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Motivations, expectations, and demands of seniors participating in computer skills training

Summary: On the basis of the assumptions of the model of motivation in adult education as proposed by M. Crowder and K. Pupynin the author presents results of the research on motivation factors of the seniors who participated in computer and internet skills training course organised as part of the *@ktywny Senior* project. The changing of the participants' expectations in relation to the process of education and the instructors during the course was analysed, as well, and a number of demands aimed at improving the proposed courses for seniors was presented.

Key words: computer skills course, senior, education, motivation for education.

Introduction

The contemporary world, full of state-the-art technology and open to communication is not easily accessible to all members of society. That which for a first-grader is an obvious aspect of everyday life and its crucial element to a senior may appear as a world of the unknown and inaccessible. A world where seniors are marginalised.

Bearing that in mind, I have made – with the cooperation of Stowarzyszenie AVEC (AVEC association) – an attempt at developing a system of training courses aimed at preventing the marginalisation of seniors. Computer skills training constituted its basis, since it is in this department that most seniors lack education. Computer and internet skills training courses for seniors are immensely popular and in many cases they encourage the seniors' decision to participate in various projects tailored and organised for them.

As Stowarzyszenie AVEC we have been conducting the aforementioned courses since 2007, and two years later we were invited to participate in the @ktywny Senior project as organisers of computer skills training courses. Thus we were provided with an opportunity to conduct a thorough research on computer skills education in this age group, with motivations, expectations, and demands constituting the notions to investigate.

The @ktywny Senior project had 60 participants divided into 6 groups of 10 people. Each group consisted of those who have never worked with computers before as well as those with certain elementary knowledge; however, it was necessary for all the participants to receive basic skills training.

The research of motivations, expectations, and demands of seniors related to the computer skills courses was conducted twice – at the very beginning of the project and during the training. The research was carried out by means of a survey consisting mainly of open-ended questions. The first group included fairly general questions and many participants answered that they simply want to learn to use computers. However, the answers addressing the seniors' expectations related to the computer skills course that were provided during the training may be divided into two groups: those related to the classes themselves and those related to the instructors.

Motywacje

Motivation constitutes the first stage in the process of education of seniors, in the broad sense of the term, because it results in seniors and instructors meeting in a computer lab and setting out on a journey into virtual reality.

The dictionary definition of motivation states that it is a declaration or display of the motives behind one's actions, behaviour – reasoning¹⁾. Elaboration upon

¹⁾ E. Sobol (ed.), *Słownik wyrazów obcych PWN*, Warszawa 1995, p. 746.

the notion of motive is required; it is to be understood as an impulse to act in order to achieve a goal – an incentive, a reason²⁾.

The model of motivation in adult education was developed by M. Crowder and K. Pupynin³⁾. In Polish social sciences it was described by M. Malewski⁴⁾, who considered the thesis that the assumptions that:

- ❖ the undertaken actions lead to participation in education,
- ❖ the participation leads to results-rewards,
- ❖ the rewards satisfy one's essential needs⁵⁾

are fundamental conditions of adult educational activity the basis of the proposed theory.

The discussed theory of motivation is founded upon the assumption that one's expectations related to education are rooted in previous educational experiences. What is characteristic is that in the group of seniors participating in the project 53% have received university education and 40% secondary school education. During the courses many of the seniors admitted to having had worked jobs related to education or requiring constant learning.

As presented in the diagram (fig. 1) educational experiences are correlated with the feeling that one's actions are successful – the people who have such sense are able to overcome numerous obstacles to realise their educational aims. During computers skills courses this is manifest in frequent consultations with the instructors, using the time dedicated to them, regularity in completing tasks as well as doing physical exercises aimed at preparing hands for the use of the mouse.

Having the sense of control over the events that one takes part in serves to strengthen the feeling of one's successfulness. During the courses such sense could be encouraged through conversations on the topic of expectations related to the essence and the form of the training, resulting in making the requested information a part of the curriculum – in practice the emphasis was usually put on the willingness to devote more time to subjects connected to internet use – or introducing the proposed changes to organisation of the classes – adding breaks, dictating notes, and additional consultations.

The third element constituting one's educational experience is fulfilling the needs that one has; two aspects should be taken into consideration: the experience with rewards that one has formerly received in the process of education and the sense of having influence on the receiving of rewards⁶⁾. In relation to the computer skills courses for seniors this is the source of self-confidence and the sense that it is, in fact, possible

²⁾ Ibid., p. 746.

³⁾ M. Crowder, K. Pupynin, *The motivation to Train: A Review of the Literature and the Development of a Comprehensive Theoretical Model of Training Motivation*, Sheffield 1993.

⁴⁾ M. Malewski, *Teorie andragogiczne*, Wrocław 1998, p. 67.

⁵⁾ Ibid., p. 67.

⁶⁾ Ibid., p. 69.

to learn to use a computer and participate in the virtual world, provided that enough practice is done.

The last of the elements in this field correlated to educational experience is the understanding of one's own abilities, which includes an established self-awareness and self-esteem in relation to learning tasks⁷⁾. In connection to these issues it was possible to observe a clear ambivalence in the seniors' approach to their own abilities resulting from positive (in most of the cases) evaluations of the abilities related to numerous aspects of personal and professional life with competences necessary to use computers excluded. Many of the seniors that we taught lost faith in the possibility to ever learn to use computers because of former negative educational experience and the lack of patience of "home instructors", i.e. children and grandchildren. It must be emphasised that here lies the greatest generation gap. Young people, all of whom have been in contact with computers since early childhood cannot imagine a world without the mentioned devices or a lack of internet access. They cannot comprehend that there are people with no understanding of the virtual world who live only in the real one. Many of the seniors participating in the courses sees the training as a "last chance" / in case of failure they most probably will never be able to convince themselves that they are able to become everyday users of computers and the internet. Herein lies the great role of sufficient preparation of the course based on the theory of motivation and relying on positive reinforcements.

The aforementioned educational experience and its elements along with the fundamental elements of the theory of motivation – in the form of the previously discussed assumptions that undertaken actions lead to participation in education which gives results-rewards satisfying one's essential needs – have an influence on the willingness to learn and, in effect, determine the level of one's motivation. In result, those participating in the process of education establish goals that they want to achieve during education, they construct learning strategies that are optimal for them, they put effort into learning and they exhibit behaviours that are intended to lead to a positive outcome⁸⁾. From the point of view of computer skills training the process is summarised in a symbolic sentence and presented in the diagram below (fig. 1).

The last but hardly less important of the factors constituting the presented theory of motivation is related to the rewarding results of learning that are subjectively classified as success or failure⁹⁾. The evaluation of the actions undertaken is greatly influenced by one's social environment – respect of the family, astonishment of the grandchildren, the peers' willingness to imitate as well as the participants of the course as a group that one can relate to. That is reflected in the seniors willingness to maintain contacts with the people that they met during the process

⁷⁾ Ibid., p. 69.

⁸⁾ Ibid., p. 70.

⁹⁾ Ibid., p. 70.

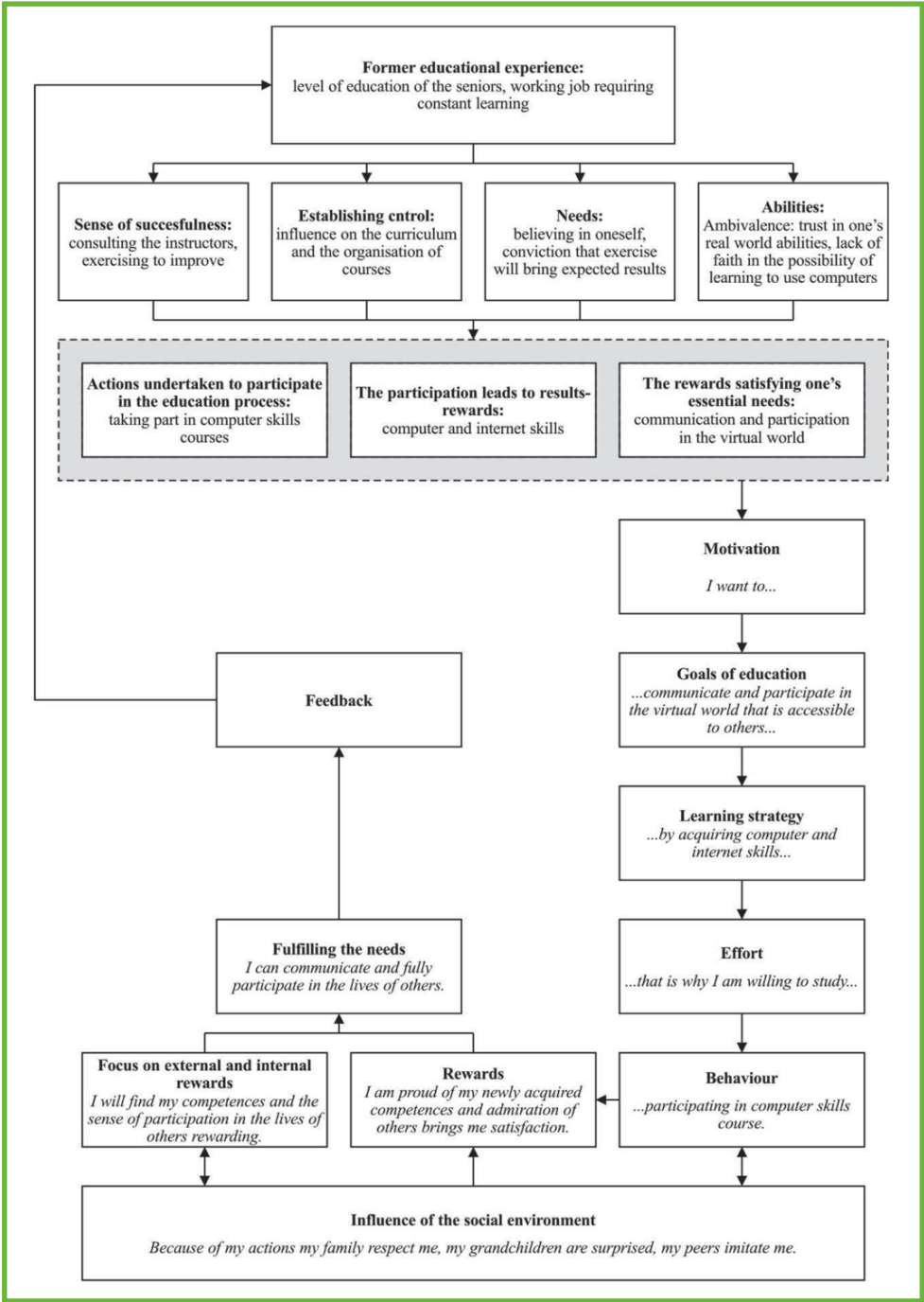


Fig. 1. Diagram of seniors' motivation in computer skills training

Source: Developed by the author on the basis of M. Malewski, *Teorie andragogiczne*, Wrocław 1998, p. 68.

of education. The awareness of the effort that one has to make on the way between turning the computer on for the first time and establishing independent information exchange by means of email that is common to these people seems to be of crucial importance in this aspect. Positive evaluation of one's experiences reflected in the feedback result in the willingness to participate in further, more advanced computer skills courses.

During the *@ktywny Senior* project the participants were asked the following question: "What encouraged you to enter computer and internet skills training?". The aim of the question was to study the participants' motivation and the answers fall into a number of groups.

There were numerous answers indicating that seniors with no acquired competences to use modern devices are marginalised and excluded from the group of people close to them (the family) as well as professional relations. One person stated: "My grandchildren relate to computers all the time. They play games, they solve tasks, they discuss what they found on the internet. And I have no idea what they're talking about". One of the seniors addressed the problem of marginalisation in the following way: "At work everyone uses the internet to send information nowadays, and I can't do it yet, which is why I'm often excluded from many projects. It's happened recently that I wasn't even asked to deal with a problem that was being discussed in my presence because of this. My previous competences just aren't enough, one has to move on". Many of the professionally active seniors emphasise the necessity to acquire computer skills because of their jobs. Some even point out that the impulse to sign up for the course was "the need to use computers proficiently at work, which is of great advantage in my job. I am fully professionally active". Some seniors also suggest outright that they want to join the society that uses computers: "I want to join the ranks of computer users – I'm moving on". Some perceive their lack of computer skills as a type of dependency. They emphasise the necessity to acquire these skills on a level allowing them not to ask their families for help; they state that they were motivated by "the willingness to use computers without my son's help". They also talk of the discomfort caused by the constant need to ask someone for help: "my grandchildren do it all so fast... they click here, they click there and all's done, and I still understand nothing and I can't cope by myself. I'd like to understand it all, so I don't have to call them to help me all the time".

Many of the seniors are motivated by curiosity. One of the women states that she was motivated by "the willingness to prove myself, to believe in myself despite my advanced age. Curiosity to learn something new and unknown, to overcome the fear of the modern devices. Being accepted by all my family and securing the appliances at hand". For some of the others the course was an opportunity to "get to know the world, devices, and people, and to make life easier".

The seniors often speak of the omnipresence of computers; it is suggested that their motivation is constituted by:

- "the progress all around me, at work and in everyday life",

- “professional needs and, on the other hand, the necessity to get to know that which my children already learn about”,
- “everyday life and the need to use computers each day”.

Some of the seniors adopted the strategy of buying a computer first and then signing up for the course to acquire the skills necessary to make use of it for fear of breaking the device. That is what they themselves labelled “self-motivation”, declaring that “since I’ve already spent so much money, I must learn to use the device. Earlier I didn’t want to learn using my children’s computer because I was afraid I could break or delete something. But now I can practise slowly by myself, I get to know my computer, I know where everything is. It’s much better this way”.

A few of the seniors pointed out that their motivation was the willingness establish remote communication via instant messengers. “My children have moved out, my son and daughter have gone to England, I miss them, but I can’t afford to call them as often as I’d like to”.

One of the women talked of a very interesting motivating factor. She signed up for the course because of one simple reason – to learn how to turn off the computer belonging to her granddaughter who, according to the senior, spent too much time using it and would never listen to what her grandmother was saying. One day the irritated senior simply unplugged the device, causing the girl to criticise and complain, because something could have been broken. As a result the woman signed up for the course in order to participate in it as long as it takes to learn to turn the computer off safely. The anecdote was told as a joke at the end of the course, and the senior was really surprised to have found using the computer so interesting. She was amused, because she thought that now the granddaughter had a problem and could not keep the grandmother away from the computer.

Another interesting story was told by one of the participants of the course – a retired teacher. In her case the children went away on holiday leaving the grandmother to take care of the flat and the pets. There was a computer in the flat so the senior without much thinking came to the conclusion that since the children made it necessary for her to take the dogs out she in return will use the computer. Without telling anyone she signed up for the course.

Expectations and postulates

At the start of the course each of the participants had certain expectations closely connected to motivation and constituting a reflection of the sense of successfulness, control and the needs (fig. 1). An answer to the question about the seniors’ reasons for participating in computer skills courses – “...it took a long time for me to make the decision and I finally decided because I read the advertisement in a Wrocław newspaper about recruitment for a course for seniors. For seniors, I emphasise, because I expected the information to be administered in a manner allowing me to understand and memorise it and I wasn’t disappointed” – may serve as an example. The answer is a perfect illustration of the fact that seniors perceive themselves

as a separate group – one of different needs related to computer skills training. The methods and ways of explaining that are normally used with other age groups cannot be employed in this case.

At the beginning of the classes the seniors pointed out that they expected "...a course tailored for seniors with consideration for our perceptive abilities, our pace of work, and our already poorer memory". It is, therefore, essential that matching the curriculum and the teaching methods to the needs of people of advanced age be taken into consideration while organising such classes. That is why the expectations of the seniors were being constantly monitored throughout the course, with their suggestions heard and implemented.

Yet another crucial problem pointed out by the seniors in the surveys was their expectation that during the computer skills course they may get rid of the fear of using the device in question. Many of the interlocutors said: "I have a computer at home, but this is all so complicated, something pops up all the time and I'm afraid to touch it, so that something doesn't pop up again and that nothing breaks. I don't want to be afraid of all this". The answer, as well as many similar ones, indicates that one of the main problems impeding individual acquisition of computer skills is the fear of breaking the complicated device. Furthermore, many of the seniors suggest that the fear is growing because of the younger family members. "My grandchildren are impatient, if I don't know something they click fast 10 times and it's all done, and I ask them to explain and do everything slowly, and they say I shouldn't because I can break it".

The seniors would also address the issue of the traits of the instructors conducting such courses. The first trait was patience, the second – mentioned almost as often – openness. The seniors pointed out that it is necessary to "employ instructors who are open, outgoing, and nice". Others wrote that "we, as people of advanced age, must be approached in an accessible manner". However, most of the statements made by the participants were of a general nature – "[the instructors] need good teaching training and good knowledge of the subject matter and they need to be real lecturers".

The last of the issues pointed out by the seniors in the first survey was the textbook. One of the seniors wrote: "It'd like the course to be accompanied by a textbook in which everything that we have to do is described step by step and in an understandable way. I once tried to learn to use the computer, I bought a textbook in a bookshop, a textbook for seniors, but I didn't understand anything. I'd like the computer terms to be explained in an accessible way, using understandable language, not the computer one". This presented a challenge for the people organising the computer skills courses; the team decided to respond to it and prepared a textbook for seniors, with its consecutive chapters distributed during the classes.

The second survey contained questions requiring more detailed answers related to the evaluation of the previous classes.

The most important of the expectations pointed out by the seniors was the need for a slow pace of work combined with constant revision of the skills and information which resulted in devoting many more hours to computer skills training classes.

In one of the surveys one can read that it is necessary to "lower the pace of instruction from time to time and devote more time to practise the skills with the help of an instructor". One of the women wrote: "I believe that the plan of the course, I mean the number of classes of the course for seniors who have only had their first contact with computers is insufficient, taking into account their poorer memory. In light of the above it is my opinion that some of the classes could be organised twice. Looking for websites and using web search engines could be revised". Another person states that: "Having introduced new information and having done the first exercise, the next class should be devoted to revision of the information in order to memorise it. The information is given too fast". Yet another statement illustrating the aforementioned need says: "The discussed subjects should be revised once or twice in order to memorise them, because our memory is good, but at the same time short, so we need time to assimilate information". The sentence: "Perhaps we should slow down; the pace of the classes is suitable for young students, and we are all beyond that group" serves as good illustration.

However, slowing down cannot interfere with the curriculum. In relation to this problem, the seniors propose two options. Most of them advocate prolonging the course. One of the participants went as far as to suggest that there should be "more classes, even if the participants had to pay a little more. We need more classes devoted to the internet". This proves that the demand for computer skills training courses is so great that the seniors are actually willing to pay more for them. Some of them proposed that organising consultations might be a good idea: "I think that after the end of the course there should be some classes aimed at partial revision, preferably individual classes with an instructor".

Many of the participants said that they thought the curriculum was extensive, yet none of them proposed to omit certain subjects; to the contrary – the seniors suggested devoting more class time to certain issues. One person states that it is expected that "the duration of the course be prolonged and made to fit the extensiveness of the curriculum and introducing revision". The ideas were manifest in the aforementioned fragments; I do, however, believe that it is necessary to list the issues appearing repeatedly in the surveys. One of the participants suggests: „For people over 60 it is harder to acquire technical knowledge. The training should include more classes devoted to using computers. We need more time to practise making new folders and saving data on flash drives". The request to devote more time to saving data on flash drives was repeated numerous during the classes as well as in the conducted surveys. This leads to the conclusion that acquiring that skill is a source of problems for people of advanced age.

Many of the seniors expected that more time be devoted to operations connected with folders; it was their opinion that the instructors should repeatedly discuss "creating folders, saving documents to folders and to flash drives, and printing". Few asked to spend more time "working with windows, and Word" as well as "inserting charts and objects".

However, almost all of the answers indicated a "hunger for the internet". I believe that it may be proposed that it is a natural result of the motivation in the form of communication on the internet with remote family members and friends that was mentioned by the seniors. During the classes the seniors would often express their joy of being able to have conversations with their relatives using programmes such as Skype or Gadu-Gadu without anyone's help and of establishing an exchange of letters via email. That is why listing expectations connected to these means of communication should come as no surprise. The seniors asked to "devote at least a little more time to the Gadu-Gadu programme, using email and internet browsers". A conclusion may be drawn from the answers that the seniors consulted their actions on the internet with other people, because of such requests as "Gmail account registration" when a different email account was used for registration during the classes. The seniors were not only interested in "GG and Skype, and sending emails", but also in "sending emails with attachments". One of the participants pointed out that "more time should be devoted to the internet, downloading image files and attachments, but that requires more work on the internet, and I don't have an internet connection". Since the lack of internet connection at home was a problem for many of the participants of the course Sektor 3 made it possible for them to use the computers with internet access individually and without supervision. Many of the participants took advantage of that opportunity.

Furthermore, the seniors expected "first of all, an in-depth (dogłębszej¹⁰⁾) knowledge about using websites, e.g. starting bank accounts, logging on at Allegro and many other operations with access to images or TV. More practical computer skills". Many of them wrote that they expected the subject of further study to be "the internet, downloading programmes from the internet (for free)". Among them there were a few answers related to using the internet in a safe way and "how to prevent weird images from popping up". One of the women stated: "I would like to know how to turn on a filter so that no such 'pussy cats' ever pop up". The answer addressed an event that took place during one of the classes – the one devoted to downloading and saving image files from the internet. The seniors were to find an image of their favourite pet that they saw as the most interesting. One of the participants typed "pussy cat" in the web search engine, and then on the screen there appeared naked girls instead of cute pets. The senior was further embarrassed because of the fact that he was sitting in the front row and his computer screen was visible to all the other students. Eventually the instructor was able to turn the incident into an educationally beneficial situation, the result of which being the expectation to broaden the knowledge of internet security related issues, as emphasised by the seniors.

In the surveys the seniors express their willingness to learn to use computers other than the PCs available in the lab. They make it clear that it is necessary to

¹⁰⁾ As in the original.

devote "at least one class to the use of notebooks, to present to possibilities of using them". Another person points out: "I would like to have an opportunity to come to an individual class with my laptop. During the regular classes that would make too much fuss, but later the instructor could show me the similarities and, last but not least, the differences". The seniors also propose for the source "to be supplemented with new solutions introduced to computer technologies". They suggest using state-of-the-art technology, as well, as exemplified by the following answer: "In my opinion in order to revise the in-class exercises at home recording the classes on an external memory device – that special drive – would prove useful".

As mentioned above in the answers related to the seniors expectations in the survey that was carried out at the beginning of the course, the instructors prepared the course textbook for each particular class throughout the training. In the second part of the research the seniors were to express their expectations, as well, and to make suggestions regarding the textbook. The seniors stated that it is necessary to "develop a more detailed textbook – for the absolute beginners". Apart from the suggestion that the textbook be more detailed the information that despite making the textbook available the seniors still took their own notes of supplementary character was also provided. The following answer may serve as a good illustration: "It is necessary for the materials that we receive (with the use of the step by step method) to include more detailed information. What is more, the issues related to the use of computers are discussed too fast. One is not always able to put down all that one is to do and then it is impossible to write them all down while at the same doing what one is supposed to do. It must be emphasised that some members of the group have some former experience working with computers and there are also those who use them for the first time". It was also proposed that "the textbook materials that we use in class be distributed earlier, because during the exercises we can't always keep up".

Few of the seniors also addressed the issue of an opportunity to introduce innovation to the training in the form of a slide projector. One of the seniors states: "a screen that the instructor could use to present the consecutive steps would be very useful". Yet another participant writes: "if at all possible, we could use a slide projector and a screen so that the instructor could discuss the particular uses step by step and that everyone could see the discussed topics clearly".

However, the question of the necessity to learn English language was raised more often. The seniors were aware of the lack of this competence from the very beginning of the classes when they had to deal with only a few English terms. One can notice the fact that younger people who are proficient at using computers and computer-related devices have already acquired some of the necessary vocabulary. Terms and names such as "flash drive, Windows, Office", etc. are words that are common among computer users. However, for seniors they constitute a completely foreign addition to the learning of computer skills. That is why in the answers of the surveyed the demand for English classes was often put forward. One of the seniors states: "At the beginning there should be a few English classes – to learn computer-related terms. Even a larger number of such classes, so that it can

be easier for us to memorise the terms that are introduced. Not all of the participants have a computer at home and it is not easy for everyone to constantly revise all this". Among the opinions of the seniors there are some propositions to organise a full English language course as well as suggestions to only learn the most important expressions. One of the participants of the project states: "During the first class the teacher should introduce the basic English terms needed to use computers to the seniors, which would make it easier for everyone to communicate using computers". Some of the participants realise the necessity to study foreign languages and counting on the chance to have such education introduced as part of the project they wrote: "English classes should be organised at the beginning of the course, not at the end – that is because of the abbreviations used in working with computers".

Yet another conclusion that can be drawn from the results of the conducted research is the fact that the seniors expect further computer skills courses to be organised. Even during the *@ktywny Senior* project it was emphasised that they would not be satisfied with only one computer skills course. One of the seniors pointed out that "the computer skills training courses could be organised once more", and in the rest of the answers the seniors suggested that during the courses they would like to go beyond the beginner level. Nevertheless, the propositions were quite varied. Some stated that they simply want "to participate in further stages of the computer skills course". Some also suggested that an „upper-beginner level" should be organised and it should be "a computer skills course for those who have a little basic knowledge, but who still do not have full confidence in their skills". There were also some answers proposing that "the individual interests of the participants should be made part of the course curriculum" instead of organising further training. One of the seniors contributed an interesting idea: "We would need a second level (!) course. Here we learn the basics, but there are many other possibilities that we have not learned of, e.g. addressing envelopes, creating business cards, invitations (in many sizes), etc.". It appears that seniors seek and find more and more possibilities of putting the acquired knowledge to practical use. One of the seniors proposed outright to "introduce single-subject courses" based on the seniors' interests. Furthermore, the idea came up to organise groups of different levels – to "select teams depending on the level of proficiency of their computer skills".

In the surveys conducted during the second part of the research some of the participants have also proposed changes to be introduced to the course in its entirety, with the possibility "to consult the dates and times of the classes with the students, so that they can organise their own time" seemingly essential to the seniors. Furthermore, in the future "the course schedule should be prepared so that there are no breaks longer than 15 minutes between the classes". The last proposition related to that subject was "to organise the classes every other day or 3 times a week. Having classes every day is hard for the seniors because of the time it requires and they need more time for everyday work at home".

The *@ktywny Senior* project in its 180 hours of computer skills training course classes was conducted by a team of experienced instructors – members

of Stowarzyszenie AVEC. Most of the members of the staff were graduates and doctoral studies students of andragogics at the Institute of Pedagogics of the University of Wrocław. Due to the fact that none of the instructors, who study, teach, and work on regular basis, could take three months off the teaching hours were split between them and a formalised report system was introduced to allow for a fast exchange of detailed information. The seniors' opinions of the changing of teachers would vary. Some of them claimed that such a form of organisation allows for the establishing of communication with each senior – "since the teachers change, there is a good contact with everyone. Because you can never satisfy everybody and if someone didn't like a particular instructor he would be unhappy throughout the entire course. I think it should stay the same for the rest of the course". However, the majority of seniors stated that "all classes with a group should be conducted by one teacher exclusively. It would be great if a group was taken care of by the same instructor from the beginning to the end". The evaluation of teacher's assistants in the course was also positive. "Voluntary workers are wonderful, because the teacher cannot take care of everything by himself, taking into account that most of the seniors don't have computers at home".

Demands related to the instructors constituted a separate, broad category. The traits that are expected of a good instructor can be categorised here in detail; the traits are as follow, starting with the most important ones:

- 1) openness and the ability to share knowledge easily,
- 2) commitment and helpfulness,
- 3) patience and understanding,
- 4) kindness and the ability to create a pleasant atmosphere,
- 5) the ability to manage group work and time effectively,
- 6) professionalism,
- 7) the ability to express oneself beautifully.

Throughout the conducted research the seniors described the aforementioned traits of an instructor in detail, and the traits that they enumerated could all be placed precisely into the above categories. That is why I have decided to illustrate the emphasis that the seniors put on the particular traits by means of a diagram (fig. 2).

In relation to communication the seniors pointed out "the ability to communicate effectively with people of advanced age" as the most important trait of a good instructor. The classes should therefore be conducted in a way that "allows an average senior to understand everything" and that is "clear and interesting for a layman". Openness was often emphasised by an especially difficult student that the seniors believe they are – one of the participants points out: "We are not young students; to the contrary, we all live on 'scholarships' from ZUS (Social Insurance Institution)". That is why the instructors conducting courses for seniors should "be able to share their knowledge with people of advanced age in a simple and understandable way". The instructors need to have "the ability to transfer information to others" and avoid "monologues typical of lectures where no contact with the students is established. Seniors should not be treated like university students, establishing a barrier between

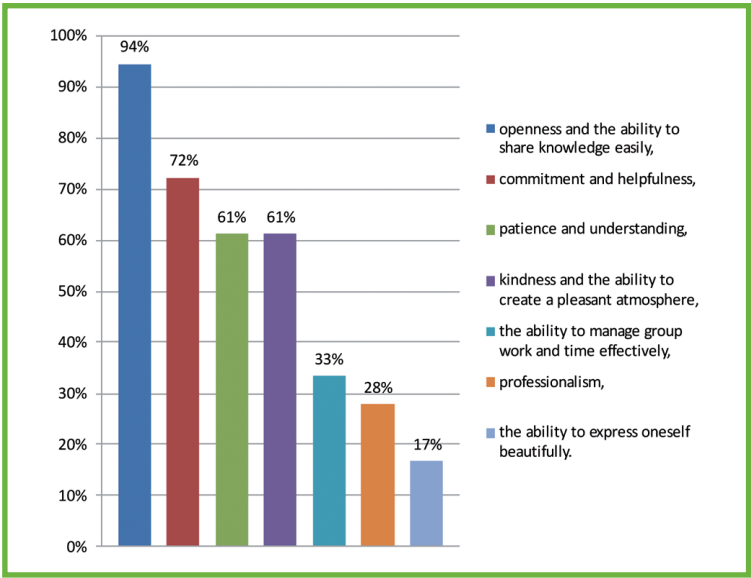


Fig. 2. The demands related to the traits of the instructors of computer skills courses for seniors
Source: Compiled by the author.

the teacher and the audience”. Some went as far as to suggest “the using of a method of direct contact with the course participants, which makes it possible to really acquire practical skills”. A good instructor should “try to keep explaining until everyone understands and be patient while teaching, because we aren’t youngsters anymore”. Therefore, the trait that is most important for the seniors is “clarity and intelligibility of information transfer” as well as providing “expressive and vivid elucidations” and “precise and comprehensive explanations”.

In the second group commitment and helpfulness are included. Since, as pointed out earlier, the surveys were distributed twice, with the present part related to the answers received from the participants during the course, in the hereby discussion the demand resulting from the evaluation of the instructors conducting the classes up to the point of the second survey is clearly manifest. It is reflected in, for instance, the answer demanding that the instructors “conduct the class in such a way that the seniors may feel that he is trying hard, even it isn’t working perfectly”. Therefore, seniors expect “commitment to sharing knowledge and teaching the classes”; they want the instructor to express “enthusiasm and zeal”. The attitude of commitment is to be expressed through “the readiness to help everyone individually during classes”; it also turns out that it is expected that the teachers „help in individual exercises taking place on the ground floor”¹¹⁾.

¹¹⁾ The regular course classes would take place in the computer lab situated on the first floor, with the seniors being allowed to do exercises using the computers located in the main room the of the Sektor 3 located on the mentioned ground floor.

As to the informative aspects of the course the participants demand help in "using the computers (the order of operations in a particular exercise)" and "correct data entering" as well as "giving additional information and tips in the most difficult exercises" along with support "when a participant is at a loss and clicks in a wrong place – tips how to solve the problem, rather than just solving it – for example, I would like to know what I did wrong". It may, therefore, be stated that in the opinion of the seniors commitment is often expressed by "being helpful".

As to the seniors' emphasis on the particular traits of the instructors patience and understanding along with kindness and the ability to create a pleasant atmosphere take the third and fourth place. Within the first category the seniors expect "patience and understanding of seniors whose mind is not as open to the issues of new technology as before". The answers in this category were formulated in quite an interesting way – just like in the case of the one quoted above – the seniors described their expectations while justifying the importance that they attach to them at the same time. In the justifications it was mentioned that seniors "are not as quick as the young and sometimes lack openness"; that they are among people "learning to use computers, and the participants are often nearly 80"; they are also people who "have never had any contact with computers before" and who are "full of doubts related to the use of computers and the internet". Furthermore, one needs "a lot of understanding for the seniors who don't always 'get' the computer-related information and they should receive help in situations when they can't do something on their own"; which is also because "our minds are not as agile as they used to be in our youth". Certain elements of evaluation of the hitherto classes are to be found in this category. One of the seniors wrote: "I admire these young people who repeated the same fragments of classes 8–10 times, because one of the 'active seniors' didn't understand something". Therefore, the seniors expect "a lot of composure while conducting the classes and patience for our complaining and constant questioning" in this category.

Regarding kindness and the ability to create a pleasant atmosphere an instructor should be characterised by "nice and polite disposition" as well as "good manners and a smile" and "a friendly manner in relations with seniors". Furthermore, it is necessary for the teacher to have such qualities as "propriety and a specific, patient attitude" and never to cease to be so, never to show anger or irritation, "because during the classes it was us who were impatient and who sometimes felt irritated when we didn't understand something". One of the seniors states: "Classes with instructors should be greatly pleasant and encourage one to discover further secrets of computers". "Friendly demeanour and understanding that in our age information is transferred much more slowly than in the case of young people" are also expected. Elements of evaluation are to be found in this category, as well, as exemplified by the answers: "The smile and cheerfulness of the teacher are an encouragement to understand the tasks better" and "the nice and quiet atmosphere give one confidence to ask questions related to the smallest of issues". It may therefore

be stated that the ability to create an atmosphere of kindness, calm, and security results in complete or partial relief of seniors' anxiety, and it is precisely the feeling of insecurity that constitutes the factor that blocks the motivation of people in late adulthood in relation to computer skills training.

The ability to manage group work and time effectively mentioned by the seniors take the fifth place. It was in this category that one of the participants suggested that a good instructor should "conduct the classes in such a way that we get to have that break¹²⁾, the classes shouldn't be prolonged". Furthermore, it is essential that "the devoted time be adjusted to the level of skills of the participants" and that "it is made sure that the discussed task is displayed on all the computer screens before moving on to further exercises". It is also necessary for the instructors to conduct "control of the understanding of the tasks and information by the participants" and to adjust themselves "to the students, with the use of the step-by-step method". The teacher should maintain "good contact with the group", but at the same time needs to be "constructive, demanding and consistent, matter-of-fact, and keep the necessary distance". The instructor must also express "interest in all of the participants of the training, but in such a way as to divide his time fairly, without devoting too much of it to only a number of students". The last issue appears to be of crucial importance, because seniors are a group that is extremely sensitive to all forms of discrimination. In an event of one of the participants feeling ignored by an instructor – regardless of whether such an opinion has factual justification, or not – the result is immediate and it is usually expressed in the form of blocking oneself from the teacher. If the instructor does not notice such behaviour soon enough to react and to explain it may even lead to the senior in question quitting the course.

Contrary to what one may expect, professionalism did not turn out to be the most important trait for the seniors. Only six people mentioned the issue and they would usually restrict themselves to statements like "the teacher should be professional" or "the instructor should have an extensive professional knowledge". Once again one could find elements of evaluation of the hitherto classes in one of the opinions expressed in the following answer that is to serve as an example: "I sense the talent of a computer specialist in him. He's always well-prepared for the classes and he knows what he's talking about; he tries to give us as much information as possible, but we can't always remember everything. He must work some more with people who have never had the contact with computer-related issues before". The attitude of people of advanced age towards the teachers conducting the courses is expressed in the opinion that in the way they run the classes there should be "more explaining and less clicking" and that they "shouldn't do anything for the participants. The students have to solve problems on their own. The teachers

¹²⁾ The course was organised in blocks of two classes with a break of 15 minutes, when the participants could leave their desks, go for a walk, or get a little physical exercise.

should only provide information". It may, therefore, be proposed that while the seniors do point out the importance of the feature of professionalism, in the broad sense of the term, they at the same time qualify it as secondary to openness and the ability to share knowledge effectively. On the basis of the observations made and the conversation conducted during the computer skills classes it may be stated that seniors might even be anxious of too high a professionalism, since many of them emphasised that professional computer technicians do not want to or cannot explain certain issues in a manner allowing an older person to understand and they resolve to using professional jargon instead.

The last trait mentioned by the participants of the course in their answers is "good, clear pronunciation" of the instructors as well as "a strong voice and the ability to express oneself nicely". The aforementioned statements are quite interesting since none of the instructors had any speech defects. Placing this group of traits in a subcategory of propriety should be taken into consideration.

Conclusion

Everyday utterances of seniors are an expression of a great need to participate in all forms of the currently available channels of communication, which have changed enormously with the development of information technology. The inability to follow that development results in the marginalisation of people of advanced age that is experienced by the seniors themselves as well as by their environment: within their families, at work, and among friends. However – as proven by the greatly positive reception of the *@ktywny Senior* project among seniors – the marginalisation can be prevented. T. Dyrda argued that the noticing of the need to balance progress and the actions undertaken in the world of technology in connection to this problem make it possible to believe that adult education through engagement in the issue may in a way support the tendencies to try to make technology more humane¹³⁾.

Seniors are special students who are characterised by a high level of commitment, and teaching them may definitely be a source of enormous satisfaction. The attitude of the seniors participating in the computer skills training course can be summed up in a statement constituting a reconstruction of the survey answers: "I want to communicate and participate in the virtual world, accessible to others, by acquiring computer and internet skills, which is why I am ready to study while participating in the computer skills training course. Because of my actions my family respect me, my grandchildren are surprised, my peers imitate me. I will find my competences and the sense of participation in the lives of others rewarding. I am proud of my newly acquired competences and admiration of others brings me satisfaction. I can communicate and fully participate in the lives of others".

¹³⁾ T. Dyrda, *Równoważenie postępu cywilizacji a edukacja dorosłych*, [in:] J. Saran (ed.), *Edukacja dorosłych. Teoria i praktyka w okresie przemian*, Lublin 2000, p. 78.

The above statement is a part of the outline presenting the seniors' motivation to participate in computer skills training (fig. 1). The analysis of the answers presented above provides further details of the expectations and demands of the „@ctive Seniors”. Both the issues are combined to form feedback proving the existence of a great demand for computer skills courses in this numerous age group. Furthermore, it is a group that is highly motivated; it is a group of people willing to learn and determined to gain knowledge and skills actively, systematically, and with commitment in order to be able to once again fully participate in the life of the society. What is more... or perhaps – most importantly – they provide an answer to the question: in what way can the marginalisation of seniors be prevented with the help of computer skills training?

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