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RESEARCH NOTE

Cross-Cultural Differences in the Motivation of Older People Toward Education and Training

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Abstract

In recent years, education has become one of the primary means of promoting social inclusion among older adults, a demographic group whose proportion in the global population is steadily increasing. However, the degree and nature of participation in educational activities among older individuals vary significantly across countries. Classical motivational theories, psychological frameworks, and theories of population ageing often fall short in explaining these differences, as they do not sufficiently account for the cultural characteristics of diverse populations.

This study identifies several educational paradigms present in different countries, each shaped by unique cultural narratives that influence older adults' willingness to engage in lifelong learning, as well as their specific educational preferences. These paradigms can be characterized as "cultural-spiritual," "technocratic," "personality-oriented," among others.

We examine the motivations for learning among older adults aged 60-70 using data from an online survey conducted in four regions: Japan, the United Kingdom, Central Europe, and Scandinavia. Across all regions, the Internet emerged as a common tool for satisfying curiosity and maintaining health – both considered foundational to well-being. In Japan, sports were identified as a significant motivator for health promotion, while intercultural communication and travel were highlighted as unique ways of satisfying curiosity. In Europe and the UK, additional motivators included addressing social challenges, though there was comparatively less interest in supporting younger family members. In Scandinavia, sports also played a notable motivational role.

Cultural differences were analyzed to explain these regional variations in motivation. For example, Japan, with its Eastern cultural background, emphasizes Confucian family values, whereas Western countries are more influenced by neoliberal ideals that foster individual autonomy and socially oriented learning motivations. The findings are used to propose culturally informed recommendations for enhancing the motivation of older adults to engage in education.

Keywords

lifelong learning, motivation to learn, intercultural differences, elderly people, Japan, Europe, United Kingdom, Scandinavian countries

JEL codes: I24

Introduction

Major demographic shifts are currently occurring in many countries. Life expectancy has been steadily increasing in the world's leading economies since the second half of the 20th century (Mendiratta et al. 2022). Both governments and societies have a vested interest in ensuring that individuals maintain their physical and psychological well-being and remain socially active for as long as possible. Consequently, many countries are exploring strategies to encourage older adults (those over the age of 60) to remain in the workforce even after retirement.

In this context, motivation has emerged as a critical area of research aimed at promoting continued learning and skill development among the elderly. Various social theories and educational models for older adults have sparked extensive academic debate concerning the different dimensions of education for this demographic (Glendenning 2001). Since older people consistently participate in education at lower rates than working-age individuals[1] across all countries, one of the key objectives of this study was to identify the motivational factors driving older adults to engage in learning, and to compare these with the learning motivations of younger individuals.

Research has shown that while some older adults cite pragmatic reasons for participating in continuing education, the majority are influenced by expressive factors such as personal fulfillment and social engagement (Ryan and Deci 2000; Boulton-Lewis 2010). Numerous gerontological studies confirm that the primary motivation for older individuals to engage in education is not typically related to acquiring a new profession or re-entering the labor market (Schoultz et al. 2022). Rather, this form of learning often falls under the category of "informal education," which emphasizes personal development, social integration, and maintaining an active lifestyle (Suryadi and Priajana 2021; Kulmus 2021).

Engaging in learning activities and social interaction allows older adults to realize their potential, maintain independence, and reduce stress, particularly during periods of personal or societal crisis (Xia 2022). Motivational drivers may encompass both explicitly normative elements and unconscious psychological dimensions. Moreover, motivation has been found to positively influence learning strategies, academic performance, adaptation, and overall well-being across various educational and life domains (Vansteenkiste et al. 2005).

Importantly, research into motivational factors reveals significant differences between adults and older learners in terms of their needs, interests, and expectations regarding participation in educational programmes. These differences are shaped by socio-economic and educational conditions within their respective countries, as well as by the institutional design and accessibility of available learning opportunities.

1 The working age is considered to be (before 2020) for men – 16-59 years, for women – 16-54 years. In 2020 the working age is considered to be 16-60 years old for men and 16-55 years old for women. Since 2021, the working age is considered to be 16-61.5 years for men and 16-56.5 years for women.

Given that older adults have spent much of their lives immersed in the specific socio-cultural context of their country, it is essential to consider this context when designing educational strategies. Several scholars have emphasized that effective lifelong learning reform – aimed at preserving the intellectual and cultural capital of a nation, organization, or individual – cannot be achieved without addressing the national and cultural goals and values embedded in education (Tanase and Kayaalp 2023; Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff 2017; Aronson and Laughter 2016; Morrison et al. 2008).

Despite this recognition, existing theories and models of adult education largely overlook comparative perspectives and the role of cultural factors in shaping the motivation of older individuals to pursue continuing education after retirement. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between motivation and culturally specific characteristics among the elderly.

Theoretical foundations and hypotheses

The motivation to educate older adults can be examined through a variety of theories, factors, and conceptual models. This section reviews the existing literature on the key theoretical frameworks and influencing factors relevant to the education of the elderly. Scholars have applied numerous interdisciplinary theories to this field, including activity theory, disengagement (or separation) theory, continuity theory, theories of intelligence, several motivational theories (such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs), self-determination theory, and human capital theory. Below, we explore how these theories contribute to our understanding of elderly education.

Activity theory posits that life satisfaction in older adults is positively correlated with active participation in social and educational activities. Voluntary engagement in meaningful roles helps maintain a sense of purpose and well-being. Additionally, social support systems – including digital platforms – can play a crucial role in mitigating cognitive decline among older individuals (Portero and Oliva 2007).

However, the issue of cognitive decline with age remains a contested topic within the scientific literature. While some studies argue that age does not directly affect professional competence or productivity, others emphasize that employers increasingly value "supra-professional" competencies – skills that tend to remain stable across the lifespan. These include communication abilities, discipline, integrity, teamwork, and time management.

In addition to supra-professional competencies, employers also value professional skills related to routine work, such as public speaking and leadership. These skills are often retained or even enhanced with experience, contrasting with certain cognitive abilities that may decline with age. According to Jacob Mincer, older workers benefit from extensive experience, broader perspectives, and diverse professional knowledge – factors that positively contribute to productivity (Mincer 1974).

Furthermore, research has shown that older adults who engage in learning or continuing education tend to lead more active and socially involved lifestyles (Hori and Cusack 2006). Activity theory supports this perspective, suggesting that older individuals, when faced with the loss of previous social or professional roles, often seek out alternative forms of engagement – such as hobbies, volunteering, or education. Within this framework, motivation for learning is often driven by the desire to acquire new knowledge or skills, either for personal enrichment or continued professional activity.

The psychosocial disengagement theory, originally proposed by Robert James Havighurst and later developed by Cumming and Henry, suggests that older adults may gradually withdraw from social interactions due to life events such as the death of a spouse or close friends, retirement, or relocation – often prompted by family obligations, such as assisting with grandchildren (Derhun et al. 2022). According to this theory, older individuals may show decreased interest in participating in educational or social activities, as their routines shift away from regular interpersonal engagement after retirement (Cumming and Henry 1961).

However, this theory has faced significant criticism. Scholars argue that its assumptions may not hold true in many developed countries, where older adults often maintain social connections and remain active well into later life. In contrast, activity theory emphasizes that continued engagement – through hobbies, volunteering, or education – enhances life satisfaction and supports healthy aging.

Despite the opposing views of these two theories, both acknowledge the potential benefits of promoting learning opportunities for older adults. Even in the face of challenges such as financial constraints, health issues, or personality-related barriers, participation in educational activities can have a positive impact on both mental and physical well-being.

The third major psychosocial theory of aging is the continuity theory, developed by George L. Maddox and later expanded by Robert Atchley. This theory posits that older adults strive to maintain consistency in their lifestyle by drawing on strategies and patterns established earlier in life (Atchley 1989; Sokić 2020). For instance, individuals who were highly engaged in learning and social activities during their youth are more likely to continue similar behaviors in later life. This inclination toward continuity supports the idea that lifelong learning habits and early experiences play a crucial role in shaping educational motivation in older adulthood.

The third and most recent psychosocial theory of ageing is the continuity theory (George L. Maddox). This theory suggests that older individuals strive to maintain continuity in their lifestyle by adapting strategies developed through previous experiences (Atchley 1989; Sokić 2020). For example, those who were highly engaged in learning or active pursuits in their youth are more likely to sustain a similar lifestyle in later life.

The theory of intelligence (Raymond Bernard Cattell) outlines a model based on two key components: fluid intelligence and crystallized intelligence (Ackerman 1996). These two forms of intelligence jointly influence the learning processes of older adults. Research shows that individuals with higher levels of fluid intelligence in their school and college years are more likely to engage in later-life education to address skill gaps (Floyd et al. 2012; Brown 2016). Meanwhile, crystallized intelligence enables older learners to structure and integrate new knowledge using their accumulated life experiences.

Theories of motivation. One of the first publications devoted to the issue of motivation for learning among adults was Houle's study in the early 1960s (Houle 1961; Cachioni et al. 2014). Houle classified adult learners into three subgroups depending on their primary motivation: (a) goal-oriented, (b) activity-oriented, and (c) learning-oriented (Daley and Cervero 2016).

Motivated older individuals often pursue education to move up the career ladder or to keep up with technological progress. Activity-oriented adults engage in learning to satisfy social needs, make new friends, or establish emotional connections. Older adults in the third category primarily study to acquire new knowledge for themselves or their families (Desjardins 2003). For example, they may choose courses focused on child care, indicating a priority on supporting their families and spending time with their grandchildren.

Motivation to learn among adults changes in three ways as they develop and age: (1) a change in the intensity of their needs, (2) a change in their time constraints, and (3) a change in the subject of their motivation (Gerstorf et al. 2020).

As for the first aspect, older people usually engage in education for intrinsic reasons rather than external ones. They are internally motivated to stay connected with society or to communicate with their children and grandchildren. The second aspect concerns health: as global trends show, increasing life expectancy encourages older adults to seek more information about their health in order to live longer and healthier lives. Regarding the third aspect, various external environmental factors can also motivate older people to learn.

Among personal factors, the majority of older respondents have clear learning goals after retirement and strive to maintain their health, although cognitive decline is an integral part of aging. While memory, communication, and problem-solving skills inevitably deteriorate in older adults, studies have shown that mental stimulation can slow the progression of cognitive decline, which is supported by the theory of intelligence development (Alvarado 2022). Thus, the main goal of learning among the elderly is to slow down the decline in brain function and cognitive abilities. For example, this can be achieved by taking knowledge-based healthy aging courses, participating in exercise and fitness programmes, learning to use the Internet, or even taking language courses. Another important goal of learning is to enhance the travel experience. As for the Internet, older people may want to learn how to use it for various reasons, for example, to access medical services or to communicate with family and friends.

Another category is interest-based learning, where older people are motivated to engage in learning activities based on their personal interests. The content of such training is usually related to cultural activities such as painting, singing, gardening, etc. Interest-based learning helps make life more fulfilling and less monotonous for many older people.

As for autonomy, the psychosocial factors that determine the quality of life may vary from person to person, depending on their lifestyle, cultural background, the country they live in, and the nature of their social environment.

At the same time, motivation and opportunities to study in old age are often shaped by life experiences and motives formed earlier in life. It is well known that cultural characteristics influence learning in general, and that education and culture are closely and inextricably linked. Indeed, the cultural model of a society determines its educational models. For example, if a society follows a spiritual model of culture, its educational models will also emphasize moral and spiritual values. A society lacking a strong cultural foundation may not develop a coherent educational environment. Therefore, the cultural model of any society, region, or country has a strong influence on its educational approach.

A comparison of educational institutions in Eastern and Western countries shows that cultural trends significantly affect how adults participate in education (Kastanakis and Voyer 2014). In individualistic cultures, students tend to work independently, engage in discussions, and debate in order to develop critical thinking. In contrast, in collectivist cultures, students collaborate with peers, offer support when needed, and maintain silence and respect in the classroom as a means of effective learning.

According to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, motivation is driven by personal needs – or, more precisely, by the partial or complete lack of their fulfillment. Unlike younger individuals, whose education is primarily focused on self-realization and professional development, the education of older people often addresses other types of needs. For ex-

ample, many older adults view education as an opportunity to make new friends and form emotional bonds, especially after the loss of a spouse.

For older learners, increasing their level of respect and recognition can significantly boost self-confidence, lead to new achievements, and facilitate the acquisition of skills and competencies that are valuable in a rapidly changing world. This, in turn, satisfies their needs for prestige and social recognition, which are often expressed through the respect of others (Cianci and Gambrel 2003; Monnot and Beehr 2022).

All these concepts of motivation are closely related to the theory of self-determination. According to Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, the key indicator of motivated behaviour is the intention to perform an action (Martela and Ryan 2015). Education driven by external motives, such as obtaining a degree or advancing in a career, is more common among younger individuals. In contrast, older adults, who no longer have the same need for diplomas or career progression, are more often motivated by internal factors such as personal interest, curiosity, satisfaction, or the joy of creativity.

Another important theory explaining the motivation for adult education is the theory of investment in human capital. According to this theory, learning and the accumulation of knowledge and skills are viewed as means to increase productivity, improve career prospects, and ultimately raise future income. Individuals assess how significant these improvements will be in relation to the resources invested and alternative uses of their time and money.

The key aspect is the comparison between the expected benefits of the investment (e.g., higher income, career advancement, enhanced professional opportunities) and the associated costs (e.g., tuition fees, potential income loss during the learning period). If the expected benefits outweigh the costs, individuals are more likely to invest in their education. The theory of human capital also assumes that individuals aim to optimize costs and maximize benefits, and this model applies not only to formal education, but also to non-formal and informal learning (Iontseva and Khvorostinina 2022; Kicherova and Efimova 2020).

However, to date, no research has examined how motivation depends on the cultural characteristics of a person's country or how cultural differences and connections can be used to improve educational programmes.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of older people in the total population in different countries compared to the percentage of older participants in adult education. The data is from Eurostat (EU Labour Force Survey) for 2021. As a rule, continuous learning includes all targeted learning activities – formal, non-formal, or informal – that are carried out continuously in order to improve knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Although one would expect the level of participation of older people in education to be proportional to their percentage of the total population, Figure 1 shows that this is not always the case. In fact, we can identify four separate groups of countries. The first includes the Scandinavian countries and Japan, where the level of participation of older people in adult education exceeds their share in the total population. The second group consists of Eastern European countries, where the level of participation in education is lower compared to the percentage of elderly people in the total population. The remaining groups are Central Europe and the United Kingdom, where we see a disproportionate number of elderly people relative to their participation in continuing education.

We assume that the difference between the percentage of elderly people in the population and the percentage of people aged 65 and older who participate in education and training is due, among other things, to cultural traditions that influence the motivation of adults

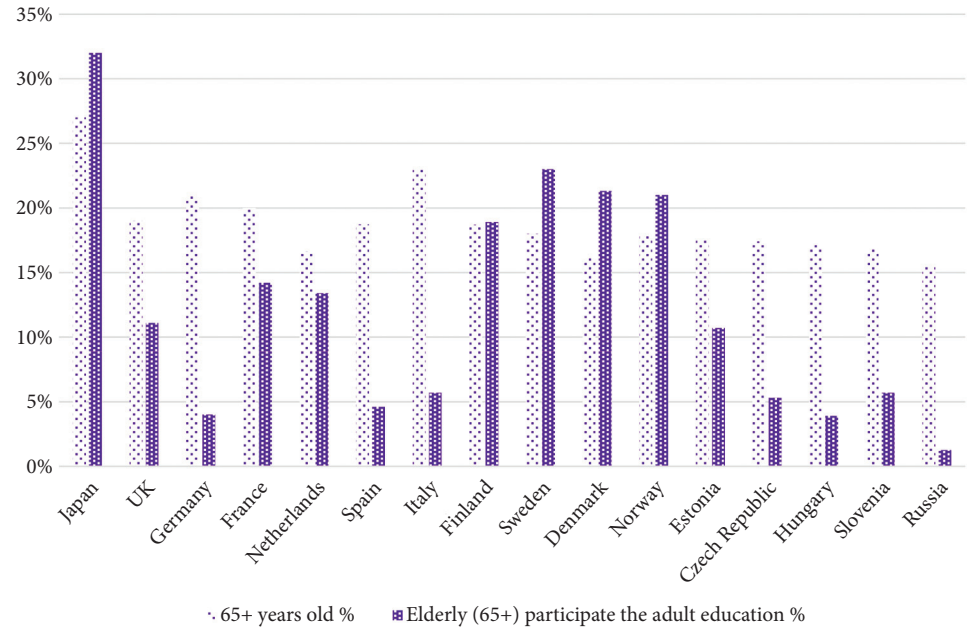

Figure 1. Percentage of older people in the total population and the percentage of older people participating in continuing adult education. *Note:* According to Eurostat data, the focus is on the key indicator "participation in formal and non-formal education and vocational training". *Source:* Eurostat, EU Workforce Survey, 2021

to engage in lifelong learning. Culture plays a particularly important role for older people, who have been shaped by it over a longer period than younger individuals.

Scientists argue that recent "reforms" in lifelong learning for the elderly have proved ineffective not only because of financial, managerial, and pedagogical issues but, more importantly, due to the lack of cultural orientation in reform strategies. This includes insufficient consideration of factors such as mentality, spiritual and educational traditions, national human capital, and prevailing educational paradigms (Avis 2018; Agila and Jayachithra 2023; Elayyan 2021).

Regarding sociocultural differences, researchers identify several key educational paradigms that provide value and meaning for lifelong learning in different countries (Bodnar et al. 2018; Ginzburg and Barak 2023). These include cultural-spiritual, technocratic, personality-oriented, and other paradigms. The dominant educational paradigm in any country is shaped by its cultural development, which encompasses confessional traditions, methods of storing and transmitting information, the societal attitude toward education, and the role of education in monitoring individual cultural development (Bond et al. 2019).

Readiness for lifelong learning often depends on the cultural characteristics of a country. Culture influences the emergence of different values and expectations, which can either stimulate or hinder the motivation of older people to study. For example, in some cultures, education is considered a supreme value, and people may be motivated by the social prestige associated with it (Bordovskaia et al. 2020). In others, education is primarily seen as a means of achieving specific goals, such as career advancement or personal well-being. Addition-

ally, some cultures place greater emphasis on practical, everyday skills rather than formal education.

In collectivist cultures, motivation to learn may stem from a desire to contribute to the development of the group or community. Conversely, in predominantly individualistic cultures, the motivation for learning is often centered around self-development and professional skill enhancement. These differences highlight the importance of taking cultural context into account when designing and promoting lifelong learning programmes for adults, as it can significantly influence their willingness to participate.

A detailed analysis of the role of these differences can help educational organizations adopt a more effective approach to developing educational products that meet the needs of their target audience. Our research hypothesis is that the uneven participation of older people in continuing education programmes may be related to differences in cultural contexts, including educational paradigms and social values across different countries.

The purpose of this study is to explain the differences in motivation to educate older adults through the lens of cultural variation. By examining the similarities and differences between educational programmes for the elderly in various regions, educators can identify and apply successful practices that align with their own cultural contexts. This study also considers the cohort effect by examining three key factors influencing learning: age, social status, and historical period.

Current research

Earlier, we examined the socio-psychological theories explaining adults' willingness to participate in lifelong learning and discussed the main differences between the learning models of younger and older individuals. According to modern theories, young people tend to engage in education primarily to enhance their professional skills and advance in their careers, whereas older adults often pursue learning as a means of addressing social and domestic issues.

Researchers increasingly refer to cultural specificities to explain different approaches to fulfilling social, spiritual, and communicative needs, while also linking the resolution of professional issues to qualification requirements for specialists. Raymond Williams, one of the founders of cultural studies, proposed that culture can be viewed from three perspectives: the first centers on individual and spiritual enrichment (individual level), the second on the lifestyle of specific groups (socio-professional level), and the third on the preservation of a particular mode of existence within the state (collective level) (Lucio-Villegas 2021).

This leads to the assumption that the learning trajectories of young people are primarily shaped by the professional cultures (group-level) to which they belong, while the education of older people is more strongly influenced by their collective cultural background. Moreover, sociologist Geert Hofstede argues that social, national, and gender "cultures" – instilled from early childhood – have deeper psychological roots than the "cultures" of professional groups acquired through education or organizational cultures developed over the course of a professional career (Schwartz and Bardi 2001; Schwartz and Rubel 2005; Hofstede and McCrae 2004; Kirkman et al. 2006).

Thus, the models of lifelong learning participation among older adults are largely shaped by cultural narratives internalized throughout their lives, which influence both their thinking and their approach to acquiring new knowledge.

Our review of the literature reveals a current gap in research analyzing the impact of socio-cultural factors and the educational policy development paradigms on lifelong learning for the elderly. This issue warrants attention, as the characteristics of lifelong learning for older adults in different countries significantly influence the decisions of states and educational organizations to introduce new programs aimed at improving the integration of this age group into society.

This article addresses the following research question: How does the willingness of older adults to participate in lifelong learning depend on their prevailing socio-cultural context and the educational paradigm of their country?

Methodology

To develop a research toolkit, we collected and analyzed a range of sources on lifelong learning for the elderly in selected countries. This approach aimed to increase the credibility and reliability of our conclusions by triangulating the data. We supplemented the academic literature with information from the websites of leading educational organizations offering programmes for the elderly, official documents, informal interviews with experts, and articles available in the media and on social media platforms.

Additionally, we reviewed established research tools commonly used to study adult learning, including the following reliable and proven questionnaires: the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), the Revised Learning Process Questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F), and the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). For our research, we focused on questions related to adult motivation to study and their choice of specific educational programmes.

After identifying the relevant issues, we conducted a pilot study with a sample of 157 older citizens enrolled in continuing professional education programmes, aged 45-55 years. Based on feedback from the pilot study, we refined the questions and added a key question: "What do you want to study?" with the following 14 possible answers: "Health or sports," "Something interesting," "Internet," "Cultural achievements," "Social problems," "Parenting," "I never want to study," "Nothing special," "Not sure," etc. The answers to this question were developed based on a thorough review of the literature on adult learning motivation. All questions in the final questionnaire were closed-ended to ensure clarity and consistency. If the respondent selected "Not sure," they were not allowed to choose another answer to avoid confusion in subsequent questions.

The questionnaire we developed was distributed to various continuing education centers, which then conducted a survey among their students who had completed their studies. Responses were collected from several institutions: Naha City Wakasa Community Learning Center and Susono City Lifelong Learning Center in Japan; AGE UK Lifelong Learning Center in the UK; AGE Platform Europe in Europe; and the Institute of Adult Education in Helsinki. Each center appointed a coordinator familiar with the research objectives and survey tools.

After the questionnaire was developed, we sent a link to it along with a cover letter to the directors of the participating centers. The cover letter described the objectives of the survey, the content and nature of the questions, the procedure and timeline, potential risks and benefits, and the rights of respondents. The data were collected anonymously using Google Forms, and the information was accessible only to the authors of this article.

The questionnaire was available to respondents for 45 days during the first quarter of 2022. We received most of the responses within the first two weeks after the survey was launched, which accounted for 80% of the total number of completed questionnaires. After all the data was collected, we carefully checked each questionnaire to ensure the answers were accurate and complete. Questionnaires with missing answers were disqualified, as were those where respondents did not specify their country of residence or provided all "Not sure" answers. The percentage of valid questionnaires was 92%, while 8% were deemed invalid.

Survey sample

A total of 1.538 people participated in the study: 793 from Japan, 212 from the UK, 241 from Europe, 292 from Scandinavia. The sample included 879 respondents aged 60-69 years and 659 respondents aged 70 years and older. Regarding the level of education, 19% of the respondents had postgraduate professional education, 74% had higher education, 7% had a doctorate. Additionally, 41.4% of the respondents were men and 58.6% were women. The respondents were recruited indiscriminately. Given the large number of participants and the countries involved, we believe that the sampling bias associated with self-selection was minimal.

The sample was recruited with the assistance of continuing education centers in the selected countries. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to individuals who studied at these centers in 2020 and 2021. Each continuing education center appointed a specialist responsible for communicating with retirees.

Although we used Eurostat data from the 2021 Labour Force survey to present Figure 1, and our sociological study was conducted in 2022, this is not a limitation of the study. An earlier analysis showed that, at all stages of sociological observation, the scale of adult participation in education remains virtually unchanged. This is particularly due to the fact that the basic cultural values that determine motivation for adult education are stable and do not undergo significant changes. All of this suggests the stability of the identified trends and their applicability to later periods.

Research methodology

This study employed quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. After completing data collection, all questionnaires were exported to Microsoft Excel for initial coding and preliminary analysis. The data were then analyzed using the SPSS statistical package and the RStudio development environment. The analysis included calculating confidence intervals, ranking data, and conducting tests to assess the statistical significance of differences between respondent groups.

Results

The results of our research are illustrated in the figures below, which detail the characteristic motivational factors for the respondents. Although the general triggers of motivation to study are similar across all countries, specific goals – such as sports, parenting, using the Internet, solving social problems, and acquiring knowledge and skills for work – vary from country to country. The reasons for these differences will be discussed below.

Japan: Motivation to Study in a Cultural and Spiritual Paradigm

Originating from Confucianism, the cultural and spiritual paradigm predominates in Japan and other neighboring Asian countries. This learning paradigm enables individuals to draw on the cultural characteristics of their country to maximize their potential. It emphasizes maintaining individual harmony and inner balance, promoting education as a key means of developing a spiritual personality grounded in high moral and ethical standards (such as discipline, respect for elders, justice, societal responsibility, and teamwork). Furthermore, this paradigm stresses the transmission of knowledge not only for professional development but also for addressing real-life situations, such as weddings, layoffs, and funerals.

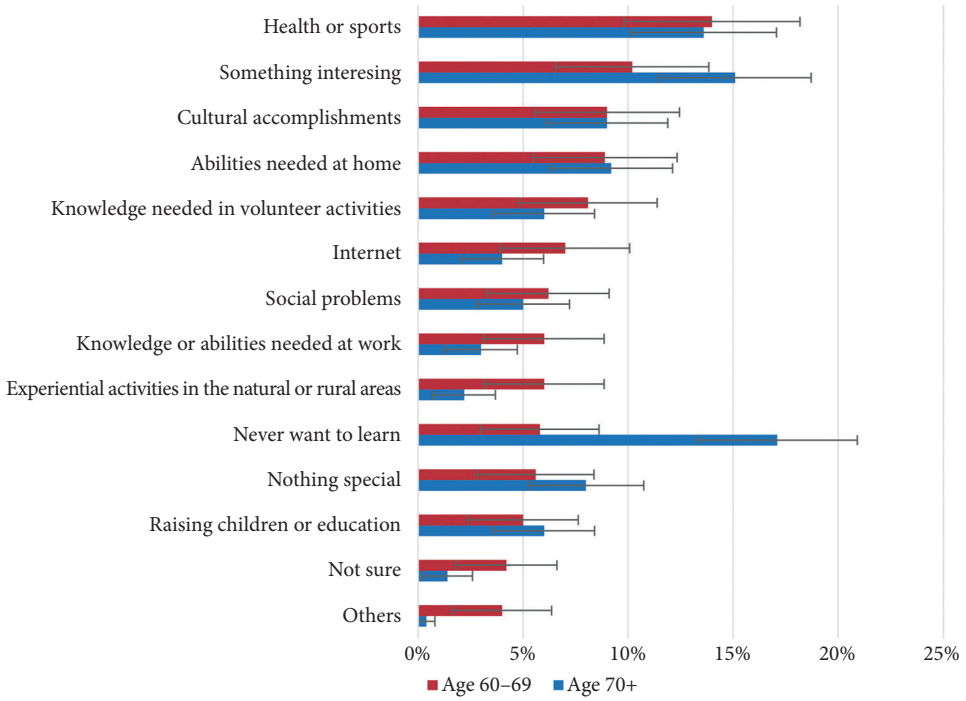

Figure 2. Willingness to be educated of the elderly in Japan. *Note:* The following explanation is used in this figure and further in Figures 3-5. The confidence level sets the limits of the confidence interval at 95% to match the 5% statistical significance when testing hypotheses. Pearson's chi-square is 54.763, the degree of freedom is 39, and the p-value is 0.048. *Source:* authors' questionnaire.

Thus, the willingness of Japanese seniors to study is primarily related to acquiring skills that support spiritual well-being, preserve and improve health, expand leisure activities, and promote personal growth. In Japan, the majority of people aged 60-69 are interested in health and sports, with 14% seeking information in these areas. However, this interest tends to decline with age. Additionally, Japanese respondents place significant value on "cultural achievements," which are equally appreciated by those aged 60-69 (9%) and those aged 70 and older (9%).

The data show that people aged 60-69 are relatively willing to study or receive retraining and vocational training, with a particular focus on health and life skills education. Only studying the Internet and developing hard skills show a higher percentage of interest (7%). However, the willingness to study declines among individuals aged 70 and older. The response "I never want to study" (17.1%) represents the highest proportion, followed by "Something interesting" (15.1%). In Japan, the categories of "Not sure" and "Other" receive relatively low response rates, suggesting that the concept of "live and learn" is deeply ingrained in Japanese society.

Japanese statistics reveal an interesting trend. On one hand, a significant proportion of people aged 70 and older are not inclined to continue their education. On the other hand, the desire to learn something new remains a strong motivator for education in this age group. This phenomenon illustrates the simultaneous influence of three classical theories of aging: activity theory, disengagement theory, and continuity theory (Portero and Oliva 2007; Hori and Cusack, 2006; Sokić 2020).

United Kingdom: Motivation to Learn in a Technocratic Paradigm

In the UK, continuing education is increasingly extending beyond non-formal education to include vocational and advanced training, aimed at helping individuals maintain their employment. This practical skills-based paradigm focuses on developing the necessary skills and experience for specific tasks, supporting people to continue working after retirement and enhancing their social mobility.

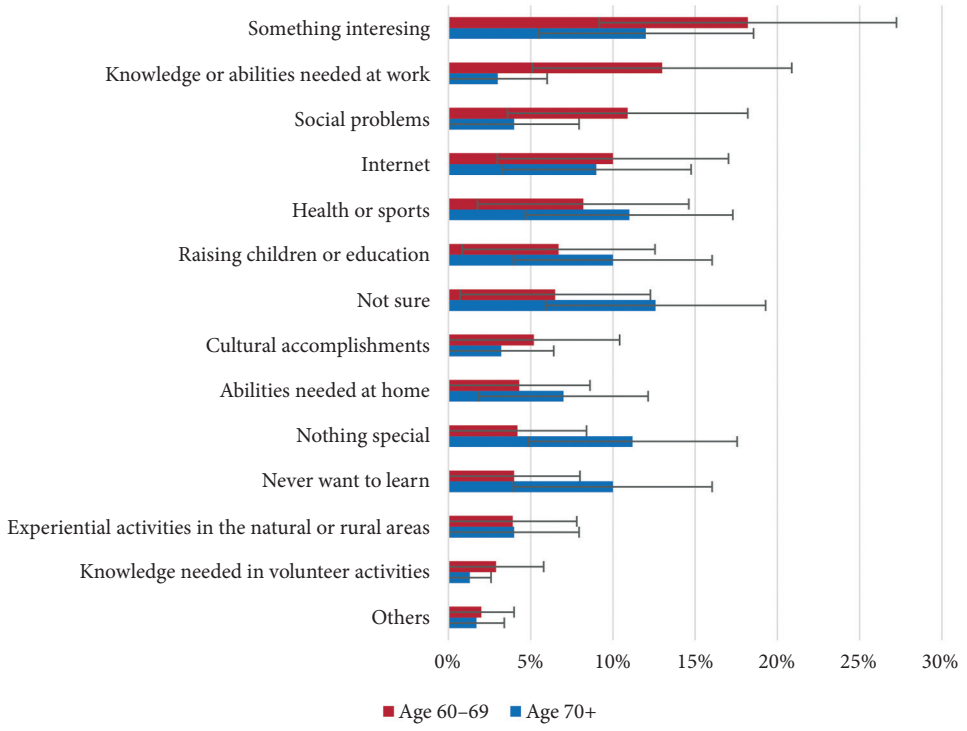

Figure 3. Willingness to learn from the elderly in the UK. *Source:* authors' questionnaire

In the UK, our survey revealed that older people aged 60-69 are enthusiastic about learning. Notable interests include "Something Interesting" (18.2%), "Skills Needed at Work" (13%), and "The Internet" (10%). This suggests that adult education significantly contributes to well-being in old age, as participants report improvements in both mental and physical health, as well as increased social interactions. The results indicate that British older adults engage in education for both internal reasons (e.g., the desire to learn something new) and external reasons (e.g., acquiring skills for work). This aligns with the technocratic paradigm, where older individuals are motivated not only by the desire for personal enrichment but also by the need to develop practical skills relevant to their work or daily life.

European Countries: Learning in a Personality-Oriented Paradigm

In Europe, educational organizations employ various approaches, one of which focuses on the individual characteristics and needs of students. In this paradigm, educators act as mentors and consultants, providing a personalized approach to support the development of skills and knowledge. This model emphasizes the independence and responsibility of students for their own learning. It aims to develop practical and professional skills, taking into account students' existing experience and knowledge, and offers customized training programs tailored to individual needs and desires. The approach includes practical and personality-oriented learning methods, such as working in small groups or providing individual counseling.

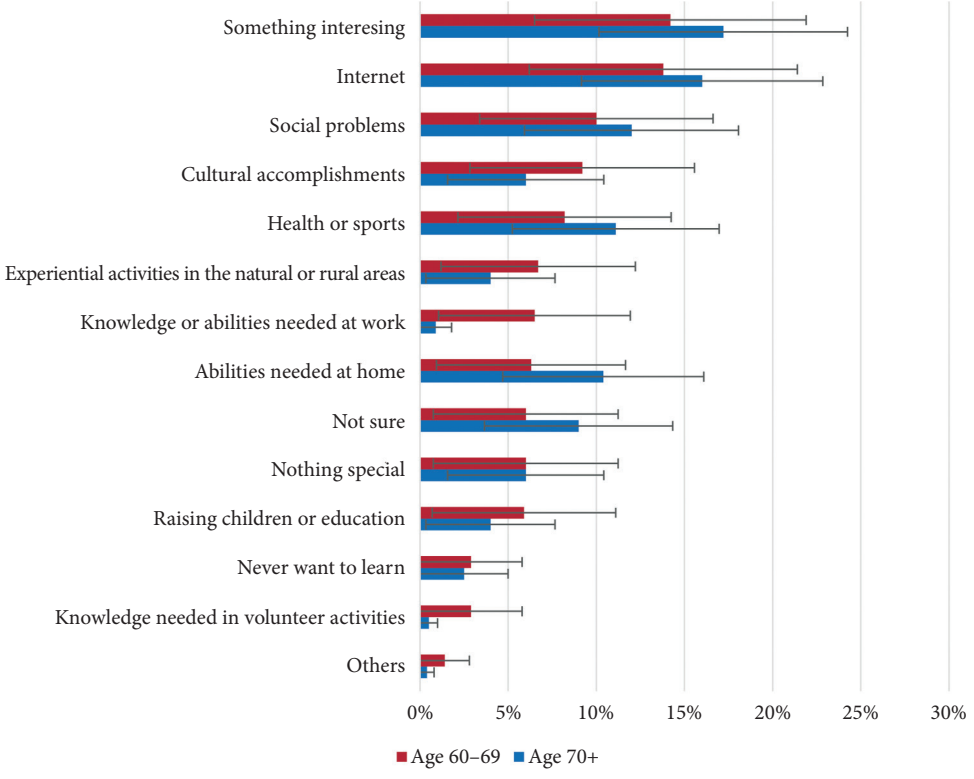

Figure 4. Willingness to be educated of the elderly in Europe. *Source:* authors' questionnaire

Figure 4 illustrates that, unlike in the UK, older people in Europe (aged 70 and over) remain interested in learning, with 17.2% expressing interest in the Internet and 11% in health-related topics. For those aged 60-69, interests include the Internet, cultural achievements, and health or sports.

Unlike their counterparts in Japan and the UK, older people in Europe are generally more likely to continue their education, with the response "I don't want to study" being relatively rare. The most common response, "the desire to learn something new and interesting," indicates that internal motivational factors prevail among this cohort when selecting study programmes. Our findings suggest that European seniors are more focused on solving personal, everyday problems – often related to improving their quality of life – rather than on achieving professional goals.

Scandinavian Countries: Motivation to Study in a Predominantly Technocratic Paradigm, with Emphasis on Basic Scientific Knowledge

Researchers have observed that Scandinavian adults often engage in continuous learning primarily for personal development and professional self-realization. Many older individuals participate in educational activities to become involved in social work, enhance their professional skills, and broaden their understanding of the world. This learning paradigm emphasizes the development of creative and critical thinking, prioritizing the learning process itself and focusing on meeting students' needs and interests to shape their educational trajectories, rather than merely targeting specific end results. The key advantage of this approach is its view of learning as a tool for self-realization.

Due to high educational standards, the involvement of key stakeholders in the development of educational programmes, and strong public support for education, the Scandinavian countries consistently rank high in educational achievement and innovation.

In the context of this study, it is important to highlight that Scandinavian countries are renowned for their advanced education systems. Unlike many other regions, especially developing countries, education in Scandinavia is not confined to formal education or university degrees. Lifelong learning is deeply embedded in the structure of society, and active participation in educational processes is encouraged at all stages of life. In this system, civil society plays a central role, closely intertwined with government and educational structures to promote lifelong learning among adults and the elderly (Lee 2021). Various community organizations, interest clubs, support groups, environmental initiatives, and cultural centers significantly contribute to offering numerous learning and development opportunities, often supplemented by financial support.

These organizations offer a wide array of educational programmes designed to help individuals acquire new professions, enhance existing skills, develop creativity, learn foreign languages, and master computer skills, among other objectives. These programmes are characterized by their flexibility, accessibility, and practicality, making them appealing to people of all ages and backgrounds. A central feature of lifelong learning in the Scandinavian countries is the close collaboration between civil society and government agencies. The state financially supports these public organizations, develops the lifelong learning infrastructure, conducts information campaigns, and implements initiatives to promote adult and elderly education.

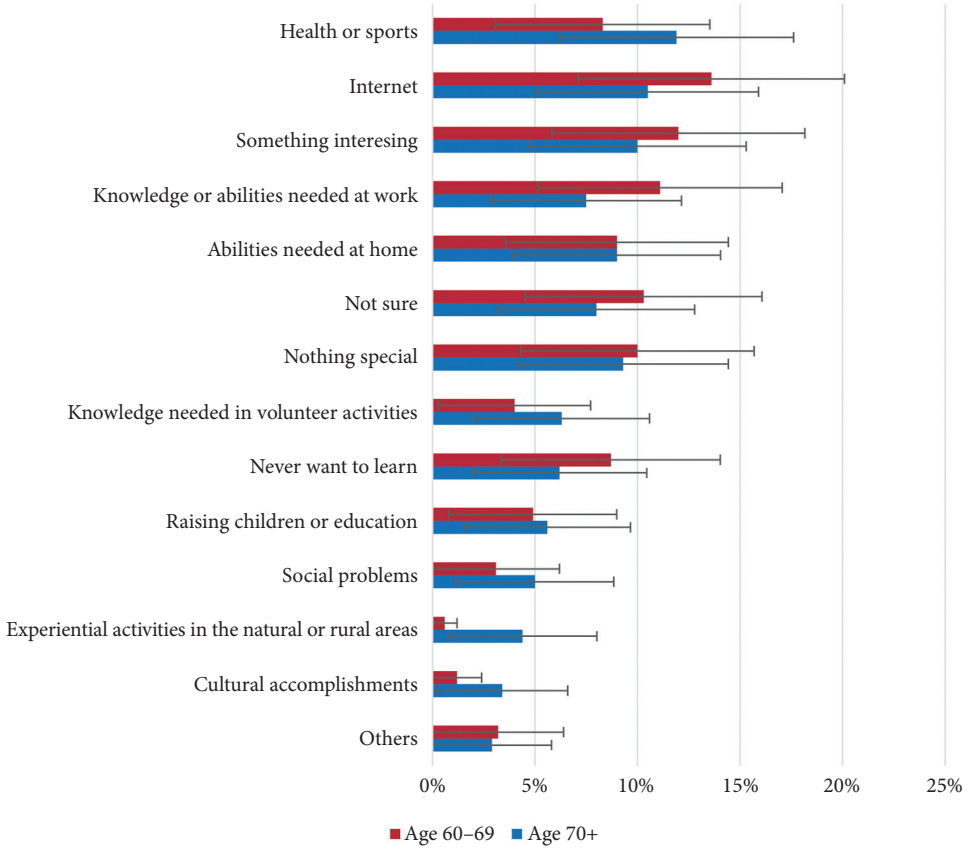

Figure 5. Willingness to learn from the elderly in Scandinavia. *Source:* authors' questionnaire

Consequently, in Scandinavian countries, adults and seniors do not perceive education merely as a duty or a necessity for employment, but rather as an opportunity for personal growth, improving quality of life, and engaging actively in public life. For example, in Denmark and Sweden, voluntary agreements at the national, sectoral, and corporate levels between the government and social partners have resulted in the creation of training funds that finance lifelong learning. Public and private investments in professional development and knowledge acquisition in Denmark are among the highest in the world. The primary principle of this educational approach is accessibility, providing professional development opportunities to all segments of the working-age population, regardless of their current level of education or qualifications. Furthermore, both Denmark and Sweden have adopted laws aimed at increasing flexibility, transparency, and freedom of choice for individuals aged 55 and older (Borovikova and Komarovskaya 2024; Goglenkov 2013).

The knowledge-based economy has prompted significant changes in the organization of work, resulting in the emergence of "learning organizations," where continuous staff training is regarded as essential for professional development and enhanced competitiveness. Countries such as Finland, Denmark, and Sweden, alongside other European nations,

have recognized the importance of informal and spontaneous learning, positioning themselves as leaders in this regard.

Our study (Figure 5) reveals that in Scandinavian countries, individuals aged 70 and over are primarily interested in maintaining their health (11.9%), followed by secondary interests such as using the Internet (10.5%) and learning something new (10%). Among people aged 60-69, the main interests are acquiring digital skills (13.6%) and learning something new and interesting (12%), with a notable interest in acquiring professional skills (11.1%).

Discussion

Overall, the first four figures indicate that the primary challenge for older individuals in all countries is their reluctance to engage in learning something new. This is evident from the responses to the options "I'm not sure," "Nothing special," and "I never want to study." Together, these responses account for approximately 20-30% of the total responses across all cultural cohorts. Furthermore, the proportion of these responses increases notably with age.

The frequent choice of "I never want to study" suggests that older people are a particularly vulnerable group of the population, prone to exclusion from active social life, according to the theory of alienation. This confirms the theory of psychosocial alienation proposed by Robert James Havighurst, which states that as people age, they often lose interest in learning per se.

Our study indicates that the proportion of responses remains relatively consistent across various learning paradigms, including the cultural paradigm. This suggests that, in all the countries studied, adults are primarily motivated by personal reasons when selecting learning paths. They are motivated to learn when they recognize the importance and necessity of acquiring new knowledge and skills.

We observed that older individuals commonly cite "learning something interesting," "the Internet," and "health and sports" as their main motivations for participating in educational programmes. Other significant motivators include "parenting" and "health and sports" as ways to improve well-being. The results of our survey show that older people in all countries tend to choose study programmes based on personal (intrinsic) needs rather than career (extrinsic) ones. This trend aligns with the theory of self-determination (Martela and Ryan 2015). However, intrinsic motivations for learning vary significantly among older individuals from different countries, reflecting the cultural characteristics and dominant learning paradigms in each country.

Next, we explore how these motivations manifest in countries with different dominant learning paradigms.

Culturally, approaches to lifelong learning for the elderly differ significantly between Eastern and Western countries. In Asia, the Confucian perspective views continuous learning as a means of personal growth and self-realization. This contrasts with the neoliberal approach, which tends to be more instrumental and focused on specific outcomes. Confucianism promotes a holistic view of lifelong learning that encompasses all aspects of human existence, emphasizing personal and social roles through active citizenship. In this context, lifelong learning is often valued for its intrinsic pleasure, rather than for practical or career-oriented goals. For the elderly in Eastern countries, the choice of educational programmes is primarily driven by internal motivations. This aligns with the belief that

career-related education is completed, and retirement offers an opportunity for self-development and self-realization (Cianci and Gambrel 2003). In Japan, the cultural/spiritual learning paradigm places particular emphasis on intercultural communication and travel as key motivational factors for the elderly.

In the UK, motivation for lifelong learning typically involves a combination of personal and professional factors, reflecting a technocratic learning paradigm. Our research shows that many adults in this region view learning as a means to enhance their career prospects, while also valuing the learning process itself (for example, "the desire to learn something interesting").

In Europe, there is a noticeable interest in solving social problems, although less attention is given to child-rearing. This trend can be attributed to the individualism prevalent in Western countries. Europeans often exhibit personality-driven motivations for learning, with a particular focus on addressing social issues as a means of achieving personal well-being.

In both Europe and the UK, the neoliberal discourse frames lifelong learning as a way to develop the human capital necessary to succeed in a modern, knowledge-based economy. As noted by B. Lambeir (2005) and M. Olssen (2006), this perspective emphasizes the role of lifelong learning in promoting economic growth and adapting to a constantly changing world. Thus, continuous learning is being championed in the West as a solution to various economic and social challenges. Our research confirms this viewpoint: British seniors show a strong interest in education not only for personal enrichment but also as a means to remain employed. This suggests that older people in the UK are motivated by both internal factors (personal interests) and external factors (career-related needs).

In Scandinavia, older people demonstrate a strong interest in sports and health issues, likely influenced by the region's unique climate and lifestyle, characterized by short summers and long winters. As a result, Scandinavians often engage in extended periods of physical exercise or pursue sports-related skills. In this context, sport is closely tied to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Both Japan and Scandinavian countries have a high proportion of elderly individuals interested in health and sports. However, in Japan, motivation to exercise is often focused on relaxation and stress relief, due to the high levels of pressure faced by many elderly Japanese.

In contrast, in Scandinavia, as well as in Western, Central Europe, and the United Kingdom, older people, whether aged 60-69 or 70+, are more likely to develop Internet skills or competencies that can benefit their careers. This conclusion aligns with previous research indicating that low levels of digital and IT literacy can result in communicative isolation and unequal access to many social benefits available online. This issue is particularly pronounced among elderly individuals with disabilities, who may struggle to actively participate in social activities (Vacek and Rybenska 2015). Furthermore, regular use of the Internet in daily life has been shown to help older people maintain cognitive functions, which is supported by research on the theory of intelligence (Šimonová et al. 2017).

Thus, our research confirms the hypothesis that the willingness of older individuals to participate in lifelong learning is more influenced by the cultural characteristics of their country and the prevailing learning paradigms than by psychosocial theories commonly applied in various countries.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that to enhance motivation, it is crucial to align educational programs for the elderly with the cultural values of their respective countries. Culture embodies and reinforces the fundamental values and social characteristics that

shape life within a society. Incorporating cultural trends into the development of educational programs for the elderly is likely to increase their engagement in educational activities post-retirement.

Conclusion

Education holds significant potential as a driving force for social and cultural transformation. Beyond transmitting knowledge and skills, it shapes interests, attitudes, aspirations, and values, contributing to economic growth and stimulating cultural evolution. Education plays a pivotal role in fostering cultural changes that can lead to broader societal shifts.

Education and culture are inseparable. Education acts as a mechanism for transmitting both traditional and modern values, which are integral to cultural identity. It serves as a catalyst for preserving national culture, while culture, in turn, influences the content and objectives of the educational system (Lee 2021). This article explored the dynamic interaction between education and culture, from both Eastern and Western perspectives, considering their respective developmental frameworks. It also examined the motivations of older individuals to engage in education and training, emphasizing the influence of socio-economic factors.

Our research indicates that, regardless of country, older individuals generally exhibit personal motives for participating in lifelong learning. However, the specific motivations of older adults differ across European, Scandinavian, and Eastern countries, reflecting the distinct socio-cultural contexts and dominant learning paradigms within each region.

These differences in motivation are closely linked to the sociocultural trends and educational paradigms that individuals experience throughout their lives. In Asian countries, for instance, older people often view education as a means to maintain their health and acquire new, interesting knowledge. This reflects a predominant intrinsic motivation centered on personal needs and interests following retirement. In contrast, external motivations related to work or child-rearing (such as caring for grandchildren) have less influence within this cultural group.

We believe that these differences in motivation can be attributed to the educational philosophies embedded in various cultural contexts. Eastern education, heavily influenced by Confucianism, emphasizes three primary goals: moral self-development, the acquisition of knowledge, and service to society. This philosophical framework shapes the educational motivation of older individuals in Eastern countries, where learning is often perceived as a tool for both personal and social enrichment.

In contrast, Western education is grounded in humanistic principles, emphasizing the development of practical and analytical skills throughout a person's life. This approach is evident in the responses of British participants, who report that their motivation for pursuing education later in life includes not only the desire to learn something new but also, prior to the age of 70, the need to acquire skills necessary for maintaining employment. It can be concluded that British respondents, motivated by the necessity to continue working and secure their positions even in old age, demonstrate a rational approach to learning. They view education not just as a means of personal development but as an investment aimed at preserving and enhancing their ability to work and, ultimately, ensuring their financial well-being. Their interest in acquiring new skills that align with modern labour market demands reflects a strategic, rational allocation of resources – an investment in their human

capital focused on maximizing future returns, rather than merely seeking personal enrichment.

At the same time, respondents from the UK and other European countries highlight the importance of developing social skills. For these individuals, education functions as a means of self-realization, improving information literacy, and addressing the issue of isolation after retirement. In Scandinavia, the primary motivation for older people to engage in learning is maintaining their health post-retirement. This trend aligns with a broader societal focus on sports and domestic tourism in these countries. The widespread interest in healthy living has roots in the Scandinavian national revival and receives strong support from the government (Laaksonen et al. 2022).

Our findings emphasize that the key factors motivating older individuals to pursue education are the practical benefits of acquiring new knowledge, opportunities for social interaction based on personal interests, and the ability to overcome isolation and loneliness. These motivators are deeply intertwined with the cultural and social context. Understanding these factors within a particular country can assist government education departments in developing and promoting educational programmes that are tailored to the specific interests and cultural characteristics of the elderly population.

We recommend further research to extend this study to regions where continuing education for older adults is just beginning to gain momentum, such as Russia, India, China, Central and South America, and Africa. This would provide deeper insights into how to effectively engage and support older learners in diverse global contexts.

Limitations of the study

Limitations of this study include the challenge of generalizing the results to the entire elderly population in the countries studied, due to the non-random sampling method and the data collection techniques employed. Specifically, the sample consisted of individuals who had already participated in training programmes, which may introduce self-selection bias. As a result, the sample may not fully reflect the broader population of older adults in these countries. Nevertheless, the empirical findings provide valuable insights into the motivational strategies for lifelong learning among older individuals from a cross-country perspective.

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