in short-term memory are most noticeable, with the key factor being declines in the ability to encode new material.
- Aging affects long-term memory less than short-term memory, but retrieval of material from long-term memory is slower.
- The misconception that older adults remember remote childhood memories more easily than more memories is not supported by research.
- The remote memories of older adults are harder to investigate, partly because verifying the accuracy of the memories is difficult.
- When older adults use priming and other memory aids, they may be more successful at recall of a past experience or in remembering to do a task than younger adults who rely on memory alone.

~ Cross-sectional studies of intelligence in the later years present a picture of



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gradually declining functions, while longitudinal studies often find intellectual gains.

- The Seattle longitudinal study has helped to define a classical pattern of intellectual aging in which vocabulary remains stable or increases, spatial abilities may begin to decline in early adulthood, and other abilities may decline or remain stable.
- Except for declines in fluid abilities related to slower reaction times, significant declines in IQ scores before age 60 are more likely due to disease or lack of effort.
- Activity levels may moderate the effects of slowing reaction time in that one study found that highly active older female subjects can perform equally as well as highly active college students.
- The classical pattern of intellectual aging is not universal. And much diversity exists in the patterns of intellectual functioning of older adults.

~ Creativity in older adulthood may take the form of self-actualizing creativeness, in which the "Ulyssean adult" possesses wisdom gathered from experiencing a long life, or may be exhibited as the special talent creativity of older artists, scientists, and musicians.

Information Processing

Older adults do more poorly on selective attention tasks.

- Vigilance, or sustained attention, may decline with age, though studies are inconsistent.
- The ability to focus, switch, and divide attention is called attentional control and may show some decline in older age.

Psychomotor Speed

- The speed at which a person can make a specific motor response may slow with advancing age.
- This finding may be due to taking longer to decide what response to make, especially when faced with an ambiguous situation.
- These changes make driving with advancing age a controversial issue.

Working Memory

- Working memory is the information that is being used at the moment.
- Working memory typically declines with age.
- A combination of declining working memory and psychomotor speed may explain cognitive performance in older adults.

Memory

- Explicit memory is the deliberate and conscious remembering of information.
 - Episodic memory is memory of information from a specific time or event.
 - Semantic memory is the remembering of the meaning of words or concepts unrelated to a specific time or event.
- Implicit memory is unconscious remembering of information learned at an earlier time.
 - Priming is the process whereby previous contact with something can implicitly aid in its subsequent recall or recognition.

What Changes?

- Episodic memory is worse in older adults than younger adults.
- Older adults are not as good at spontaneously using memory strategies to improve recall.
- No age differences in implicit and semantic memory have been found.
- For all groups, memory is better for events that occur between ages of 10 and 30 years.

The Impact of Beliefs about Memory Aging

- Stereotypes about older people and memory loss impacts what elderly people believe about their own abilities, affecting their strategies for remembering.

When Is Memory Change Abnormal?

- Most people worry about memory loss and its possible implications for disease.
- When memory problems seriously affect everyday life, a serious problem may be suspected.

1.7 Social Aspects of Later Life Psychosocial, Retirement and Relationship

Continuity Theory

- Continuity theory proposes that people use familiar strategies to cope with daily life.
 - Too little continuity promotes a feeling that life is too unpredictable.
 - Too much continuity promotes boredom.
 - Optimal continuity allows for challenges and interest without overwhelming.

Competence and Environmental Press

- Competence is the upper limit of a person's ability to function in physical health, sensory-perceptual skills, motor skills, cognitive skills, and ego strength.
- Environmental press is the physical, interpersonal, or social demands of the environment.
- Both factors change as we move through life and interact with life's changes.
- Our adaptation level is the level at which press level is average for a particular level of competence.
- Slight increases in press results in the zone of maximum performance potential, which results in increased performance.
- Slight decreases in press result in the zone of maximum comfort in which
- people are able to live without worrying about environmental demands. –
- When people exert control over their lives by choosing new behaviours to
- meet their needs or desires, it is called proactivity.
- When people allow the situation to dictate their options, they show docility.
- Research shows people with high competence more often choose proactivity. Low competence results in more docility.

Integrity Versus Despair

- ~ Older people engage in the life review in which they reflect often and long on the events and experiences of their lifetime.
- Some individuals judge their life to have been meaningful and productive and feel good about the choices they have made, resulting in ego integrity.
- Others feel a sense of meaninglessness and blame others for their problems, resulting in despair.
- Three tasks to be resolved during Erikson's eighth stage: ego differentiation versus work-role preoccupation, body transcendence versus body preoccupation, and ego transcendence versus ego preoccupation.

Emotional and personality development in late adulthood

- Older adults experience a variety of positive and negative emotions, but generally have high levels of life satisfaction and happiness.
- Three times as many elderly Americans say that old age is better than they expected, compared to those who say it is worse, and the positive reaction also is found in many other countries.
- Depression is the most common emotional problem of the elderly and is



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more prevalent in the elderly than in other age groups.

- Depression may be caused by physical illnesses or may be due to older adults experiencing the effects of many losses.
- Older adults can be helped to deal with depression in the same ways that younger depressed persons are.

□ While research results indicate that personality characteristics remain relatively stable across the adult years, the findings could indicate that only people's beliefs about themselves become more consistent, while their actual behaviors continue to change.

What Does Being Retired Mean?

- Retirement does not always mean complete withdrawal from the work environment.
- Some elders have a bridge job, or a job one holds between ending their primary employment and final retirement.
- Bridge jobs are associated with both retirement and overall life satisfaction.
- The average adult spends a fifth of his or her life in retirement, but 1 in 6 men and 1 in 10 women do not retire, and 20 percent of retirees work part-time.

Today, more people retire by choice than for any other reason.

- Most people retire when they feel they are financially secure.
- Some people retire when physical health problems interfere with work
- People with jobs that are physically demanding tend to retire earlier.

Gender Differences

- Women enter the workforce later and have more interruptions in their work history. They also may have different financial needs.
- Women with husbands that have poor health or with larger numbers of dependents tend to retire earlier. The opposite is true for men.

Adjustment to Retirement

- People's adjustment to retirement develops over time as a function of interplay between physical health, financial status, voluntary retirement status, and feelings of personal control.
- Men who place high priority on family report more retirement satisfaction.
 - Women's satisfaction with retirement does not seem to be associated with any specific roles.
- Research does not find the belief that health begins to decline right after retirement to have any validity.
- Spouses and other family members also have to adjust to the retirement of another family member.

Friends and Siblings

- Friendships
 - Patterns of friendships in late life are similar to those in young adulthood.
 - Older adults have fewer relationships than younger adults.
 - Friendships form on the basis of many factors that are more relevant at different times, a process known as socioemotional selectivity.
 - Elderly women find understanding and support in friendships, while
 - elderly men value friends for the opportunity to participate in activities. – Reciprocity is the key to long-term friendships.
- Sibling Relationships: 5 Types:
 - Intimate sibling relationships- 14%
 - Congenial sibling relationships- 30%
 - Loyal sibling relationships- 34%
 - Apathetic sibling relationships- 11%
 - Hostile sibling relationships- 11%

~ For most people, sibling relationships are the longest- lasting relationships in their lives.

In later adulthood, siblings often provide companionship and emotional support.

Among the elderly, sister-sister relationships are typically the closest, and brother-brother relationships the least close.

Relationships in older adulthood

- Most older adults are married or have been married and report feeling closer to their families than in previous years.
- Typically, marital satisfaction is never higher than in old age.
- Older couples report that the most rewarding aspects of marriage are companionship and the expression of true feelings, while value differences and lack of mutual interests are the most troublesome.
- A small number of older couples divorce, but many more experience a transition to being single again as the result of the death of a spouse.

Caring for a Partner

- Caring for a chronically ill partner is more stressful and challenging than caring for a chronically ill parent.
- The dynamics of the relationship may change. Division of labor has to be readjusted.
- Spouses of Alzheimer's patients report more depression and decreased

marital satisfaction.

- Older adults who have higher feelings of competence report few hassles in caring for partners.

Widowhood

- For most people, the death of a spouse is among the most traumatic experiences they will have.
- More than half of all women over 65 are widows. Only 15% of men the same age are widowers.
- Friends & family may not visit or socialize as much with elders after the death of a spouse.
- Men are at a higher risk of dying, themselves soon after the death of a spouse.
 - Some researchers believe that a man's wife is often his only close friend and confidant.
 - There is evidence that older men are less likely to be able to carry out routine activities such as shopping and financial responsibilities.
- Women are usually less financially secure when widowed and are more likely to enter poverty status.
- Widowers are 5 times more likely to remarry than widows.

Great-Grand parenthood

- For most adults, grand parenting is an enjoyable and important role.
- Three important aspects of great-grandparenthood:
 - It gives a sense of personal and family renewal.
 - Great-grandchildren provide new diversions and a positive new role.
 - Great-grandparenthood is seen as a major milestone of longevity, which is usually viewed positively.

Frail Older Adults

- Frail older adults have physical disabilities, are very ill, or may have cognitive or psychological disorders.
- A minority of older adults is frail but the percentage increases with advancing age.
- Activities of daily living (ADLs) assess the basic daily living task competencies of older adults.
- Instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) are tasks that require intellectual competence and planning.

Prevalence of Frailty

- Less than 5% of adults aged 65 to 74 need assistance.
- Incidence of needing assistance increases dramatically thereafter.
- Older adults may also have higher rates of anxiety and depression.

Living in Nursing Homes

- Only about 5% of older adults live in nursing homes.
- About 50% of those who live beyond 85 will spend at least some time in a nursing home.
- The increase in the number of assisted-living facilities, for older adults who need help but are not so impaired to require 24-hour care, is decreasing the number of older adults in nursing homes.

Who Lives in Nursing Homes?

- Usually widowed or divorced, financially disadvantaged, possibly without living family and very old.

Risk factors include:

- Over age 85
- Female
- Recently admitted to a hospital – Lives in retirement housing – Unmarried or living alone – Has no children nearby – Has cognitive impairment – Has problem with IADLs



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Module 2 Characteristic of language learning senior citizens

2.1 Motivation

What is “Motivation” in teaching/learning field?

According to Z. Dornyei², motivation could be identified as: why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity [and] how hard they are going to pursue it

Why senior citizens would learn a second language?

In the field of second language acquisition, two main kinds of motivation have been identified:

- integrative motivation – that is wanting to learn a second language in order to identify oneself with the community that speaks the language
- instrumental motivation – that is wanting to learn a second language in order to meet urgent needs and desired goals, such as to get a job or to ask for specific information

While the instrumental motivation belongs to some issues related to (personal and professional) growth and research, integrative motivation belongs to identity and community acceptance: in a world in which the IT proliferation covers the whole social scene, living far from IT language – mostly English – means living far from global community. And for senior citizens target – who already suffers of an age-based discrimination – IT-language ignorance is a primal point of social exclusion.

So, temporarily answering the opening question, the main reason why senior citizens would learn a second language (and also need to do so) is an integrative one: the large diffusion of IT-language ignorance among senior citizens, following the same example, isn't due to a lack of training or individual neglect but only to a simple “technical” divide (called usually “digital”) that is related to society evolution and so it's not dependent on personal responsibility. Seniors find themselves “out” of the new (present) community and its language for an historical reason, so the first step to do in order to be re-integrated is learning a second language – that's the one

² Teaching and researching motivation”, 2001. ²(cfr. R. Gardner “Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitude and motivation”, 1985), ³(cfr. R. Oxford & J. Shearin, “Language learning motivation: Expanding the theoretical framework”, 1994).



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of the global community. For senior citizens instrumental motivation follows (and depends on) integrative motivation.

Focusing on integrative motivation

In order to stimulate senior learners' interests and motivation it's important to show them language learning as a process to reach a major goal: getting into contacts, integration in the global community.

Trainers and teachers can facilitate this motivation by helping elder learners value their knowledge through a "translation" of it into a second language system: this puts senior learners on a confident and non-formal ground and grants a lesser "performance stress" and/or embarrassment of being not able in transferring information, because one's own life, knowledge and experience is the better known topic to talk of!

It can be done easily thanks to some few tips:

- as a teacher, to assure a good knowledge of each learner's background (strength and weakness) in order to ask always the "right" question and to interact with them on a favourable ground;
- constantly referring to these senior learner's background, experiences and past activities during explanations;
- encouraging positive self-evaluation in order to create a relaxed environment in which second language is used without competition but with mutual acknowledgment and respect ;
- empowering the rising of a "group cohesion" in order to act in it as a first example of that larger community in which senior learners have to be (re)-integrated through second language knowledge.

Facilitate motivation during the language learning process

Motivating senior learners in a second language acquisition is not only a question of "why" they have to learn it, but also of "how long they are willing to sustain the activity [and] how hard they are going to pursue it" as suggested by Dornyei's definition quoted above.

Both these problems are felt by senior learners lesser than by younger ones, but some approaches used with younger learners could be useful for seniors too. For example, trainers can facilitate motivation by helping senior learners identify short-term goals and reflect on their progress and achievements in language learning. In this way it's possible to "measure" progress on a time scale and estimate the usefulness of the actual language learning process, giving a reason and the right answer to an (eventual) upcoming "waste-of-time" sensation. Such sensation could



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be, in fact, more common among seniors than younger learners because of their larger amount of experiences in life and practice and their major “authority”, due to the old age, as native-speakers among society: such authority is “lost” in a second foreign language.

It's possible to avoid this sensation and increase motivation providing senior learners with self-assessment checklists to identify skill strengths and weaknesses, to record the use of practical experience in any single task and/or to track their progress on meeting a language learning goal, i.e. how to ask time/date.

Motivational strategies

Dornyei says: the spectrum of other potentially more effective motivational strategies is so broad that it is hard to imagine that none of them would work. It's true: no one can provide an univocal list of motivational strategies that could fit for every possible target/situation. But it's important to design a framework of motivational strategies in order to “restrict” the field; in this specific case it's the senior language learners field.

The central question in designing a framework of motivational strategies for senior language learners is to decide how to organise them into separate themes. Dornyei offers his own model on which is built the following framework, based upon three key units:

- Creating/generating the basic motivational conditions, that means setting the scene for the use of motivational strategies: for senior learners, focusing on “integration” granted by a second language knowledge;
- Maintaining and protecting learner motivation, that is the real trainer's challenge and could be done through self-assessment checklists (see above) and facilitating senior learners autonomy (also a lot of willingness and patience is indispensable in this phase!);
- Encouraging a positive learner self-evaluation, that means to work on the way learners feel about their accomplishments in order to turn “positive” each feeling.

Dornyei shows three strategies:

- promoting attributions to effort rather than to ability;
- providing motivational feedback ;
- increasing learner satisfaction experience after a task completion.

Maintaining motivation by facilitating learner's autonomy

Following this framework of motivational strategies it's clear that the real challenge for a teacher/trainer is represented by the second key unit: maintaining senior



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motivation during a second language learning process could be easier only encouraging learner autonomy.

As seen above, while learning a second language, senior citizens have to maintain the same “authority” they bear as elder native-speakers in the community.

In order to realize this during the learning process it's important to leave them autonomy on what and how they learn, that means to be “among” and not “above” learners. Trainers have to encourage senior learners in imagining and representing speaking situation in which they could be involved, to select on their own topics on which start a discussion in a foreign language or to share their experiences as they could teach something to the rest of the class...

Senior learners have to feel themselves able to use second language as they're not in a learner status: through the effort used in explaining something related to their experiences in a foreign language, senior learners feels that they're doing an active performance and that they are not “chained” in a passive learning process. Through active use of second language during the language learning process, senior learners save their autonomy and authority and could feel themselves “integrated” even in this new “community” of speakers. This is the best way to “protect”, and even increase, the motivation in language learning.

Some words on instrumental motivation

As seen above, “integrative” motivation is the real engine that moves senior citizens' decision in starting a second language learning process.

This does not mean that there isn't an “instrumental motivation” in senior learners: it means that the “integration” goal is more urgent for them than others, but it's not the only goal to be achieved.

Such goals could be also a typical high school certification to fulfil occupational aspirations, or other kind of skill certifications: seniors are not to be considered as natural “outsiders” who needs only to be generically “integrated”!. Instrumental motivation could be maintained high if trainers/teachers took steps in order to maintain and enhance it. As suggested by a study from Rutgers University⁵, the works of trainers in this sense have to be goal-oriented and focused on encouragement, explained as follows:

~ Because learners engage in order to meet specific goals, it is important for teachers to understand clearly what those goals are and to organize instruction so that they are met. It's a good practice to set up individualized “packaging” of instruction targeted on learner's specific goals. For example, in one of the basic skills classes studied in that report, a learner had the goal of obtaining a driver's license. In response, the teacher obtained a copy of the driver's license examination manual and used it for reading material



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for that learner. This “practice” will empower learner’s instrumental motivation.

~ Instrumental motivation—and hence engagement—is enhanced by teachers through praise and encouragement, the more if given during one-on-one helping sessions. Yet overuse of praise and encouragement can reduce its reward value and even seem condescending to senior learners; but to know how and when provide encouragement is an occasion for trainers’ professional development that cannot be easily reached in other ways different from the teaching practice.

2.2 Social aspects in language courses for senior citizens

Aging is not a handicap

Senior citizens have more free time than the younger people but their participation in learning activities is lesser than the younger one. This happens often because they automatically feel “too old” to do such things as learning activities.

So the first social aspect about senior citizens to take in account – that comes first of ethnic or economic or gender status, and crosses them all - is their feeling the aging as an handicap, as something inexorable that cannot be overcome. Consecutively, the first challenge for senior citizens is to develop a more positive image of aging itself in order to start with a learning activity as could be attending a second language course. This is the prerequisite for starting a language learning activity: aging is not a handicap, and is not true that younger citizens could face SLA in an easier and better way. Learning ability depends only on will.

Social identity and acculturation

As seen in 2.1, integration is the real aim of second language learning for seniors.

But this learning activity focuses on an integration process that is related to time more than space: a second language could put senior citizens into the present world and its common language, having the knowledge of only one language taken the place of physical borders, cutting away its speakers from a larger community – the global one – that is the actual community.

So the second language acquisition is also an useful instrument in order to “reset” any social status to the point of active participation through a process that could be similar to the so-called “acculturation”.



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The “classic” acculturation process is “the process of becoming adapted to a new culture”: with the second language learning process, senior citizens become “acculturated” to the present community values because it’s really an “adaptation” to a new (for them) form of culture. So it could fit the same factors contributing to acculturation:

- ~ Social distance
 - o Social dominance (dominance, non-dominance, subordination)
 - o Integration pattern (assimilation, preservation)
 - o Enclosure, cohesiveness and size of the first language group
 - o Cultural attitudes and congruence between first and second language groups
 - o Intended length of residence
- ~ Psychological distance
 - o Motivation (see 2.1)
 - o Culture shock
 - o Language shock
 - o Ego permeability

Now we could examine each point of this scheme.

Social dominance and integration patterns of senior citizens

In ancient oral societies, the elder group of a community was the most respectable one. Of course it did not matter seniors’ knowledge of a foreign language: their own speak and experiences were the law and the history of their community.

According to this example, social distance as second language speakers in those societies was of no importance for elders, because they’ve got an absolute dominance position among the community, and they pursue a preservation pattern in order to let that community survive.

In global community we’re at the extreme opposite: senior citizens find themselves on a subordination position confronting younger knowledge and use of two or more language and IT language in particular, and they have to face an assimilation tendency that rules against a preservation one (and for really good reasons!).

This automatically puts second language senior learners on a greater distance from social integration in a global community than younger ones



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Characteristic of senior language learners' first language group

As described above, for senior citizens the integration process is more a matter of time than of space. For this reason their first language group has to be considered as a time-delimited group: so enclosure, cohesiveness and size all will depend on time issues, having cultural and physical barriers substantially been pulled out in global community.

But these characteristics are related to senior's individual past experiences and life among a group that is no more the same one, and senior citizens are very able to understand this as a problem to be faced independently from the language learning issue.

Cultural attitudes and congruence between first and second language groups

Senior citizens are already dipped into a world that needs at least a second language knowledge that is the IT one; so the basic cultural attitude and congruence is between their past experience of a group in which spoken language could be even only one and a community that calls itself global and tends to multi-language and multiethnic features. This means that part of the social distance due to different cultural attitudes in the language learning field is actually at its minimum, and that the "remaining" depends, among senior citizens, only on individual experience, not on social status. According to the "social distance" scheme, this distance could depend also on the "length of residence": this point derives itself from the "acculturation" concept we've used as a model. Even this "residence" in a second language group is a matter of time: today it's not possible for seniors, as for everyone, to be apart of a second language as IT language. So the "length" of this residence in a second language is – in terms of time that is the right ones - the entire "rest-of-the-life". This makes of the "social distance" problem something of no importance for this point.

Social aspects and psychological distance in senior SLA

We've seen how some points that could influence on social distance in senior language learning and acquisition are instead something related to individual experience and become matter of psychological attitudes. In these attitudes, motivation is to be included in the form of integrative motivation, as explained in 2.1.

Psychological distance could be measured as the more or less lack of will of senior citizens facing a second language learning activity. So this "will" depends on how strong the motivation is, and how weak are eventually cultural and linguistics shocks that belong to individual experience. Trainers could increase senior learners' will by taking in account tools and methods to be used in order to strengthen motivation and to weaken the influence of individual bad experiences.

2.3 Aging and social integration in language courses for senior citizens

[see also the Netherlands' experience here:

<http://pefete.eu/index.php?section=1&article=10>

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Module 3 Age-appropriate didactic and methodology

3.1 Learning in the context of one's own biography

Learning by integrating practical aspects of life experience is of high importance for the target group 50+. Examples, theoretical inputs and explanations should represent and match life and workplace experiences of the participants.

Targeting senior citizens, trainers, pedagogical experts and administrative staff are confronted with altogether very heterogeneous groups of students, since learners show different biographies, different skills and fields of expertise, different cultural backgrounds, future interests and learning biographies. This, of course, results in different learning attitudes, different behavioural patterns and motivations for learning.

Linking new and old knowledge

On the one hand language teaching should be attached to past experiences of life and occupation of the senior learners, since age-appropriate didactic and methodology especially focuses on associations by linking new knowledge to old knowledge. Biographical reflection is therefore an important component of language course teaching methods for senior citizens. On the other hand learning must make learners think something new concerning their future. The opportunity to move themselves forward, to follow new interests, to actively participate in communication of family and society by increasing language skills, is a guarantee for a personal involvement of senior citizens and an engaged learning process.

Behind the background of globalization and rapid changes it is also a concern of the language course teaching methods for senior citizens to filter out and strengthen a sheltering biographical baseline. An awareness of biographical continuity seems to become a central condition to handle adoption demands and to actively face the rapid invalidation of knowledge. Awareness of the own competences and skills is a further precondition for a positive learning experience. So learning in the context of one's own biography is one of the basic principles of language course teaching methods for senior citizens and it focuses on the biographically acquired abilities of the learners and not on their deficits and difficulties.

Reflecting experiences and role models

Tagging learning interests and identifying training goals serve the development of subjectively (that is: biographically) meaningful perspectives. A way to make existing experiences and skills visible and thus usable in the means of language learning is the reflection on the (learning) biography. This approach supports



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learners to realize their positive and negative learning experiences and the affiliated role models, which usually very much affect current learning. Therefore the reflection of learning experiences is considered a central component of seniors' language learning

*"When I was young
I learnt very quick,
but now I feel too old
to start something*

*"I never got the
chance to learn
a second
language"*

*"At school I always
felt miserable when
it came to
languages."*

*"I've got a workplace
language training, but
I was ashamed about*

*"I can talk a lot, but
I never liked*

Learning in the context of one's own biography imparts the exploration of individual learning experiences and resources, a constructive reflection of the current learning situation and the purposeful direction of the learning process are based on individual and collective reflection.

- Senior learners who didn't do well at school or within vocational trainings learn to reflect their own learning strategies languages.
- The biographical approach helps by identifying individual and age-related weak and strengths as well as experiencing new role models of active and independent minded learners.
- It also supports in raising awareness of the own motivational factors and helps adopting and modifying learning strategies.

Orientation on biography means for the advisor to look at the learners against the background of their (learning) biography and so become able to detect potentials as well as to explain resistances or blocking behaviour and possibly even to break them open and turn them positively. A close interlocking between self-reflection and collective reflection in the group promotes a dynamic interactive learning progress. Reflection serves as a bridge between past, present and future, it means to connect the current learning situation with the personal goals and the individual life perspectives

LOT- HOUSE: Good practice on strengthening the self-esteem of the individual

Experiencing failure due to an ageing related memory decline in many cases results in loss of self-confidence, which can also lead to resignation.

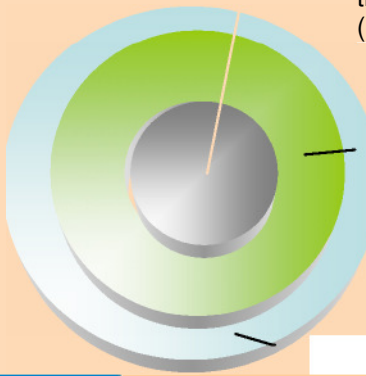
Developing individual competence portfolios by orientation on biography turned out to be a good practice of support, since very often people belonging to the target group are not (or no longer) aware of their own competences and skills.

Generally, working on one's self-esteem and being aware of one's strengths is a necessary basis of taking responsibility for one's development in life.

For this reason, the following concept was developed in the LOT HOUSE¹. **Self-esteem** – it is first and foremost necessary to become aware of one's own value for and within society. In order to work on this aspect and achieve respective improvement, personal coaching and counselling was offered to every student from the very beginning. Individual strengths were analysed in the course of reflective sessions aiming at (re)enforcing people's self-confidence.

2. Self-competence – as a next step, students' competences were analysed and reflected on. Individuals were provided with tools for subject-related and personal competence-development.

3. Presentation – Presenting one's own competences was an essential component of work in the LOT-House. This proved to be of good example for other members of the target group and emphasized the actual value of self organized learning.



BEST

BEST Training, Vienna, www.best-training.org

Gender issues concerning language courses

In this context it is necessary to refer on the awareness of gender issues, since recent studies on lifelong learning e.g. show that after embarking on their professional lives, all over Europe, men rapidly become extremely passive as regards learning per se while women clearly tend to be more active in this field and to derive fun and enjoyment from personal further education.

Further more investigations exploring gender effects on adult foreign language learning detected a particular "male foreign language learning resistance" and state the facts that especially language uptake is imbalanced between men and women and that language courses usually have a larger proportion of female participants.

After health and allied services, foreign language is the second highest female-dominant education area, the ratio between women and men in language learning varying between 3:1 and 2:1. In addition to this, there are significantly higher numbers of male drop outs.

One of the reasons for this is the often negative relationship with learning which



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men have developed over the course of their lives. Many associate learning with school and this, in turn, with the fear of failure, with a lot of stress either at school as at home, with swotting, subordination, bad marks and punishments. The majority of men do not derive a great amount of fun and enjoyment from personal further education, and nor do they approach it with any degree of playful effortlessness or in a relaxed manner. In the light of an educational background which focussed firmly on functional skills, it seems as if men are hardly motivated to improve their language skills in areas which don't appear necessary and useful.

Further more a gender sensitive age-appropriate didactic and methodology has to take into account that language learning of male students is based on a far more goal-and results-oriented manner and that male seniors prefer short, compact intensive courses. Other decisive course-related factors are structured discussions, a public space and competitive elements in addition to course accreditation.

3.2 Principle of autonomy

Supporting senior learners individually is regarded as a basis of motivation and the learners' development of self-confidence and self-esteem. On the other hand senior learners themselves often resist on a didactical approach, which takes into account an independent-minded attitude. Drop-outs are avoided by encouraging the learners to take over responsibility for the course design.

Communicating with children and grandchildren is only one motive for the older generation to learn languages. Senior citizens like "staying on the ball", they attend to language courses due to their own personal circumstances, because they like to be more autonomous when they travel and – not least – to train their memory.

Their participation in training courses refers to the degree of co-determination and codecision in the learning/training process and forms the central quality criterion of language course teaching methods for senior citizens

Self-organized fields of interactivity

Particularly senior learners often resist on a didactical approach, which takes into account an independent-minded attitude. In order to facilitate self-direction in the language courses, it is necessary that the senior students are enabled to take over responsibility for their own learning activities.

Although at the same time, a didactic approach focussing on shared responsibility normally doesn't match the older generations' prior learning experiences in school and vocational education. On the one hand the learners have to recognise and experience fields of language learning, in which a joint organisation is possible and desired. On the other hand the advisors have to accept the learners as individuals



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and actually hand over parts of responsibility i.e. open and propose methods, tools, fields and instruments for the further development and design of the language learning process.

During the course the balance between supplying language knowledge, training language skills and offering consulting reflection for an autonomous learning process has to be adopted and redefined in a group and process oriented way. The group has to define roles and tasks anew for current challenges in each of its phases - Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing and Informing. This applies both to the learners and the tutors, since finding a balance between structures and openness can only succeed cooperatively in the group – which is quite connected with intermediate ambiguity and uncertainties. By reflecting past learning phases, the following phases, fields and tools can be planned. Reflection phases thereby serve the integration of technical and methodical and/or social learning processes. The intention is to include and render effectuality to the potentials and competences of all involved in the process when directing the very same. Opening fields of interactive participation proves to be a particularly big challenge for training providers, since this interaction between learners and advisors requires an openness also on an institutional level. Structural limitations of responsibility and decision making show up here very frequently.

For advisors it becomes crucial, to face their participants with a “view for competences”, which means to overcome the often predominating deficit orientation in favouring a positive mental attitude. So they can bring the existing competences and resources to their own and their learners’ minds, and appreciate them as a source of energy for individual and group processes.

3.3 Principle of explication, repetition, slowness and clearness

Repetitions are an important instrument to better memorize new content, since gradual memory decline is part of normal ageing. However, recently researchers have also discovered that simply saying that older adults are doing the same thing, only less of it, is not always accurate. In some cases, older adults seem to be using different strategies than younger adults.

There are several ways to classify human memory, based on duration, nature and retrieval of information. From information processing perspective there are three main stages in the formation and retrieval of memory:

- Encoding or registration (processing and combining of received information)
- Storage (creation of a permanent record of the encoded information)
- Retrieval or recall (calling back the stored information in response to some cue for use in a process or activity)

Within these stages a gradual memory decline is part of normal ageing, such that many elders feel that they have poor memory. In fact, loss of memory is influenced by many factors like self-confidence, training, physical health, attention, stress, educational level etc..

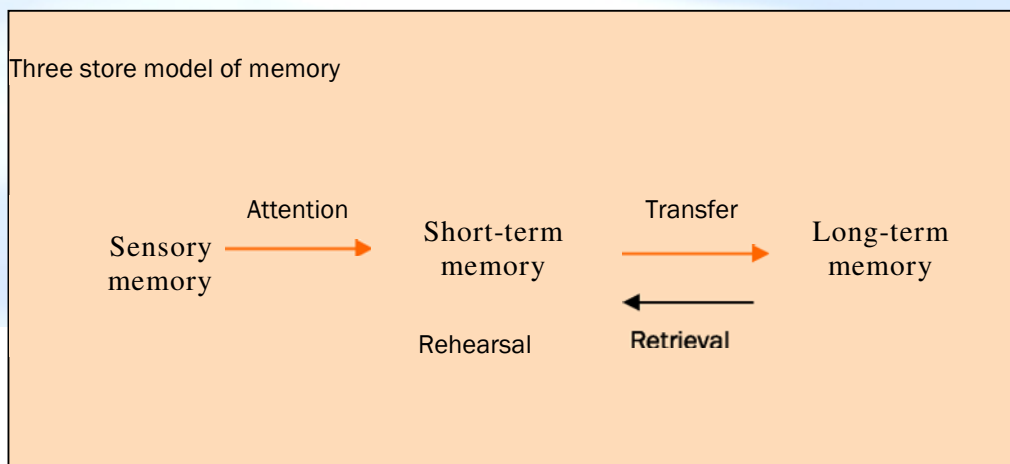
Factors Affecting Memory in the Elderly

- Inattention and external interference or distractions.
- Fatigue leading to poor concentration.
- Lack of opportunity for practising and rehearsing.
- Psychological stress and emotional problems, e.g. depression and anxiety.
- Lack of confidence: some older people consider themselves as stupid, poorly educated, and hold fear for new things, hence become too pessimistic and negative

The principles of repetition, slowness and clearness correspond to the basic and generally accepted classification of memory, which is based on the duration of memory retention, and identifies three distinct types of memory: the sensory memory, the short term memory and the long term memory.

The sensory memory responds to the initial 200 - 500 ms after an item is perceived. The ability to just shortly look at an item or hear a sound, and remember what it looked like or how it sounded, is a result of the sensory memory.

Some of the information in sensory memory is transferred to the short-term memory, which allows one to recall something from several seconds to as long as a minute without rehearsal. Its capacity is also very limited: George A. Miller conducted experiments showing that the capacity of short term memory was the "magic number 7±2", modern estimates of the capacity of short-term memory are lower, typically on the order of 4-5 items. The third type of memory, the long-term memory can store much larger quantities of information and potentially lasts for a whole life span



Memory declines as part of normal ageing differ from individual to individual. The real cause is not known yet (see also module 1). It is assumed that according to the three store model shown above a lack of concentration, psychological stress or emotional problems diminishes the “attention” needed for a successful transfer of information to the short term memory and also the “transfer of new information” from the short-term memory to the long-term memory declines. The latter may be also related to impairments seen in the (unconscious) ability to refresh recently processed information. Simply saying that senior citizens are doing the same thing, only less of it, is not accurate. In some cases, older adults seem to be using different strategies than younger adults. For example, brain imaging studies have revealed that seniors are more likely to use both hemispheres when completing memory tasks than younger persons. In addition recent studies state, that training is able to compensate the effects of aging and that elder people are capable of maintaining a good memory through simply exercising their minds frequently and using appropriate memory skills.

1. The *attention* needed for a successful transfer of information from the sensory memory to the short term memory is usually the higher; the more of the relevant conditions, factors, and possibilities are known to all involved.
2. Repetitions are an important instrument to *strengthen the transfer of new information* from the short-term memory to the long-term memory as well as the *retrieval of information from the long-term memory* (principle of repetition).
3. An age-appropriate didactic and methodology also attaches importance to the learning pace, which is to be defined individually by the (diverse) learners themselves in order to minimize stress factors (principle of slowness)
4. Transparency regarding organisation, contents, methods and media assures that the *attention* needed for a successful transfer of information from the sensory memory to the short term memory is focused on the learning process (principle of clearness).

Respecting the individuality of the target group and the learning processes involved language courses for senior citizens therefore should offer a wide range of methods, instruments and tools to promote the storage as well as the recalling of learning contents by:

- Activating different senses
- Addressing both hemispheres
- Promoting associations and combining of received information
- Leading participants to individually set the pace

- Relieving stress
- Relieving anxiety (making mistakes is part of learning)
- Promoting self-confidence
- Promoting concentration
- Presenting positive role models

Learning how to deal with mistakes and/or frustration is particularly important. In this respect, reflection accompanying the process – in both, face-to-face sessions and group settings - is always necessary and helpful.

Some examples of repetitions addressing different senses are the following

- Reading – textbooks, newspapers, magazines, concentrating on grammar exercises
- Writing – e-mails, post cards, letters, short stories
- Speaking – conversation lessons with native speakers, answering questions, reproducing contents, defining positions, explaining facts and procedures
- Listening – to tapes, audio files, musicians, CD-ROMs
- Watching – videos, television

The choice of resources to be used is another factor in the organisation of language education. Dealing with specific topics, preferably of interest to the learners and the use of websites, e-mail, message services or television gives much more authenticity to the learning context and can have a positive motivating influence. A pool of learning sources can further consist of:

- Current technical literature: Books, magazines, essays, encyclopedias...
- Files with sorted texts
- Skripts from the trainers/cousellors as exercise offers
- Learning and working tasks
- Selection of different computer-based teaching programs
- Internet access.



Some examples of repetitions addressing both hemispheres and enabling an action oriented way of knowledge learning

- Role plays, sketches



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- Joint cooking, gardening, painting, singing Christmas songs, excursions etc.
- Project work, collecting information, structuring information, researches and presentation of outcomes
- Internet communication via e-mail, chat, virtual meetings

Good practice on enabling- self directed learning based on action oriented learning strategies

Neighbouring languages in border regions by “tandem” projects in where e.g. two learners are twinned in a tandem and teach each other by the exchange of messages. In border regions, the proximity of the tandem partner not only allows exchanges beyond pen-pal letters, e-mails or Internet chats, the partners can also meet, and establish personal contacts.

Transparency in the sense of comprehensibility of the learning/training situation – regarding organisation, contents, methods and media – is the precondition for an active participation of the learners. Learners willingly take over responsibility for the individual and the collective learning process, the more they see through, decode and comprehend the training situation. Interaction hereby refers to communication processes, by which the learning/training situation in its whole is negotiated.

As the role model of teachers' changes by learners taking over responsibility the question arises: what happens to the role of teaching? How can teaching and counselling come together? In order to implement self-directed learning methods the role of professionals has to change. They are less in focus as lecturers in front of classes who dictate knowledge and facts which the learners have simply to re-produce. Educators become facilitators and counsellors. Professionals have to learn more about different learner's biographies. They have to get to know more about different support strategies and to apply them adequately and effectively.

The professional/institution has to provide support when the learner needs it, especially in phases of irritation or frustration. The changing and new relationship between teaching and counselling has to be explored even further in future.

3.4 Learning environment and learning places

A particularly open and trustful atmosphere among participants allows reflection within the group on learning strategies and prior aspects of learning (learning experience). This serves as a basis for developing a step-by-step procedure in order to manage age related barriers and make positive learning experiences.

An atmosphere of „wellbeing“ can be created by a good equipment, comfortable



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chairs, target group oriented learning materials with bigger letters and by respectively decorating course rooms (plants, pictures and other elements of decoration that foster motivation and regular attendance of courses). In order to establish the senior learners' identification with the learning environment, the participants can also be invited to (re)design and decorate "their" rooms the way they want to.

Although it is a legitimate question to ask whether the traditional classroom is the best place for language learning. In view of (male) senior learners prior, often negative, educational experiences, a learning environment which is not associated with negative experience, fear of failure and discrimination could serve better. There are a number of alternatives which could be adopted or flexibly integrated.

Factors that make up the learning environment:

Physical = The layout of the school and classroom, its facilities and the resources senior learners use. Background noise and distractions should be eliminated. Teachers should be aware of the importance of good light. Using high levels of illumination or providing intense lighting for small group tasks is important. Choosing a room with natural lighting makes the learning environment much more comfortable. Tables and chairs should be placed far enough apart to minimize the background noise of others talking nearby. Use chairs that are comfortable and level, neither too low nor too deep for those older adults who have difficulty rising from a sitting position.

Relationships = How people in the school behave towards each other, care about and look after one another.

Structures and expectations = Expectations we hold about senior learners' behaviour, and the school and classroom rules and routines.

Language and communication = The way that relationships, structures and expectations are manifested through verbal and non-verbal communication in the learning facility.

Access

There are barriers to access, whether to language courses or lifelong learning in general; important ones are lack of confidence and of self-esteem but also lack of knowledge and information. Therefore the marketing of language courses should be designed in a target group oriented way concerning either the placement of advertisements as concerning the design and language. Gender sensitive topics, contents and methods are important to attract both male and female seniors



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equally.

Rural areas often provide poor access to educational offers, suffer from structural deficits and are characterized by a lack of affordable transport. Inhabitants of small village communities are traditionally unable to access educational services close to where they live. They need to be provided by transport and location information. Also training providers in urban areas miss providing their potential participants with detailed information about access by especially respecting the needs of physically handicapped people and those who have walking difficulties.

Last not least it is the time frame and duration of a course which should match the needs of elderly people.

L- Points: Good practice on training access in a rural region

The Vhs Cham is responsible for the project Lernende Region Cham – New Learners in new places. It has established 35 L-points in Cham Rural District. They are affiliated in the different village communities. The L-point advisers first of all recommend those who are longing for (language) courses to look around in their communities for others with similar interests, and support this endeavour by inserting brief notices in the local press or community news-sheets. At the same time, they inform the central coordinators at the project office of the presumed requirements, with approximate times. By entering the enquiries into a database, requirements can be collated across local authority boundaries, thus supporting another of the basic maxims of our concept: to make education available as close to people's homes as possible.

The L-point advisers have a good overview of their community's needs, and are familiar with educational provision at regional level, as well as with the relevant interfaces in the Cham Learning Region network. Where a need exists, the L-point advisers direct it along the appropriate channel. Loosing as little time as possible, the aim is then to develop and try out model training courses, which, after appropriate inspection, can be offered in a modular system to all the other local authorities participating in the network.



Volkshochschule im Landkreis Cham e.V., www.vhs-cham.de

Class settings

One to One

Modules can be taught on a one to one basis; although the content will remain the same the lesson plan will vary. The advantages are that the senior learners determine the pace of the learning.

Small Group

The size of this group may vary from two to four people and this allows for more trainer-student interaction. The lesson plan may again be adapted to suit the particular group, however the time frame may vary and the full curriculum will be covered. The bonding and interaction between the learners may allow the weaker students to attain a higher level of proficiency than they would have in a larger class room setting and the teaching pace can be adapted to suit the lesson plan.

□ Class

The size of the class may vary from six people up however the advantages of teaching aids, overhead projector and resource packs will make the learning environment a pleasant teaching experience using exercises.

3.5 Case studies

You are never too old to learn. And the students are never too young to teach you ...

- Mr X is 71 years old and married. *“I’m quite nervous of doing something new, and concerned that it will all go dreadfully wrong”,* he stated during the initial contact. His educational background was good, his work life had been satisfying and he was quite experienced and skilled in use of computers, surfing the internet and sending e-mails. But *“I never had the chance to learn a second language”,* he told.

His son had married in the United States some years ago and he had visited him several times together with his wife. Now, that the grandchildren were getting older he started the language course together with his wife in order to stay in contact with his relatives on a more regular basis via e-mail.

After a first quite positive learning phase he got impatient concerning his proceedings since his ten years younger wife seemed to be a quite excellent achiever. Feeling aging as a handicap, as something inexorable that cannot be overcome caused a serious loss of motivation. When the language teacher had realized this and was starting an individual counselling process he managed to overcome his deficit orientation and actively acquired a positive mental attitude by experiencing mnemo techniques. He also managed to reflect on his mental attitudes. Meanwhile he attains the fourth course and enjoys poking fun on his grandchildren by mailing messages with intentional writing mistakes.

- Mr X is a 57 years old widow and physically handicapped.

“When I courageously plunged into the first Spanish course, I had just heard about language learning courses for elderly and how learners could exploit them. I had come home from a holiday in Barcelona. I was thrilled but also somewhat daunted by starting the Spanish course the next week. I was thrilled not only because I had enjoyed Spain so much and planned to come back in winter I also found the whole idea of training courses targeted at older people fascinating and exciting, since it fitted in with beliefs and ideas that I had been holding, sometimes not even consciously, but also because as soon as I hear something that I fancy, I feel an instant urge to try it out as soon as possible!”



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I was slightly apprehensive about the organizational aspects: How to get there? Will I be able to reach the room? Do I have to cope with stairs? Do they have an elevator? Will they provide restrooms for people with walking difficulties? Will I be able to follow the course and do well?

Nevertheless, I plunged into the experience – and I feel I won. Not only getting known to other senior learners and experiencing learning being fun, I was fully reassured that I was doing the right things at the age of 57. And also coming back to Barcelona and being able to talk to the people gave me a tremendous confidence.”



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