

## Language as a Tool for Social Integration: The Role of Language Education in Active Aging

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### Abstract

Language education plays a key role in the process of active aging, serving as an effective tool for social integration and counteracting the exclusion of older adults. Learning foreign languages not only stimulates cognitive functions but also strengthens the social capital of seniors, enabling them to build relationships, pursue personal development, and actively participate in social life. In Poland, language courses for seniors, especially those organized by Universities of the Third Age, are gaining popularity. The aim of this paper is to discuss the role of language education not only as a factor supporting active aging but also as a tool for social integration. The analysis is based on research conducted among Polish seniors learning English in a formal setting, specifically through language courses offered by Universities of the Third Age. This discussion is relevant both from the perspective of glottogeragogy and educational and social policy. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research. Data were collected through surveys and focus group interviews. The focus groups, conducted in May and June 2022, provided insights into seniors' experiences, while surveys were administered between January and May 2023 both online and in person in two Polish cities—Kielce and Lublin. A total of 134 older adults (aged 60–81,  $M = 70.5$ ) learning English participated, including 120 women and 14 men. Focus groups involved 25 participants ( $M = 69.5$ ), and surveys were completed by 53 respondents on paper and 81 online. Participants often highlighted the need for interaction and communication as their primary motivation for learning. Research findings confirm that language education not only improves seniors' communication skills but also enhances their self-esteem and social inclusion. In the context of global population aging and the challenges associated with ageism, promoting language education as part of strategies supporting seniors' active participation in society becomes increasingly important.