

# Lost in Translation: Experiences of the Japanese Senior Citizens in Learning the English Language

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52006/main.v6i2.748>



ISSN 2672-3107 (Print) • ISSN 2704-288X (Online)  
Volume 6 Number 2 April-June 2023

Dominic Bryan S. San Jose<sup>1</sup> and Dennis V. Madrigal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>GLP International School, Nagoya City, Japan

<sup>2</sup>University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos, Bacolod City, Philippines

## Article history:

Received: 1 June 2023

Revised: 25 September 2023

Accepted: 10 October 2023

## Keywords:

English as a foreign language

Third-age learners

Transcendental phenomenology

Japan

**ABSTRACT.** Older adults or third-age learners, despite their age, are growing more enthusiastic about learning English. In Japan, 18.2% of English learners are from the third-age learners' group. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Japanese third-age learners in learning English in Japan's Chubu region. Eight (8) Japanese third-age learners were identified as participants using a purposive sampling technique and inclusion criteria. Results demonstrated that, in essence, their experiences in learning English constituted a complex interplay of three major themes: motivations, adversities, and adaptation. Their experiences represent a profound exploration of self-discovery, intellectual engagement, and the pursuit of meaningful relationships in a globalized society. This linguistic journey highlights the human spirit's ongoing capacity for growth and adaptation, reinforcing the significance of language as a bridge to new horizons and enriching experiences. This study

offers valuable insights for Japanese geragogy and other countries with increasing third-age learners, potentially benefiting third-age educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers.

## 1.0. Introduction

English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners account for more than 1.5 billion worldwide (Beare, 2019), making English the most spoken language in the world (Rao, 2019; Herawati & Istinganah, 2021; Chang, 2022; Emery, 2023). The UK had the most EFL learners in 2020. EFL teachers are invited to teach in non-English-speaking countries, especially Asian countries (Okiasi, 2021), driven by globalization and economic progress. EFL has been either included in their formal education curriculum or offered by private institutions.

Adult learners, including senior citizens (60 and above), despite the age factors (Gawi, 2012), are increasingly interested in learning English due to its popularity as a global language. They are goal-oriented (Smith & Strong, 2009), can handle linguistic difficulties, and apply the lessons learned immediately (Eguz, 2019; Ethelb et al., 2020). There is a growing interest among senior citizens or "third-age learners" in EFL learning (Gabryś-Barker, 2017; Kacetyl & Klímová, 2021).

In Japan, 18.2% of the people learning English are from the third-age learners' group (Statista, 2022).

This is evident in the places where the researcher lives and works. In three big cities in the Chubu region, the researcher facilitates two English classes and workshops with 10-15 senior citizens per class. In two other cities, one of the researchers taught in an Eikaiwa or English conversation school. Third-age learners, mostly women, attend English conversation classes once a week. The researchers were impressed with the academic discipline of the Japanese students and how they take their studies seriously. But he is even more impressed with the senior citizens who take time to come to an Eikaiwa and to Saturday workshops to learn the English language instead of relaxing in the comfort of their homes. This phenomenon that fascinates the researchers is the subject of this study.

The researchers explored the lived experiences of Japanese senior citizens in learning English. This study focused on the three cities in the Chubu region, where no similar study has been conducted to date. Thus, it is a pioneering study that explored the lived experiences of senior citizens learning English in the Chubu region's three cities. This study is a contribution to the body of knowledge regarding third-age learners.

Therefore, the primary objective of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of Japanese senior citizens studying English in Chubu, Japan. The phenomenon explored

\*Correspondence: [dominicsanjose@gmail.com](mailto:dominicsanjose@gmail.com)  
Dominic Bryan San Jose, GLP International School, Nagoya City, Japan

© San Jose and Madrigal (2023). **Open Access.** This article published by Philippine Social Science Journal (PSSJ) is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). You are free to share (copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format) and adapt (remix, transform, and build upon the material). Under the following terms, you must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not use the material for commercial purposes. To view a copy of this license, visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

in this study was the event or the act of the senior citizens in learning English despite their age (Matsumoto, 2019). Specifically, it investigated the senior citizens' motivations and reasons for learning English, challenges, strategies, and the perceived values of learning English.

## 2.0. Methodology

A descriptive phenomenological research design was utilized in this qualitative study based on Edmund Husserl and modified by Moustakas (1994) in his transcendental phenomenology. This type of research method explores and describes as accurately as possible the essence of an individual's or group's conscious experience of their life-world experience (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method is appropriate for exploring the lived experiences of Japanese senior citizens in learning the English language, a phenomenon affirmed by Matsumoto (2019). In phenomenology, a phenomenon is what appears in consciousness or, in a broader sense, that which appears stimulates experience and the generation of new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, the phenomenon was the Japanese third-age learners' act of learning English and the experiences that emanate from this act since it appeared to the consciousness of the researchers. Moreover, studying this phenomenon generated new knowledge by analyzing the participants' lived experiences. The phenomenon's essence, as experienced by the participants, was described from the participants' perspective (Farmer & Farmer, 2021) and analyzed by the researchers. The researchers acknowledged the interplay between subjective and objective knowledge (Moustakas, 1994) in which the (researchers') subjects' explication of the phenomenon's essence depended on the (participants') object's perception of their experiences.

Using a purposive sampling technique (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009), eight (8) Japanese third-age learners were identified using the following inclusion criteria: senior citizens (60 years old and above), women, working part-time or full-time, living in the Chubu region of Japan, and currently studying English. This sampling method helped the researchers gain information-rich interviews with the eight participants.

The researchers used a semi-structured, in-depth interview to explore, elicit, and extract the meaning of the phenomenon being studied. The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and uses open-ended comments and questions (Moustakas, 1994) to draw out views and opinions from the participants (Creswell, 2009). An unstructured, in-depth interview helped the

researchers obtain rich, vital, substantive descriptions of the Japanese senior citizens' motivations for learning English.

The researchers conducted data collection by presenting a letter to the selected participants with an informed consent and interview schedule form. Interviews, until saturation (Groenewald, 2004), were conducted in quiet and cozy places, and participants were allowed to speak in Japanese. The interviews were recorded, and salient points were written down. The bracketing technique (Given, 2008) was observed and enabled the researchers to capture the essence of the Japanese senior citizens' lived experiences. Lastly, a debriefing was conducted at the end of the interview.

The data were then transcribed and uploaded to NVivo to be organized, analyzed, classified, and coded. The researchers used Lichtman's (2013) three Cs: coding, categorizing, and identifying concepts. In the coding phase, the transcripts were reread, and codes were assigned. In the categorizing phase, the codes were reread, and categories were identified. In the concept identification phase, themes were drawn out from the categories. The number of themes depended on the collected data.

The researchers adopted the four strategies (credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability) proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to establish trustworthiness. Quality time was spent on data gathering until saturation, and the methodology and procedure were clearly explained. All claims were based on the data provided by the participants.

The researchers observed ethical practices in this study, such as obtaining a signed informed consent and following an ethic of honesty, integrity, caring, nonjudgmental and non-denigrating language (Leavy, 2022), transparency, and confidentiality. The researchers used codes instead of names to guarantee that no sensitive data obtained would endanger the participants' identity or privacy. An interpreter was present to address the language barrier and give justice to the information provided by the participants.

## 3.0. Results

Several themes emerged in the detailed experiences of the participants. The three major themes were motivations, adversities, and adaptation. Under motivations, the subthemes included travel, the popularity of English, hobbies, socialization, mental and emotional well-being, and lifelong learning. Under adversities, the subthemes were opportunities, cognitive ability, and linguistic and cultural differences. The subthemes under adaptations were the use of media and socialization.

**Motivations.** The participants had a collective

answer when asked, 'At this point in your life, why do you still learn English?' Most of them were quick to share that they were motivated by their desire to travel, the popularity of English worldwide, the joy of learning English as part of their hobbies, its importance in their social lives, its value in their mental and emotional well-being, and their devotion to lifelong learning.

*Travel.* It is not surprising that most of the participants have already traveled outside Japan. Most of them have already visited more than five countries and are still planning to visit more in the coming years. Despite the pandemic, most of the participants were able to travel within Japan. Their desire to travel abroad motivates them to keep learning English. Some of them shared it this way:

"If I go abroad, I want to speak the local language... If I go abroad, English will be very helpful to me. English is convenient to use in foreign countries." (Participant 2, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"Of course, I enjoy English. I love it. Basically, I love traveling, and I want to try to communicate with foreigners. And you know, seven years ago, I went to Germany. I lived in Germany for 2 years." (Participant 3, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"Going abroad is my purpose in learning English... I really want to go to England after the pandemic. I have been to England more than 10 times because I love its countryside. I am not interested in cities. When I go there, I skip London and go to the countryside." (Participant 4, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"I study English to avoid troubles when traveling abroad alone and for stress-free communication with foreigners." (Participant 8, personal communication, October 30, 2022)

"We need English when we travel abroad." (Participant 5, personal communication, October 31, 2022)

*The popularity of English.* Just like in many countries, the English language is popular in Japan. Most of the participants keep on learning English:

"...because we learn English as a foreign language in our JHS years. If I learned German at JHS, of course I would choose German." (Participant

8, personal communication, October 30, 2022)

"Most Japanese people learn English throughout middle and high school (and university) because English is the common language of the world." (Participant 1, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

The idea of English as a global language emerged in some of the answers of the participants. Their first-hand experiences confirmed the global importance of English.

"... English is a global language; I'm not sure, but maybe every country studies English." (Participant 8, personal communication, October 30, 2022)

"... because English is a common language. When I lived in Germany, I could use English instead of German. And when I visit other countries, I can use English as well." (Participant 3, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"Well, English is very common. You can use English in any country. And very useful for travel. English is a global language, I think. So usually, I can speak English in many countries." (Participant 4, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"Because a lot of people can speak English. Even in India or Africa, many people speak English. I think many people will come to Japan, especially immigrants. They speak English. Then, our country (Japan) will change and will be able to have English as a second language." (Participant 5, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

*Socialization.* The desire to socialize and meet new friends, especially foreigners, was also among the motivations for the participants to learn English. Below are some of their answers.

"The first time I met these people (group), it was because of English. English is very helpful to make friends." (Participant 4, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"... if the foreigners are confused in Japan, I can help if I can speak English." (Participant 3, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"I'm interested in communication and communicating with people. By studying English with somebody else, we can communicate with a lot of people like this (group). I like this atmosphere. I think I need to enjoy my life. And being happy keeps me healthy mentally and physically. I had some foreign friends whose mother tongue was English to hang out with. That was my motivation to learn English." (Participant 1, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"I want to communicate with foreigners. And I want to make foreign friends in Japan, but I'm shy, so it's difficult." (Participant 2, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"I studied in JHS and HS, but that didn't help me. I learned them, but I forgot them. Then I started learning English again when I met foreign friends. I want to speak English fluently with foreigners." (Participant 5, personal communication, October 31, 2022)

*Hobby.* Another theme that emerged as part of the participants' motivation was their hobby.

"Basically, I like foreign languages. So, not just English. I study Korean too." (Participant 2, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"Every night I try to watch an English movie, but I tend to concentrate on the Japanese subtitles. My goal is to watch English movies without subtitles." (Participant 3, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"English has become part of my routine. And I am looking for some people who would like to join me in learning English in our city. I'm looking for some nice people interested in learning English." (Participant 4, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"Many people would like to study English. They have many reasons. For example, my friend has a daughter who got married in America, so she studies English. But I learned English just as a hobby. When I was in high school, I wanted to study English more, but we had to spend a lot of money to do so. It was very expensive before. I always wanted to study English, but it's expensive. Now, I

can afford it." (Participant 7, personal communication, October 24, 2022)

"Learning English is my hobby. Every Saturday, I meet our group to talk in English about some interesting things and current issues." (Participant 8, personal communication, October 30, 2022)

*Mental and emotional well-being.* The participants were conscious of their mental and emotional well-being. Below are their answers.

"... I want to try to do something good physically and mentally, like mental exercises good for the brain or mind." (Participant 1, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"Learning English may help me prevent dementia... For us getting older, the brain and body are getting worse, and we have to keep ourselves healthy; so, studying English helps because I use my brain and it continues to function." (Participant 4, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"Learning English helps me keep my brain young. It keeps my brain functioning and working to avoid dementia, especially at over 40 years old, when it is easy to forget everything. For example, if I memorized English words, after 15 minutes, I would forget everything. So, learning English helps my brain." (Participant 8, personal communication, October 30, 2022)

"Through learning English, my foreign friends helped me boost my self-confidence. I also like the way they think, and I apply that to my life. For example, if someone likes me, it's enough. If they don't, it's their problem. Another example is that my foreign friends, when asked, answer only yes or no. But for the Japanese people, it's difficult to say 'no'. Even though we want to say no, we still say yes. I also learned from them that helping people is very important." (Participant 5, personal communication, October 31, 2022)

"I am a shy person. And it takes time for me to feel comfortable with other people, especially foreigners. So, English is helpful for me to go out and meet new people and overcome my fear of talking with foreigners." (Participant 2, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

*Lifelong learning.* The participants shared some indicators of people committed to lifelong education. Most participants are devoted to continuous learning, personal improvement, and sharing their knowledge. The indicators are expressed below.

"I speak English every day, even if it's only for 5 minutes." (Participant 6, personal communication, December 6, 2022)

"I am saying that I keep on studying or learning English because it's challenging to me. And I like challenges that interest me." (Participant 1, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"I note the new words, and I try to use them." (Participant 2, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"I took the TOEIC, as I mentioned last month. The TOEIC result is not pass or fail. If I take a test, I don't need to pass or fail. If I study, I don't need to succeed or fail. What I need is a score to keep studying. I want to see if my score this year is higher than my score last year. I need the score to keep on learning." (Participant 8, personal communication, October 30, 2022)

"Improving English skills is necessary. Continuous improvement is very important. Actually, it is necessary for studying not only English but also other things. Continuous improvement is my motivation for learning more. That's the reason." (Participant 4, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"When I was in Germany, I joined a Japanese community. The name is Kimono. We talked about the Japanese culture of kimono. Every German in our community who wanted to wear a kimono was helped to do so. I realized that it was a very good experience. So, I wanted to keep learning English because I wanted to spread or share knowledge about our Japanese culture among foreigners or in foreign countries." (Participant 3, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

**Adversities.** The participants shared their experiences related to the challenges of learning English. Most of their answers were subcategorized under opportunities, cognitive ability, and linguistic and cultural differences.

*Lack of Opportunities.* Most of the participants lack opportunities to use English in their daily lives. Some of them expressed their experiences this way:

"I don't have enough opportunities to use English to maintain my level of English." (Participant 1, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"Speaking is more difficult because we have no chance to speak with foreigners." (Participant 8, personal communication, October 30, 2022)

"I think I don't have a lot of opportunities to speak with foreigners. And when there are, I am feeling very shy to speak with them." (Participant 5, personal communication, October 31, 2022)

"I don't have enough opportunities to hear the pronunciation peculiar to English or the native pronunciation of words." (Participant 6, personal communication, December 6, 2022)

"I rarely meet foreigners in our city. So, speaking English is limited to my Japanese friends. We are not native speakers of English, so we are not sure if we are speaking correct English." (Participant 2, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

*Cognitive ability.* Another challenge that the participants encountered was difficulty related to cognition. Some find it hard to remember or memorize vocabulary, including grammar patterns. Some of the participants shared the following:

"... I can't remember English words sometimes, and I can't construct grammatically correct sentences." (Participant 3, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"Memorizing is difficult... So I read articles to make it easier for me to memorize and learn the words, just words, because memorizing is difficult for me and for my age." (Participant 4, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

"I am unable to understand words that rapidly increase in the text or articles I read, and learning more of them can be a pain." (Participant 6, personal communication, December 6, 2022)

"It's very difficult to remember English words at my age. Even when I really

want to memorize new vocabulary and idioms, my brain forgets them easily. For example, last week, we learned idioms related to driving. While I was driving, I wanted to use some of them, but I could not remember.” (Participant 8, personal communication, October 30, 2022)

*Linguistic and cultural differences.* The linguistic and cultural differences between English and Japanese languages were also challenging for some participants. Some participants shared the following:

“I’m always struggling because I can’t choose the correct words and sentences for explaining things I want to say.” (Participant 2, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

“You know, in Japanese, explanation is usually complicated. But in English, it is usually simple and direct. In Japanese, you have to read and think between the lines.” (Participant 4, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

“I don’t understand idioms and slang words... If foreigners speak the way native speakers say the idioms and slang, they are not familiar to me, which is why I can’t understand them well. The Japanese language is very cool. One word in Japanese is already long in English. But I’m disappointed sometimes because the English words cannot express the meaning of what I want to say in Japanese. The translation is not enough. We lost the meaning.” (Participant 7, personal communication, October 24, 2022)

“In Japanese, we don’t usually mention the subject in the sentence, especially if the subject is the speaker, and we say the verb at the end. But in English, we always say the subject before the verb. So sometimes I get confused and mention the verb at the end of my English sentence.” (Participant 3, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

**Adaptation.** If there were challenges, there were also some strategies that the participants generously shared. Most of them utilized media, especially the internet, which came in handy with their mobile phones. They also made use of their community to keep learning English.

*Media.* The participants made use of the available

media to keep learning English. Some of their answers are expressed below:

“... I think listening and learning vocabulary are most important. I watch many American dramas. If I find things that I don’t know, I check the dictionary.” (Participant 2, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

“Actually, I watch American movies every night. It’s a good strategy for me. My listening skill is improving, and I can enjoy the movie.” (Participant 3, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

“By reading the newspaper, I gradually became interested in other countries and the world news. So, reading the newspaper is very helpful to me. And I also use a mobile application called Duolingo.” (Participant 4, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

“I do not learn through textbooks... but by listening to and watching movies and news with English or Japanese subtitles... I also use mobile applications like Duolingo.” (Participant 5, personal communication, October 31, 2022)

“I read the Daily News.” (Participant 6, personal communication, December 6, 2022)

“... I watch YouTube and visit English websites to learn more about English.” (P7) (Participant 7, personal communication, October 24, 2022)

“... I listen to CDs in English and sometimes sing with CDs in English. Recently, I chose a high-tempo song.” (Participant 8, personal communication, October 30, 2022)

“I think a good way to learn a language is to combine the learning process with something you love. In my case, I love dancing and singing. Sometimes with videos on YouTube. Singing cool English songs and speaking in rhythm as if dancing are a lot of fun for me, which means that I feel learning English is more fun than a serious study. Always have fun! That’s my strategy.” (Participant 1, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

*Socialization.* The participants affirmed the role that their social lives play in the continuous improvement of their English language skills. Some

of their answers are expressed below:

“... if I found things that I didn’t know, I asked teachers or friends as soon as possible. I prefer learning in a group. My classmates give me good ideas and advice, and they make the time fun.” (Participant 2, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

“... I prefer to study in a group because it’s fun. If I’m studying alone, I get bored, and I can’t keep studying.” (Participant 3, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

“I keep learning English by going to Saturday Mates to speak with other people who are also interested in speaking English.” (Participant 8, personal communication, October 30, 2022)

“I always look for inspiration wherever I go. I meet a lot of people who are trying to learn another language. It all comes down to inspiration. That would give me the idea of ‘Never give up!’” (Participant 1, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

“With my friends, we exchange ideas or opinions, and we translate the news from Japanese to English... It’s our way of learning English. If I am alone, I am not sure if my translation is correct. But if we exchange our answers, we learn the correct translation. At the same time, we have more time to talk about the issues in the news that we are translating. So, reading the newspaper is very helpful. We get information about different parts of the world. And in reading and translating, I improve my English, and I memorize the new words.” (Participant 4, personal communication, October 11, 2022)

“I want to increase opportunities to travel abroad alone so that I can acquire English naturally by interacting with the locals.” (Participant 6, personal communication, December 6, 2022)

The study revealed three main themes: motivations, adversities, and adaptation. Some answers validated previous studies, while others are interesting enough to be part of further studies.

#### 4.0. Discussion

**Motivations.** Many participants strongly desire to travel and visit various countries, which

is a substantial motivator for learning English. This motivation stems from the practical requirement to communicate with either natives or other nationalities and navigate foreign environments. This supported the findings of Matsumoto (2019), Wood and Koiseegg (2020), and Chen (2022) showing that third-age English learners are motivated by a desire to travel. The participants accept the English language’s global dominance. They consider English as a universal language that is spoken all over the world, which inspires them to study it as a means of international communication. They are drawn to studying English because it allows them to connect with individuals from diverse cultures and establish friends, particularly foreigners. In line with previous studies (Słowik-Krogulec, 2020; Lee, 2020), social connection and the ability to connect with others are important motivators.

For some of them, learning English is a hobby in and of itself. They like learning foreign languages and consider it a joyful and intellectually interesting pursuit. Learning English is viewed as a means of preserving mental agility and preventing cognitive decline. It also improves emotional well-being by increasing self-confidence and encouraging a positive attitude. Previous research similarly found out that learning English among the third-age learners brought socio-cognitive benefits to their lives (Pfenninger & Polz, 2018), promoted mental health (Brouwer et al., 2020; Nijmeijer et al., 2021; Grossmann et al., 2021), developed linguistic skills (Słowik-Krogulec, 2020), self-actualization (Lee, 2020; Klimova, 2020), general well-being and quality of life (Kramkowska et al., 2019; Pikhart & Klimova, 2020), and positive effects on the brain (Gabryś-Barker, 2020; Nilsson et al., 2021; Rivera et al., 2022).

Lastly, many participants are motivated by a desire for lifelong learning and personal development. They see learning as a continual adventure and find inspiration in self-improvement. This is one facet of the Japanese Ministry of Education’s duty to promote lifelong learning, which includes enabling all citizens to continue to learn throughout their lives, on all occasions and in all places (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology-Japan [MEXT], n.d.).

Participants’ strong desire for personal improvement, cultural connection, and the quest for meaningful experiences is at the heart of their motives. Learning English is more than just a functional necessity; it is a multifaceted journey that includes self-discovery, intellectual engagement, and a sense of purpose.

**Adversities.** Many participants reported a lack of opportunity to practice and maintain their English

skills in their daily lives. Key obstacles included a lack of exposure to native speakers and a lack of immersive situations. Some participants were struggling with memorizing and language retention. The same issues were reported by Matusz and Rakowska (2019) in their study regarding the self-reported difficulties in learning English for third-age students in Poland. The participants find it challenging to remember vocabulary and form grammatically accurate sentences as they age. Although Brouwer et al. (2020) stated in their study that lifelong bilingualism can train cognitive flexibility, perhaps it would be an interesting subject of future investigation to study how to develop cognitive flexibility among third-age learners.

Lastly, the participants experienced difficulty in terms of linguistic and cultural differences between the English language and the Japanese language. Finding the correct translation or precise words to express their thoughts and feelings from Japanese to English or vice versa could be disappointing. It is similar to dispositional challenges mentioned by Chahine and Sibai (2019) related to difficulty and language barriers. Using Google Translate or other related apps sometimes does not help. Complicated Japanese words and expressions lost their essence when translated into English. This might indicate that Japanese sociolinguistics can be fertile ground for future studies.

The participants' effort to bridge the gap between language instruction and real-world language use is at the heart of the issues. These issues reflect the conflict between their desire to communicate successfully in English and the real limitations they face.

**Adaptation.** Participants used various media to improve their language skills, such as movies, news, web apps, or mobile applications. It was similar to the findings of Klimova (2020) who stated that utilizing mobile applications to learn English proved to be effective even for adult learners (Klimova, 2020). Furthermore, the participants used these materials to improve their listening comprehension, increase their vocabulary, and maintain their interest in the language. Many participants found group learning situations more engaging and motivating, almost similar to practical classes identified by Jun and Evans (2019) as part of the learning strategies of third-age learners in South Korea. This indicated that the participants were not only interested in developing their language skills but also in the opportunity to engage in stimulating mental activities and socialize with their peers (Slowik-Krogulec, 2020). Collaboration, idea exchange, and mutual support were all possible while learning with peers. Moreover, the participants stressed the significance

of everyday practice, whether by newspaper reading, watching English-language content, or engaging in dialogues. Their learning tactics were based on consistency and routine.

The heart of participants' learning strategies is their proactive and adaptive approach to language acquisition. They use current technology, social connections, and a commitment to regular practice to overcome obstacles and continue their English language journey.

Overall, the essence of the participants' act of learning the English language is the search for personal growth, cultural connectedness, and flexibility in the face of adversity. Their goals push them to explore the world through language, their obstacles push them to find innovative answers, and their learning methodologies reflect their commitment to ongoing progress. Each part of their encounters, whether motives, problems, or learning tactics, contributes to a rich tapestry of lived experiences, underlining the essence of their journey.

Motivations are the spark that ignites their language-learning adventure. Traveling, communicating abroad, connecting with diverse cultures, and simply enjoying the pleasure of learning are all vital strands of motivation. The human search for personal progress and meaningful connection is at the heart of these motives. Learning English is transformed into a vehicle for self-discovery and intellectual development rather than a practical task. However, as with any worthwhile adventure, difficulties are inevitable along the road. The participants are confronted with the harsh reality of limitations, cognitive challenges, and linguistic differences between their native Japanese language and English. These difficulties capture the core of their struggle, symbolizing the conflict between aspiration and realism. They have tremendous perseverance and readiness to face challenges head-on in the face of these problems. Participants use learning strategies to traverse this complex journey. Their versatility and proactivity are at the heart of their tactics. They exemplify resourcefulness by utilizing current media, engaging social connections, and committing to constant practice. Their approach to language acquisition is active rather than passive. These tactics demonstrate a commitment to personal development and an unwillingness to be discouraged by the challenges of learning a new language.

In essence, the experiences of the participants in learning English go beyond the realms of language acquisition. Their journey represents an in-depth examination of self, culture, and the complex interplay of motivation and adversity. The researchers see the enduring human spirit's capacity for growth and adaptation via the lens of Transcendental



Phenomenology. These people are living proof of the significant changes that can occur when one embarks on a journey motivated by a strong desire for connection and personal enrichment.

### 5.0. Conclusion

The transcendental phenomenological study of the participants' English learning experiences reveals a fascinating journey characterized by motivations, adversities, and adaptation. This journey is essentially about personal development, cultural connection, and flexibility. Participants are motivated by a strong desire to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries, and their motivations extend from the practical requirement to converse when traveling to the joy of pursuing a lifelong passion.

This journey, however, is not without difficulties. Participants face challenges such as restricted opportunities for real-world language use, cognitive challenges, and the intricacies of bridging cultural and linguistic disparities. These difficulties are a natural part of their lives, acting as catalysts for growth and adaptability. In response to these hurdles, participants adopt a variety of proactive learning tactics. They use current media, encourage socialization in group situations, and emphasize the significance of constant practice. Their learning practices exhibit resilience and a dedication to continual growth, capturing the essence of their transformative journey.

Finally, the experiences of the participants in learning English go beyond simple language acquisition; they represent a profound exploration of self-discovery, intellectual engagement, and the pursuit of meaningful relationships in a globalized society. This linguistic journey highlights the human spirit's ongoing capacity for growth and adaptation, reinforcing the significance of language as a bridge to new horizons and enriching experiences.

### 6.0. Limitations of the Findings

The study has various limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings. The participants, who were all women, were few and limited to three cities in Japan's Chubu region. This could affect how well the findings apply to a bigger group of men and women.

### 7.0. Practical Value

The findings of this study, which contribute to the literature on third-age learners, are relevant not only for Japanese geragogy but also for other nations where the number of third-age learners is growing. Furthermore, understanding how learning and motivation are involved in older Japanese English learners may assist old adult or third-age educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers in

developing teaching materials that are sensitive to the learners' needs, interests, and situations (Pfenninger & Polz, 2018; Slowik-Krogulec, 2020; Sahoo et al., 2021). Third-age learners must be recognized as independent learners who can assist the teacher in developing appropriate resources that include their desired content of study.

### 8.0. Directions for Future Research

Based on the results of this study, researchers may perform comparable investigations in other parts of Japan using either a qualitative or quantitative design to reach generalizable conclusions. Future research may look into how to develop cognitive flexibility in third-age learners, as well as the exploration of Japanese pragmatics in this group of students. Future studies may also investigate third-age learners' English proficiency to develop a tailored curriculum and learning materials aligned with their motivations and instructional modules based on multiple intelligences to encourage more engagement of the learners (Malapad & Quimbo, 2021). Future researchers may consider the following topics: Cross-cultural communication competence in third-age learners; policy implications for promoting third-age English language learning; language learning and quality of life in later years; a narrative inquiry into the language learning journeys of third-age learners in Japan; and facilitator/teacher perspectives on teaching English to third-age learners.

### 9.0. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors disclosed no potential conflicts of interest in relation to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this work.

### 10.0 Acknowledgment

The authors like to express their gratitude and appreciation to the participants who generously offered their experiences, time, and resources, particularly during data collection. Special thanks to *Mitsuko-san, Ayumi-san, Zeph-san, Kayo-san, Kaoru-san, Jessica-san, and Ariane*, our translators, interpreters, and transcribers. Otsukaresamadeshita! Arigatou gozaimashita! Yoroshiku onegaishimu!

## REFERENCES

- Beare, K. (2019). How many people learn English? *ThoughtCo*. <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-many-people-learn-english-globally-1210367>
- Brouwer, J., Van den Berg, F., Knooihuizen, R., Loerts, H., & Keijzer, M. (2020). Exploring language learning as a potential tool against cognitive impairment in late-life depression: Two meta-analyses and suggestions for future research. *Behavioral Sciences*, 10(9), 132. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/bs10090132>

- Chahine, M. A., & Sibai, A. M. (2019). The university of the third age in Lebanon: Challenges, opportunities, and prospects. *The University of the Third Age and Active Ageing: European and Asian-Pacific Perspectives*, 181-193. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21515-6\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21515-6_15)
- Chang, J. (2022). The ideology of English-as-the-global-language in Taiwan's private English language schools. *Arab World English Journal*, 12(4). <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3998321>
- Chen, L. (2022). Exploring the motivation of the older Chinese people learning English in China: A case study in a senior college in Guangdong. *Educational Gerontology*, 48(2), 74-102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2021.2021720>
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Eguz, E. (2019). Learning a second language in late adulthood: Benefits and challenges. *Educational Gerontology*, 45(12), 701-707. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2019.1690273>
- Emery, C. (2023 April 27). The 33 most spoken languages in the world. *Langoley*. <https://www.langoley.com/most-spoken-languages/>
- Ethelb, H., Shalabi, M., & Sasi, E. (2020). Teaching English to adult learners: A practical remedial method. *Journal of Engling Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 2(4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.32996/jeltal.2020.2.4.7>
- Farmer, A., & Farmer, G. (2021). *Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications, Inc., <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071878873>
- Gabryś-Barker, D. (2017). *Third-age learners of foreign languages*. Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783099412>
- Gabryś-Barker, D. (2020). Teaching foreign languages to seniors: Some insights from pre-service EFL teachers. *Revista de Estudos Linguísticos da Universidade do Porto - N° Especial*, 157-170. <https://ojs.letras.up.pt/index.php/EL/article/view/10100/9275>
- Gawi, E. M. K. (2012). The effects of age factor on learning English: A case study of learning English in Saudi schools, Saudi Arabia. *English Language Teaching*, 5(1), 127-139. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1078726.pdf>
- Given, L. M. (Ed.). (2008). *The sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Sage Publications.
- Greenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1), 42-55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069040030010>
- Grossmann, J., Koelsch, V., Degirmenci, M., Aschenbrenner, S., Teichmann, B., & Meyer, P. (2021). Effects of foreign language learning on executive functions in healthy older adults: Study protocol for a randomized controlled trial. *BMC Geriatrics*, 21(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12877-021-02051-x>
- Herawati, I., & Istinganah, E. L. (2021). Students' perception of English as a global language. *Journal of Applied Linguistics Indonesia (Aplinesia)*, 6(1), 18-25. <http://jurnalnasional.ump.ac.id/index.php/aplinesia/article/view/13595>
- Jun, S. K., & Evans, K. (2019). Third-age education and the senior university movement in South Korea. *The University of the Third Age and Active Ageing: European and Asian-Pacific Perspectives*, 219-231. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21515-6\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21515-6_18)
- Kacel, J., & Klimová, B. (2021). Third-age learners and approaches to language teaching. *Education Sciences*, 11(7), 310. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/educsci11070310>
- Klimova, B. (2020). Benefits of the use of mobile applications for learning a foreign language by elderly population. *Procedia Computer Science*, 176(2020), 2184-2191. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2020.09.255>
- Kramkowska, E., Danilewicz, W., Prymak, T., & Constanção, J. P. (2019). Exploring learning and teaching needs of elderly people: A comparative study. *Rethinking Teacher Education for the 21st Century: Trends, Challenges and New Directions*. 381-397. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpb3xhh.29>
- Leavy, P. (2022). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research approaches*. The Guilford Press.
- Lee, J. S. (2020). English language programs for seniors: Motivational constructs and teaching objectives. *Functional Variations in English, Theoretical Considerations and Practical Challenges*, pp. 243-257. Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52225-4\\_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52225-4_16)
- Lichtman, M. (2013). *Qualitative research for the social sciences*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lincoln, Y. S., Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Malapad, L. P., & Quimbo, M. A. T. (2021). Designing an instructional module for classroom teaching based on the multiple intelligences theory. *Philippine Social Science Journal*, 4(3), 9-18. <https://doi.org/10.52006/main.v4i3.372>
- Matsumoto, D. (2019). Exploring third-age foreign language learning from the well-being perspective: Work in progress. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 10(1), 111-116. <https://doi.org/10.37237/100107>
- Matusz, L., & Rakowska, A. M. (2019). Self-reported difficulties in learning English as a second language for third-age students in Poland. *Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition*, 5 (1), 113-130. <https://doi.org/10.31261/TAPSLA.2019.05.07>
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Merriam, S., & Tisdell, E. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology-Japan (MEXT). (n.d.). Basic Act on Education (Act No. 120 of December 22, 2006). *Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology*. <https://www.mext.go.jp/en/policy/education/lawandplan/title01/detail01/1373798.htm>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Human science perspectives and models*. Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412995658>
- Nijmeijer, S. E., Van Tol, M. J., Aleman, A., & Keijzer, M. (2021). Foreign language learning as cognitive training to prevent old age disorders? Protocol of a randomized controlled trial of language training vs. musical training and social interaction in elderly with subjective cognitive decline. *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience*, 13, 550180. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fnagi.2021.550180>
- Nilsson, J., Berggren, R., Garzón, B., Lebedev, A. V., &

- Lövdén, M. (2021). Second language learning in older adults: Effects on brain structure and predictors of learning success. *Frontiers in aging neuroscience, 13*, 666851. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnagi.2021.666851>
- Okias, R. (2021). Asian countries with the highest demand for English teachers. *Fasthire*. <https://thefasthire.org/asian-countries-with-highest-demand-for-english-teachers/>
- Pfenninger, S. E., & Polz, S. (2018). Foreign language learning in the third age: A pilot feasibility study on cognitive, socio-affective and linguistic drivers and benefits in relation to previous bilingualism of the learner. *Journal of the European Second Language Association, 2*(1), 1–13. <http://doi.org/10.22599/jesla.36>
- Pikhart, M., & Klimova, B. (2020). Maintaining and supporting seniors' wellbeing through foreign language learning: Psycholinguistics of second language acquisition in older age. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(21), 8038. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17218038>
- Rao, P. S. (2019). The role of English as a global language. *Research Journal of English, 4*(1), 65–79. [https://www.rjoe.org.in/Files/vol4issue1/new/OK%20RJOE-Srinu%20sir\(65-79\).pdf](https://www.rjoe.org.in/Files/vol4issue1/new/OK%20RJOE-Srinu%20sir(65-79).pdf)
- Rivera, M., Paolieri, D., Iniesta, A., & Bajo, T. (2022). Cognitive and contextual factors modulating grammar learning at older ages. *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience, 14*, 943392. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnagi.2022.943392>
- Sahoo, S., Yamashita, T., Millar, R., Cummins, P. (2021). Motivation to learn and multilingualism across the adult life stages in the U.S. *Innovation in Aging, 5*, 952–953. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igab046.3414>
- Słowik-Krogulec, A. (2020). What motivates older adult learners in Poland to study foreign languages in later life? *ET Journal, 9*, 153–173. <http://dx.doi.org/10.23817/bzspr.9-8>
- Smith, A. F. V., & Strong, G. (2009). *Adult language learners: Context and innovation (Classroom Practice Series)*. TESOL Press.
- Statista. (2022). Share of people learning English in Japan in 2021, by age group. *Statista*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/752624/japan-participation-rate-in-learning-english-by-age-group/>
- Wood, J. C., & Koisegg, K. (2020). Motivation and language learning: A look at age factors, learning histories, and more. *Nagoya JALT Journal, 1*(1), 9–28. <https://doi.org/10.37546/jaltchap.nagoya1.1-1>

---

**Additional Author's Information:**

DOMINIC BRYAN S. SAN JOSE  
dominicsanjose@gmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9089-9336>

DENNIS V. MADRIGAL  
dennis\_madrigal@yahoo.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5548-2682>