

AGE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN RUSSIA

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Lifelong learning is currently one of the mostly used concepts in European Union's attempt to achieve the objective to become the most competitive. In Russia, the concept of lifelong learning as such is quite new. Senior adults can actively participate in lifelong learning obtaining new language skills not for professional but personal development. This article deals with the following: peculiarities of teaching English as a foreign language to the senior learners on the basic principles of andragogy. The purpose of this paper is to consider the language teaching techniques which may be inappropriate for senior learners according to their psychological peculiarities, which allow developing the intellectual and cognitive abilities of the senior learners.

Key words: lifelong learning, senior learners, teaching techniques.

The problem of demographic aging of society has reached the global level by the end of the XX century. In Russia the number of senior adults is about 21 %. Nowadays they have become more sociable. The concept of lifelong learning is believed to involve participants of all ages. Today educational institutions in many countries such as USA, Poland, Japan, etc. provide educational services for senior adults. Curriculum is based on the senior learners' psychological peculiarities and personal interests. They study medicine, foreign languages, law, economy, psychology and ecology, gardening and local history.

Can senior adults successfully learn foreign languages? Recent researches give positive answers to this question. The researches show that there is no decline in the ability to learn as people get older; except for minor considerations such as hearing and vision loss, the age of senior learners is not a major factor in language acquisition; the context in which they learn is the major influence on their ability to acquire the new language.

In the largest study researchers at Edinburg University examined the medical records of 648 Alzheimer's patients in the Indian city of Hyderabad. They found that the bilinguals developed dementia later than monolinguals, by an average of four-and-a-half years.

Lifelong learning is important for keeping the mind and memory working. Education and learning activities can compensate for age-related degenerative brain diseases encourage seniors to develop and maintain social connections, improve their self-confidence and quality of life, and prevent depression due to social isolation.

They are embracing lifelong learning and seeking out new challenges to keep their brains active and healthy. Being a part of a classroom, senior learners feel themselves a part of a community. Friendships from the classroom can help provide support and distraction in times of loss and sadness.

Senior learners are more motivated to learn than younger students. They show more excitement when they have mastered even simple tasks.

Some of the difficulties in teaching of senior learners come from physical limitations and a lower endurance than younger students. Others are caused by changes in the brain due to age.

Senior learners have already developed learning strategies that have served them well in other contexts. They can use these strategies to their advantage in language learning, too. Teachers should be flexible enough to allow different approaches to the learning task inside the classroom.

Most of the difficulties can be avoided or lessened by modifying the classroom or teaching techniques.

Language teaching techniques

Certain language teaching techniques may be inappropriate for senior learners. For example, some methods rely primarily on good auditory discrimination for learning. Since hearing often declines with age, this type of technique puts the senior learners at a disadvantage. Exercises such as oral drills and memorization, which rely on short-term memory, also discriminate against the senior learners. Speed is also a factor that works against the senior learners, so fast-paced drills and competitive exercises and activities may not be successful with them.

Senior learners study English for a specific purpose. They have already developed learning strategies that work well for them. It is necessary to develop material and vocabulary that they can immediately use in real situations.

The appropriate teaching technique helps senior learners with self-direction and facilitates the acquisition of English.

Here are some techniques that will help teachers to make their classes more effective.

Pair work: it will help to provoke quiet senior learners into talking. When they are with one or perhaps two or three other learners, they are not under so much pressure as they are if asked to speak in front of the whole class.

'Acting out' and reading aloud: getting senior learners to act out dialogues is one way of encouraging quiet learners. However, acting out does not just mean reading aloud. The teacher has to work with the senior learners like a drama coach, working out when the voice should rise and fall, where the emphasis goes, and what emotion the actor should try to convey. When senior learners then act out the role, a teacher can be confident that it will sound good.

Role-play: group activities have been proven to be very effective in getting senior learners in a language classroom to interact with each other and to use English as a tool, rather than just treat it as another subject to be studied. Many teachers have found that quiet senior learners speak more freely when they are playing a role – when they do not have to be themselves, in other words. The use of role cards allows senior learners to take on a new identity, one in which they can behave in uncharacteristic ways. It can be very liberating.

Educational situations: the role of educational situations is to reveal its practical capacity and developing the functions that they are modeling the fragments of objective reality, correlated with speech acts of the communication partners, provide an opportunity when reading new material to demonstrate where, when, for what purposes of communication it is possible to use presented material to arouse senior learners' awareness that they will be able to understand and speak in this language. When training the teaching situation provides personal participation in the hearing and use of excavated material in the statements and impression in memory functions, values, and material forms, and also forms the flexibility of the skill.

Course content

Choosing conversation topics, it's most important to pick topics which senior learners like and want to talk about; topics that have a focus in the real world and senior learners will be more likely to remember new words as they go about their days, outside the class.

Language material within the framework of studying different modules can be represented by the topics: "In a hotel", "Ask for direction", "Cafe", "Shopping", "Hospital", "Leisure", "Making Contacts", etc.

It is better to avoid controversial topics, unless you know your group well. Politics and religion are two areas that can result in heated debates, one person monopolizing the class, or people feeling insulted. But with some groups, these topics can produce the best discussions.

Using Native Language

“Native language” refers to the use of the senior learners’ first language. The native language can be a useful tool to build content knowledge, alleviate anxiety in the classroom, and explain concepts in learning English. One effective strategy is the “review/preview method” in which a teacher introduces a lesson in the native language, conducts the lesson in English, and then switches back to the native language to check understanding and answer questions.

According to this paper, the beneficial effects of lifelong learning helps senior adults enjoy opportunities to socialize when traveling, staying active and participating in community life.

Effective elderly language training techniques are those that use materials that provide an interesting and comprehensible message, delay speaking practice. They create a classroom atmosphere which supports senior learners and builds confidence. Teaching senior learners should be a pleasurable experience. Their self-directedness, life experiences, independence as learners, and motivation to learn provide them with advantages in language learning. A topic that meets the needs of senior learners will lead to rapid language acquisition.

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