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Motivation of seniors to learn at the Universities of the Third Age

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Abstract: The study presents the results of a survey examining the motivation of the seniors to receive lifelong learning in university courses. The sample was based on 150 participants who take these courses in the fields of medicine, the natural sciences and humanities. It was found that the main motive for entering these studies was the desire to further learn a new education skills, followed by the need to actively spend leisure time. The motive of establishing new relationships with peers of similar interests was not significant. The motives were not influenced by the gender, age or education of respondents. A certain relationship has only been proved between the professional focus of study and motivation, where the desire to learn a new education skills was slightly more prevalent among students in the fields of medicine and the humanities. The investigation confirmed the importance of the development of internal motivation and pointed to a connection between interest studies and improving the quality of life of seniors.

Keywords: motivation for education, seniors, lifelong learning, Universities of the Third Age

Motivace seniorů ke studiu na univerzitách třetího věku

Abstrakt: Studie prezentuje výsledky anketního šetření zjišťujícího motivaci starších osob k zájmovému celoživotnímu vzdělávání v univerzitních kurzech. Vzorek tvoří 150 účastníků, kteří studují tyto kurzy v lékařských, přírodovědných a humanitních oborech. Bylo zjištěno, že hlavním motivem vstupu do studia je chuť dále se vzdělávat a poznávat, následováno potřebou aktivně trávit volný čas. Motiv navázat nové vztahy s vrstevníky podobných zájmů se neukázal jako významný. Na motivy nemá vliv pohlaví, věk ani vzdělání respondentů. Určitý vztah se ukázal pouze mezi odborným zaměřením studia a motivací, kdy chuť se vzdělávat a poznávat mírně převládá u posluchačů lékařských a humanitních oborů. Šetření potvrdilo význam vnitřní rozvojové motivace a poukázalo na souvislost mezi zájmovým studiem a zlepšením kvality života studujících starších osob.

Klíčová slova: motivace ke vzdělávání, senioři, celoživotní vzdělávání, univerzity třetího věku

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1 Introduction

Old age is an important and often long stage of life. From a demographic perspective, population aging is not only one of the major trends in society, but is also a global problem, especially in the social and economic spheres. Due to this fact, it is necessary to pay due attention to seniors, not only regarding health, but also in physical and mental terms. It is important to realize that people of post-productive age have the right to a socially valuable and active life, and many of them can focus on their interests, for which they have not had time before. One of these possible interests is educational institutions, specifically the University of the Third Age. This name (abbreviated as U3A) is used in the Czech Republic for a specific form of lifelong learning offered by universities to people who have ceased their professional activity, or possibly to disabled people. It is a non-professional or hobby education, and only universities can use the term “university” for these courses. In addition, education in the Lifelong Learning Program does not establish the student's legal status (Act No. [111/1998 Coll.](#), The higher education act).

U3A does not provide a comprehensive university education. These are courses that have the character of selected lectures and are not identical to the accredited fields of study at universities (Haškovcová, [2010](#)). These courses last from one to six semesters and do not have a commercial character, so any study fees have a rather symbolic value (Šerák, [2005](#)). According to both authors the fees in the Czech Republic range between 300 to 900 CZK per semester.

U3A are an integral part of the leisure activities of people of post-productive age. Seniors not only acquire new knowledge and skills, but also meet people of similar ages and interests and expand their social contacts. The social function of U3A is also important, because it helps to ensure the educational rights and opportunities of older citizens (Špatenková & Smékalová, [2015](#)). Seniors' education should also reflect societal changes and help them navigate the ever-changing world. However, Šerák ([2015](#)) recalls that as retirement age increases and the participation of older workers in the labor market increases, it may be necessary to redefine the content and focus of senior education, which will no longer be seen as non-professional and hobby. U3A may have to redefine their mission over time and create other educational offers for seniors.

In the Czech senior population, interest in U3A is steadily increasing. Currently, more than fifty thousand seniors are studying at public universities compared to 2010, when over thirty thousand were involved in U3A, this is a significant increase (Keményová, [2019](#)). Telnarová and Kutnohorská ([2020](#)) reached similar numbers.

Experts agree that seniors who study no longer need to upgrade their professional qualifications or build careers. Therefore, they emphasize (Cuenca, [2011](#); Escuder-Mollon, Esteller-Curto, Ochoa, & Bardus, [2014](#); Haškovcová, [2010](#); Lehmborg & Fung, [2010](#); Salivarová & Veteška, [2014](#); Ušča, Ľubkina, & Kaupužs, [2013](#)) that U3A is filling free time and maintaining and improving the physical and mental health of seniors. However, there is not much research that examines the motivations of seniors to sit again at their university desks. This study enriches this perspective by bringing data from a survey conducted among seniors enrolled in U3A courses at Charles University, Czech Republic. The question of why older people enter leisure education is interesting because seniors make up a significant share of the clients in this educational segment.

2 Senium as a specific phase of ontogenesis

Old age (senium) can be defined as the last stage of ontogenesis. It is a period when the life possibilities of a person are culminating. In social geriatrics (Čevela, Čeledová, Kalvach, Holčík, & Kubů, [2014](#), p. 19), it is emphasized that this is a phase that is a manifestation and consequence of involutionary changes taking place at a specific rate, with marked inter-individual variability, and leading to a typical image called the “old age phenotype”. It is conditioned (Benešová, [2014](#)) by individual factors:

genotype and biological involution, consequences of illnesses and injuries, lifestyle, and environmental and psychological conditions.

Old age has biological, social and time delimitations. Biological old age is a specific measure of the involutional functional and morphological changes in a given individual, which are conditioned by their health condition or diseases that typically manifest themselves in old age. Social old age is related to the combination of social change, especially the change of social role, economic security and lifestyle. In this sense, old age is primarily understood as a social event. Chronological old age is defined by reaching a certain age (Mühlpachr, 2004).

In the 1960s, the World Health Organization commission set the age of 60 as the old age limit (this was also accepted by the United Nations in 1980). In economically developed countries, however, the age of the population is shifting to the age of 65 as the population ages and prolongs its life. According to Neugartenová (in Kalvach & Mikeš, 2004) the period up to 65 years can be understood as presenium, from 66 to 75 years we talk about younger persons of senior age and from 75 to 85 years we talk about older persons of senior age. Above this limit there are long-lived people.

Although old age is often perceived as a period of greatly reduced possibilities and quality of life, it can also be viewed as a period when an individual comes to balance, wisdom and acceptance of his/her own life. On the other hand, population aging is seen as a problem. In recent decades (Hasmanová Marhánková, 2010, pp. 212–216), the concept of “active aging” as an image of good, successful or productive aging has been promoted in educational policies and in gerontological discourse. Emphasis is therefore placed on a positive vision of aging, which may be a deliberate counterpart to ageism and “demographic panic”, portraying an aging population as a threat to the functioning of society.

3 Motivation of seniors in interest education and quality of life

Generally, motivation can be defined as an incentive to act, as “the source on which our conduct is based and through which it can be explained” (Rabušicová & Rabušic, 2008, p. 97). It is also a process of maintaining, regulating and energizing behaviors in a particular direction (Hartl & Hartlová, 2000), a “lever” that forces us to meet our own needs (Klevetová & Dlabalová, 2008). Motivation is undoubtedly of great importance in education and the learning process but may vary considerably in selected groups depending on age, gender, marital status or residence (Beneš in Benešová, 2014). In old age, motivation and access to learning are often conditioned by motives from a previous life. For example, in a survey conducted for this article, seniors talked about the need to catch up in their studies on what they could not do in life.

Due to personality changes, an aging person usually no longer competes and ceases to be performance-oriented (Vágnerová, 2007). This reduces the importance in senium of performance motivation, which is typical of productive age. Positive motivation associated with success in learning, praise, or recognition plays an important role in senior education, while negative motivation such as lack of interest or negative evaluation should not occur (Benešová, 2014).

According to a number of research surveys (Cuenca, 2011; Escuder-Mollon et al., 2014), learning at an older age brings more opportunities for personal development, enhanced sociability and individual autonomy. It can therefore be assumed that the main motivational factors to study U3A fall within the area of developing internal motivation. Internal motivation is a key component of each individual's cognitive, social and physical development, because it inspires us to learn new skills. Internal motivation is also a highly individual issue (Cherry, 2017). For one activity, two people may feel an internal motivation of varying intensity.

In the area of developmental theories of motivation, which lean in the direction of so-called positive psychology, the concept of Ryan and Deci's self-determination is important (Slezáčková, 2012) and has

found an important application in the field of education, training and work. The theory puts the greatest emphasis on how, and by what, a person determines their life. In general, the authors recognize two basic sources of motivation: autonomy (behavior of their choice and free will) and control (behavior enforced by duties, standards, obligations). According to Ryan and Deci (2011), the condition of a happy life is the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy and social inclusion. A person with a high degree of autonomous motivation is not only happier in his life but also more creative, flexible, more interested and active, and his physical health and the quality of his interpersonal relationships is better. The theory of self-determination thus shows that the issue of internal motivation is directly related to life satisfaction, which is the basic determinant of quality of life.

In professional discourse, the category of quality of life is used across the sciences. Many authors point out that, because of its multidimensional, culturally conditioned and highly subjective character, it does not rest on a clear theoretical and scientific basis (Dragomirecká & Škoda in Vaďurová & Mühlpachr, 2005). Nevertheless, this category is useful as an interpretive concept and therefore there are efforts to define it more clearly. Following WHO definitions, quality can be understood as a subjective perception of one's position in the world in the context of culture, values, expectations, standards and concerns. The individual hedonic perspective is essential, relating both to objective needs (property, money, food, etc.) and subjective needs, such as the need for autonomy and control, choice, etc. (Escuder-Mollon et al., 2014).

The list of psychosocial determinants of the quality of life may vary for a particular person, depending on their lifestyle, the situation they are in, and the nature of the social context (Bonomi et al. in Dvořáčková, 2012). In the seniors age, the most important factor in their quality of life is health. Another important factor is the ability to influence the development of one's own life and the level of subjective well-being. Well-being is also considered to be one of the essential components of health (Van Der Steen et al. in Dvořáčková, 2012). Another important factor affecting the quality of life of seniors is the social network, including social contacts, family and interpersonal relationships and integration through social activities (Vaďurová & Mühlpachr, 2005). As far as family relationships are concerned, the quality of life of seniors is greatly affected by the greatest test in their lives, which is the loss of a life partner, which often carries a feeling of loneliness and personal insignificance (Vágnerová, 2007). In addition, the gradual loss of independence and the growth of self-sufficiency is a serious risk factor in old age (Topinková in Dvořáčková, 2012).

Retirement is a major intervention in the quality of life, bringing changes in working and financial status, interpersonal relationships and the cultural perceptions of pensioners. Depending on the ability of seniors to deal with situations related to these factors, retirement may be seen as either a time of great fulfillment of possibilities or a time of psychological crisis (Dabback, 2008).

It is clear from the overview of the factors of the quality of life of seniors that they are fundamentally related to autonomy, social inclusion and competence, i.e. the needs highlighted by the theory of self-determination. It can therefore be assumed that the motivation behind the decision to participate in a university education of interest for seniors is primarily to meet these needs and, as a result, to enhance life satisfaction and quality of life. It is this effect of senior education that is also highlighted by some research.

Escuder-Mollon et al. (2014) defined 18 factors related to senior learning and directly affecting quality of life, based on a questionnaire survey of university course participants in Spain, Italy and Poland ($N = 122$). The factor with the greatest impact on the quality of life of seniors is personal development, followed by joy and improvement of the mental state. On the other hand, adaptation has the least impact. Seniors do not feel that they have to take courses to face the changes that occur in their families, friends or community. They enjoy attending classes for personal motivation and believe that their psychological well-being has been strengthened by the education they receive. The impact on their physical well-being has proved limited. Interestingly, the senior learners also agreed that their

teachers and classmates had a greater influence on the quality of their lives than the content of the courses themselves or their didactic side. Thus, this education can contribute to meeting the really important life needs while providing various types of tutorial support, creating a meeting opportunity, encouraging learning among seniors, and helping them to remain members of the community and stay active.

Cuenca (2011) found that the main motivation to study for seniors who attended hobby university courses ($N = 165$) was to learn more (68%) and stay active (59%). Again, these are motivational factors related to improving the quality of life. Lehmberg and Fung (2010) pointed out, among other things, the psychophysical (feeling of vitality and freshness, coping with stress and anxiety, stimulating brain activity), psychosocial (constructing individual identity through the possibility of working with others, finding their social self in history and culture, individual visibility) and socio-physical (overall increase in activity and participation) benefits.

Holmén and Furukawa (2002) highlighted the importance of social contacts in a survey involving around a thousand seniors. Almost 80% of respondents said they had been lonely during the last years of their lives and therefore decided to study. In the Czech Republic, the dominance of social factors is currently being pointed out by Telnarová and Kutnohorská (2020). Authors mention the need for contact with new people and the opportunity for intergenerational dialogue.

Many authors point to the importance of education in old age in the Czech Republic as well (Haškovcová, 2010; Salivarová & Veteška, 2014; Šerák, 2005, 2015; Telnarová & Kutnohorská, 2020). One of the research studies carried out was a survey by Petřková and Čornaničová (2004), who asked first year students ($N = 56$) at the U3A in Olomouc to write a reflection on the topic: "My return to the role of a student." It was found that the common motive of seniors to receive education is a desire for self-realization, an attempt to confirm their own identity, and an effort to gain control over their life and the environment in which they live. According to the authors, the need for self-realization corresponds to integrity – the wisdom of old age.

Adamec, Dan and Hašková (2010) found that the motivation for new seniors studying at U3A ($N = 132$) was to obtain new knowledge and information, as well as to enhance knowledge in the areas of interest. The weaker motives included the effort to maintain and deepen knowledge in a profession, and the least important motive was to obtain a certificate. Telnarová and Kutnohorská (2020) mention, in addition to social factors, the need to learn new technologies and to meet the pressure of these times.

Some other investigations are carried out within the framework of the final theses. Among the successful ones, we can mention, for example, the work of Věříšková (2019), which examined the motivation of seniors at U3A within the 12 faculties of Charles University ($N = 855$). She also found that for 672 (79%) of them, the main motivation was to gain new information and deepen their knowledge.

3.1 Purpose of the study

Due to the shortage of research carried out in the Czech Republic, we decided to carry out a research probe using a survey and to determine the motivating factors for seniors enrolled in U3A courses at Charles University. The survey has an ad hoc design created for the purposes pursued.

The aim of the survey was to find out why seniors study in U3A courses at selected faculties of Charles University. Our partial goals were to find out whether these motives are influenced by the gender, age, educational attainment and field of study. The following research questions emerged from these objectives:

RQ1: What determinate seniors to study in U3A courses?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the motivation of seniors for U3A education and selected variables?

4 Methods

4.1 Participants and procedure

The survey was administrated to 150 seniors studying at Charles University as part of U3A courses. These were respondents from U3A from the fields of medicine, the humanities and natural sciences. The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	49	33%
	Female	101	67%
Age	Up to 65 years	30	20%
	66–75 years	93	62%
	75–85 years	27	18%
Education	Secondary education without GCSE	8	5%
	Secondary education with GCSE	77	51%
	University	65	43%
Field	Medical	99	66%
	Natural sciences	21	14%
	Humanities	30	20%

Note: GCSE = General Certificate of Secondary Education.

Out of a total of 150 respondents, 101 (67%) are women and 49 (33%) are men. This is in line with existing knowledge that the majority of women in lifelong learning courses are women (Russell, 2007; Špatenková & Smékalová, 2015; Věříšková, 2019; Williamson, 2010). In terms of age, most respondents are in the 66–75 age group (93, 62%). The sample is therefore made up mostly of respondents who can be described as younger seniors. The youngest respondents (up to 65 years), who fall into the presenium period, and the oldest respondents (75–85 years), who belong to the older seniors group, consist of two groups of approximately equal numbers of 30 (20%) and 27 (18%) respondents. Long-life persons were not represented in the sample. Similarly, out of a total of 150 respondents, there is no one with only basic education. 8 respondents (5%) have a secondary education without GCSE, 77 respondents (51%) have a secondary education with GCSE and 65 respondents (43%) have a university education. Furthermore, table 1 shows that the sample is dominated by students of medical field of study (99, 66%). This is followed by representatives of the field of humanities (30, 20%) and natural sciences (21, 14%).

4.2 Measures

A written survey consisted of five questions was chosen for the purposes of the investigation. Three of them were socio-demographic. These questions also followed research variables, i.e. gender, age, education, faculty, and field of study. The motivation to start studying at U3A was followed by the semi-closed question “What was the reason for your enrollment in U3A?” This was an item with the following answers: a) establishing new relationships with people of similar age and interests, b) the desire for further education, c) spending my free time actively, d) other – fill in. Respondents had the opportunity to mark only one answer in each question.

Intentional sampling based on availability was chosen for the purpose of the investigation. Deliberate selection is “necessary to ensure that the individuals selected are suitable for the research and have the necessary knowledge and experience in the field or environment. Only in this way can they provide an information-rich and truthful picture of it” (Gavora, 2000, p. 144). Choice based on availability is a selection based on the fact that not all respondents are available (distance, reluctance, etc.)

and therefore those who are currently available are selected (Hendl, 2008). Availability-based selection is linked to a specific way of collecting data, in our case a survey.

The data were collected at the 1st and 2nd Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Arts at CU, in the period from October 2019 to February 2020. The questionnaires were distributed in printed form to the seniors present with the help of the study officers of the faculties. The survey was voluntary and anonymous for the students. For statistical testing of agreement between the values of actual and expected frequencies, a chi-square tests statistics χ^2 were calculated and assumptions were checked. The level of statistical significance was based on the p -level of .05 using IBM SPSS v. 24.

5 Results

In order to find out the answer to RQ1 (what is the motivation of seniors for education at U3A) the first item was created: "Why did you apply for studies at U3A?" A chi-squared goodness-of-fit test indicated significant difference in the proportion of motives of seniors to study at U3A, $\chi^2(3, n = 150) = 100.188$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .472$. Out of 150 respondents (see Table 2), 16 of them were motivated by new relationships with people of similar ages and interests; 41 respondents wanted to spend their free time actively; and for 86 of them the greatest motivation was the desire to learn and get to know things. Seven respondents chose the open answer option, which was offered by the "other" option.

Table 2

Motivation of seniors to study at U3A

Reasons for attendance	<i>N</i>	%
Establishing new relationships	16	11
The desire to learn and get to know things	86	57
Spend free time actively	41	27
Other	7	5

Now we will focus on analyzing the answers that were hidden under the "other" option. This option was chosen by 7 respondents. As an incentive to study, they stated:

- verification and deepening of theoretical knowledge from 45 years of practice in geological activities;
- to acquire knowledge from fields which I have not studied and I am interested in;
- to learn something more than I was able to do before;
- my husband is a mineral collector and I also wanted to know something about it so we could talk about it;
- finally study the field I always wanted;
- the desire to learn, expand knowledge, prove something to myself;
- to ensure mental activity with a study discipline and an evaluation.

If we analyze these answers, we will find that they could be placed under the option "the desire to learn and get to know things". This option is therefore represented by 93 points. Therefore, for other statistical operations these responses were included under b). To determine the response to RQ2, the chi-square of the independence test was calculated for all variables studied.

Table 3 shows that both men and women are dominated by the desire for further education and getting to know things. It was found that $\chi^2(2, n = 150) = 4.35$, $p = .113$, Cramér's $V = .17$ indicating no significant differences between gender and motivation of seniors to learn at U3A. Table 3 shows that both men and women are dominated by the desire for further education and getting to know things, which is important for 51% of men and 67% of women. However, this proportion does not differ by gender.

Table 3
Relationship between gender and motivation

Variables	Category	Establishing new relationships N (%)	The desire to learn and get to know things N (%)	Spend free time actively N (%)	Sig.
Gender	Men	8 (16%)	25 (51%)	16 (33%)	.113
	Women	8 (8%)	68 (67%)	25 (25%)	
Age	Up to 65 years	-	15 (60%)	10 (40%)	.525
	66–75 years	-	61 (72%)	24 (28%)	
	66–75 years	-	17 (71%)	7 (29%)	
Education	High School	8 (9%)	50 (59%)	27 (32%)	.476
	University	8 (12%)	43 (66%)	14 (22%)	
Field	Medical fields	6 (6%)	64 (65%)	29 (29%)	.007
	Natural sciences	7 (33%)	9 (43%)	5 (24%)	
	Humanities	3 (10%)	20 (67%)	7 (23%)	

The sample of respondents was divided into three groups according to age (see Table 3), and according to the periodization set in the theoretical part of the article. It was found that $\chi^2 (2, n = 134) = 1.289$, $p = .525$, Cramer's $V = .093$, indicating no significant differences between of motivation for education at the U3A and the age of respondents. However, the minimum expected frequency (more than 5) in 80% of the pivot table fields was found not to be closely met in this distribution (78% of all fields were expected). Therefore, the least selected option, "establishing relationships with others", was omitted for the calculation.

To determine the relationship between education and motivation (see Table 3), all high school students were grouped into one group to meet the expected frequency condition for pivot tables. It was found that $\chi^2 (2, n = 150) = 1.485$, $p = .476$, Cramer's $V = .099$. The motivation of seniors to learn at U3A is not influenced by the level of education achieved in the sample.

To determine the relationship between study focus and types of motivation, a chi-square independence test was performed. The expected frequency condition was not met by a small margin (77% of the fields in the pivot table met). However, the chi-square was moderately significant: $\chi^2 (4, n = 150) = 13.965$, $p = .007$, Cramer's $V = .216$. Furthermore, the internal motivation of "the desire to learn and get to know things" in the sample is more related to the medical fields and humanities. If students of the least represented fields of science are excluded from the sample, the relationship between motivation and fields is unproven, since $\chi^2 (2, n = 129) = .823$, $p = .664$, Cramer's $V = .079$. The case is similar if respondents motivated to acquire new social relationships are omitted, because $\chi^2 (2, n = 134) = .466$, $p = .793$, Cramer's $V = .059$. We note with caution that there is some correlation between the focus of study and types of motivation in the sample, but the outcome is influenced by a lower proportion of respondents studying science. Therefore, in a strictly statistical sense this assumption cannot be confirmed.

6 Discussion

The survey sought to answer two research questions. Regarding RQ1 (What motivates seniors to study at the U3A), the following conclusions can be drawn. The most frequently stated motivation was the desire to further education, in 62% of respondents. Furthermore, it was important to spend leisure time actively for 27% of seniors in the sample. Conversely, for less than 11%, it proved important to establish new relationships and it helped to be in touch with people of similar interests. These results proved to be statistically highly statistically significant at a significance level of .001. For seniors, the decisive motivation for entering education is the development of internal motivation associated

with the desire to learn and enrich their knowledge, which is related to feelings of inner fulfillment and self-realization, important factors in the quality of life. Research shows (Escuder-Mollon et al., 2014; Lehmberg & Fung, 2010) that an improved quality of life is a significant effect of leisure education in seniors.

Our result is also in line with the findings of Petřková and Čornaničová (2004), which show that the prevailing motives are to expand, supplement or deepen existing knowledge and the need to obtain new information. Similarly, it is also consistent with other findings, including the need to know (Cuenca, 2011) or confirm the dominance of the development of internal motivation (Escuder-Mollon et al., 2014).

The investigation confirmed the assumption that the motivation behind the decision of seniors to participate in a university education of interest is primarily to satisfy the need to learn, and consequently to enhance life satisfaction or quality of life. Ušča et al. (2013), Escuder-Mollon (2012), Gil et al. (2012) and Escuder-Mollon et al. (2014) have also pointed to this relationship.

In contrast, the survey did not confirm social needs as an incentive factor for entering education, as establishing new relationships was important for only 11% of respondents. This contradicts the findings of Holmén and Furukawa (2002), where this was significant for 80% of respondents.

The conclusions of the survey do not confirm the opinion of Šerák (2018) that while in the past the education of seniors was mainly motivated by an effort to improve the quality of life and dignity, nowadays economic aspects also come to the fore. We assume that if this were the case, seniors would use the free answer and give economic and social reasons. Neither performance nor professional motivation was mentioned, although respondents were given the opportunity to do so. This confirmed the assumption that for seniors this motivation for education is not crucial.

RQ2 asked whether there is a relationship between the motivation of seniors for U3A education and selected variables. It turned out that most of the monitored variables did not play a role in the sample. No effect of gender on motivation has been demonstrated. In accordance with the specifics of senior education, we can also speak about the feminized environment, as pointed out by Špatenková and Smékalová (2015). According to authors approximately 80% of students are women. Věříšková (2019) mentions the feminization of the environment as well (90% of the respondents at U3A were women). Real representation of men and women at U3A is also mentioned in Rabušic (2006). In the case of the presented survey, although the result is not so dramatic, women account for almost 70% of the sample.

The reasons why women are attending U3A may be different, such as male over-death, which increases with age, and the associated loneliness of women, who may consider education at U3A as a social event, presenting the opportunity to get to know persons of the same age and with the same interests. Russell (2007) mentions feminization of the environment at U3A as well. According to him, one of the main reasons for this is that women use their free time to improve and find people of a similar age. In an Australian study, Williamson (2010) mentions that women want to be active after retirement and continue their own education. However, such findings were not proven in the presented study.

Furthermore, it was not confirmed that the age of seniors has any influence on motivation. The sample that was examined does not confirm the conclusion of Špatenková and Smékalová (2015) that the most numerous group of seniors in U3A are trainees aged 66–70 years. On the contrary, the current results of Telnarová and Kutnohorská (2020) confirm that students aged 70–75 have the highest number (the sample was represented by 83 respondents over 70 years, of which the group of 71–75 consisted of 56 respondents). This extension of the age limit may be due to demographic indicators, such as a population that is aging while maintaining relatively good health, and the later retirement of seniors.

No relationship between education and motivation was proved. The only variable whose relationship with senior motivation could be stated with caution is the focus of studies. Medical and humanities U3A students have a stronger motivation expressed as “the desire to learn and get to know things”, while science students slightly prefer to acquire new relationships with people of similar ages and interests. In a strictly statistical sense, however, this assumption cannot be confirmed.

The motivation of seniors to participate in university hobby courses is related to satisfaction and self-realization and has a positive impact on their quality of life.

The investigation carried out had a number of limitations, in particular as regards the design and use of the research instrument. A survey was chosen mainly because of the speed and ease of filling out for seniors who completed it. However, it does not go further and meets only the limited demands of exploratory research designs. The size and unrepresentation of the sample, which was determined by selection based on availability, is also a limitation. In addition, the complex item “the desire to learn and get to know things”, which was the most frequent choice of respondents, would need to be uncovered more. Therefore, the results can be taken more as a probe into an issue illustrating the chosen topic, a probe that has nevertheless produced useful results and can help U3A course creators to better meet the educational needs of seniors.

7 Conclusion

The survey conducted of seniors studying at the U3A of Charles University showed that the most frequent motivation for entering this type of lifelong learning is the desire to learn and get to know things, followed by the need to actively spend their time. These motives fall within the area of the development of internal motivation. Internal motivation is, according to the theory of self-determination, much stronger and more effective than external motivation, while also affecting personal satisfaction. It can be assumed that such motivated seniors perceive active participation in this type of education as something that will bring them personal benefit and contribute to improving their quality of life. The aim of the Universities of U3A is not only to satisfy the cognitive and professional interests of seniors, but also to help them orient to social changes and to contribute to their integration into society. Given the growth of the senior population in developed countries, it can therefore be assumed that the scope of the U3A will continue to expand. Therefore, we consider it important in the future to investigate the motives that lead seniors to this education.

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