

# Learning English in the Early: Motivational Factors and Simple Techniques

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**Antonation:** If you think you are already too old to learn something new, it is time to prove yourself wrong. Studies show that anyone at any age can learn a new language. This article investigates benefits of language learning for older learners and language learning strategies involved in the process of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the elderly.

**Kalit so'zlar:** attitude, isolation, motivation, bilingualism, direct, indirect, listen up.

## Introduction

Teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is a worldwide reality. That is why, the large number of courses, workshops, lectures and scientific research encompassing this field is not surprising. However, little is discussed when it comes to teaching EFL to the elderly. Because "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" may also stop language instructors, as well seniors from learning a second language. As we are only concerned about difficulties we might undergo, we may probably not notice that there are so many advantages that seniors can have increased self-confidence, increased feelings of health and well-being, reduced feelings of isolation, and increased engagement in the community.

Most elderly people really want to master a foreign language and according to experts, they are brilliant at learning effectively due to a number of reasons.

**Outlook.** Although they are aging, in general everything in their life is a remarkably enthusiastic for them. Because they just let all worries go away. By this way, they can teach their instructors, groupmates towards positive attitude even to serious problems respectfully.

**Company.** During senior years, most of them face the feeling of loneliness at home. So they need good friends. They can discuss the topics, gather after classes to strengthen their bonds remembering their childhood with the combination of coffee. One of the reasons why senior adults do not miss attending courses.

**Great inspiration.** Since they do not generally need to a diploma, certificate or any kind of degree, they take language classes just for fun and their motivation is intrinsic. They have the highest motivation when we compare them to youngsters. Studies reveal that the important factor in determining successful language learning is a great motivation. In addition, seniors do not be absent from their classes, almost every time do their homework participating actively.

**Younger brain.** York University and the American Academy of Neurology also conducted their own studies about bilingualism and dementia. Both institutions found that switching from one language to the other activates areas of the brain responsible for executive functioning. This involves the same area that is responsible for completing tasks. According to the studies, utilizing this part of the brain often can decrease cognitive decline and can delay the initial effects of dementia. It must be noted that a third language is not required unless you are already bilingual. For multilingual individuals, learning a new language when you reach the age of 50 is a good way to improve brain health.

**Cognition.** Bilingualism is beneficial to brain health, according to researchers at Edinburgh University. After examining medical records of 648 patients with Alzheimer's disease in Hyderabad, the researchers found that monolingual patients developed dementia earlier than those who spoke two languages. The lead researcher Thomas Bak notes that learning a new language later in life is beneficial because it helps exercise the brain.

"It is too late to get started". Most of elderly people used to think so. But it does not mean it is not impossible. A lot of researchers investigated how to maximize the language learning of senior learners. One of the most prominent researchers on language learning strategies is Rebecca Oxford, who makes a distinction between direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are the ones "that directly involve the target language," meaning that they "require mental processing of the language" (Oxford, 1990), while indirect strategies "provide indirect support for language learning through focusing, planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing cooperation and empathy, and other means" (Oxford, 1990). The author identifies six groups within these strategies, namely:

### Direct strategies:

1. Cognitive strategies help students to take advantage of the language material in direct ways. Analysis, note-taking, outlining, reasoning, reorganizing information, summarizing, and synthesizing are examples of this type of strategies.

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2. Memory-related strategies help learners enter and retrieve new information by creating mental linkages between images and sounds in their memory. These strategies include grouping words, placing new words into context, using imagery, or using physical response, among others.
3. Compensation strategies represent ways in which students deal with gaps in existing knowledge, such as guessing in reading and listening, using synonyms in speaking and writing, and using gestures in speaking.

#### **Indirect strategies:**

1. Metacognitive strategies are ways in which students regulate their own learning processes. These involve reflecting, planning, monitoring, and evaluating such processes.
2. Affective strategies are those meant to manage one's emotions, like coping with anxiety, expressing feelings, encouraging and rewarding oneself when performing well, and relaxing.
3. Social strategies help learners tackle language issues by interacting with others through asking questions, cooperating, and empathizing in the group. Under these premises, Oxford (1989) designed her Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), featuring 50 quantitative, close-ended questions, aiming to identify the most frequent strategies used by language learners. This questionnaire has been widely used since it was released (Dörnyei, 2005; White, Schramm, & Chamot, 2007), and it has been translated into several languages (Oxford, 1996b).

A philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein famously said, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." If the older have decided to break the barriers and open new horizons by learning a new language at an older age, here are some tips that can help them in that mission.

**Decide your path.** Learning a new language especially during senior years is a complicated concept, that is why firstly old people should break it down. Identify your goal. What do you want mostly by learning a particular language? Do you want to improve your listening skills or speaking or reading? Which one? What is the specific reason that has inspired you to manage this? Define it. Direct your learning towards that reason.

**Have fun.** Learning a new language can be an exciting adventure for people of any age. Remember that learning can be fun if you decide to look at it that way. Rather than stressing about every mistake you make and follow up that frustration with "I'm too old for this" or "I'm not cut out for this", enjoy learning every step of the way!

**Listen Up.** The elderly people make a mistake in terms of learning languages by only memorizing vocabulary and grammar points. There are, however, much more colorful sources. They are:

- TV shows
- Podcasts
- Songs

According to your interests, choose listening activities and by this, one never can be bored! If language learners do not understand unknown words or phrases, they may pause and search them from the dictionaries. If you are listening to an exercise or you're watching a TV show in a second language, repeat what they say.

**Follow language blogs.** There are numerous blogs for beginners that can help the older to practise. The owners of such channels teach you in a funny way. And you learn easier how to sound like natives.

#### **Conclusion**

All of above-mentioned tips and techniques might be helpful to teachers to dealing especially with lifelong learning courses. Instructors can aid their older students by making them aware of different strategies, as well guiding them. After knowing that why second language acquisition is so important in an advanced age, the elderly people may find their motivation and change their wrong notions about language learning. Finally, they can!

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