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**Examining individual differences of L1 English senior
learners of Spanish: A multiple-case study**

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ABSTRACT

Research studies support the idea that language learning is an activity that enhances cognition, social relationships, and subjective positive feelings among older populations. However, little research has investigated how older people learn languages, especially if and how their psychological individual differences can shape their process of acquisition. Moreover, most studies conducted so far deal with L2 English senior learners, but very few explore the study of other languages. In this regard, the present study aims at exploring L2 Spanish senior learners' psychological individual differences, namely beliefs, motivation, and strategies used. The participants were 9 L1 English senior learners who were learning Spanish as a foreign language. A mixed-methods approach was followed, consisting of a background questionnaire, a questionnaire that encompassed 36 statements on beliefs, motivation, and strategies to be rated on a Likert Scale, and a fifteen-minute semi-structured interview. Results show a variety of positive emotions linked to foreign language learning, an increasing desire to travel, which constitutes the primary motivation to learn Spanish, and the high use of metacognitive, cognitive, compensation and social strategies as a means to build their own learning process and self-motivation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last 70 years, the proportion of people aged 65 or over has been steadily rising due to a decline in fertility rate, outnumbering children under age five in 2018 for the first time in history. Old population is projected to double today's number by 2050, growing from 771 million people aged over 65 to 1.6 billion (The United Nations, 2022). As the ageing population increases every year, humankind deals with a vast group of people experiencing many age-associated physical and cognitive changes, ageing being a major risk for neurodegenerative diseases, as claimed by Niccoli and Partridge (2012). Moreover, ageing also comes with changes on a psychological dimension after retirement (Ramírez Gómez, 2016). This demographic change implies a social effect, but also a financial burden on governments, as in countries with a growing old population, public programmes will need to be adapted, including a reliable social security and pensions system, as observed in the results of the World Population Prospects by the United Nations (2022). Consequently, as Ramírez Gómez (2016) explains, there is a growing need for mechanisms that will improve the ageing group's social, physical, and psychological wellbeing.

In this sense, language learning is considered to be a stimulating activity that may improve senior learners' cognitive functions and overall wellbeing and, therefore, it could be used as a way to promote healthy ageing. However, as Ramírez Gómez (2016) states, there is very little empirical research on how older adults learn languages and most existing studies focus on age-associated cognitive losses. This might be because *age* is usually seen as a prominent individual difference (ID) that clearly impacts the process of language learning due to theories such as the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) (Griffiths & Soruç, 2021). However, as Griffiths and Soruç (2021) claim, this individual difference is mainly biological and interacts with other equally important IDs such as beliefs on language learning, motivation, and strategies, which are defined as psychological variables. To date, older population's IDs, such as the ones previously mentioned, have been overlooked, even though these might be fundamental to their language learning process and may not only help to make age-related changes be less visible (Mackey & Sachs, 2012), but also to contribute to senior learners' overall wellbeing, as can be observed in other studies such as Pfenninger and Polz's (2018) and Pikhart and Klimova's (2020). In addition, most studies investigating senior learners' individual differences deal with senior participants learning L2 English (Mora et al., 2018; Pikhart & Klimova, 2020;

Pffenninger & Polz, 2018; Schiller & Dorner, 2019, among others) but very few studies explore senior learners learning other languages.

In this regard, the present study will aim at exploring L2 Spanish senior learners' individual differences, namely *beliefs*, *motivation*, and *learner strategies* in order to develop a better understanding on this under-researched population. To do so, it is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the most relevant studies on senior learners' characteristics, as well as important research on beliefs, motivation, and learner strategies. In section 3, the participants and instruments used in the study are described. Section 4 presents an overview of the results that are later discussed in section 5 and, finally, section 6 provides the conclusions of the paper, limitations, and ideas for further research.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The following review of literature will be dealing with the most widely investigated topics on senior learners. First, section 2.2 will cover the main concepts, definitions, and background of this population. Secondly, sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 will explore the age-related changes experienced by this group on a physical, cognitive, and psychological level; in relation to such features section 2.2.3 will review some of the studies that prove that language learning can be used as a means to promote healthy ageing. Even though the present study will deal with L2 Spanish senior learners, most studies reviewed to support this previously mentioned section analyse L2 English senior learners, since, as mentioned in the introduction, most research on senior learners focuses on L2 English. Finally, section 2.3 will deal with the role of individual differences that may help compensate for age-associated cognitive or physical losses and may explain feelings and attitudes towards language learning. This just mentioned section will cover the main individual differences investigated in this study; namely *beliefs*, *motivation*, and *learner strategies* (sections 2.3.1, 2.3.2, and 2.3.3).

2.2 Senior learners: Who they are

Often referred to as *third age learners*, *older adults*, and *senior learners*, there does not seem to be a consensus on when an individual can be considered part of this population

group and what it should be named. Being part of this population has usually been linked to the beginning of the third age, often seen as the retirement (Moen, 2011; as cited in Oxford, 2018) as well as to a specific chronological age. However, considering that each person's life, different ages of retirement, and other personal factors may be different between individuals, as Oxford (2018) claims, this population cannot be reduced to a specific age or the age of retirement. Moreover, Andrew (2012) makes a clear distinction between "ageing" and "age", defining the former as "a multidimensional process that is physiological, social, and cultural" (p. xiv) and the latter as "a place or position a person has at a given moment in time" (p. xiv). In the present study, the term that will be used to describe and talk about this population will be *senior learners*, which is the one used in most recent studies (Klimova & Pikhart, 2020; Schiller & Dorner, 2021, among others). A clear justification for conducting research on senior learners is the fact that while research on younger learners' L2 acquisition increases, there seems to be a lack of empirical studies on senior learners and the individual differences that may affect the L2 learning process. According to Ramírez Gómez (2016), such lack of research may be explained by three different factors: The first is that language learning is more common between younger population groups than it is for senior learners; the second reason is that most existing studies focus on age-associated cognitive losses, but do not explore the mechanisms they use to compensate for this deficit; and finally, theories that, such as the CPH developed by Lenneberg (1967), have led scholars to support the idea that younger learners are more advantageous in contrast to older learners in the second language (L2) learning process based on their age of onset (AO). In relation to this topic, relevant studies that support the existence of a CPH for L2 acquisition are Johnson & Newport's (1989) and Long's (1990). Despite this assumption, other studies such as that by Ioup, Boustagui, Tigi and Moselle (1994) found subjects who had achieved a native or near nativelike proficiency despite a later AO. Moreover, other researchers such as Dörnyei (2005) or Griffiths and Soruç (2021) point out an interplay between age and other contextual, environmental, or affective factors.

2.2.1 Age-related physical and cognitive changes

Ageing comes with some biological changes, both physical and cognitive. According to Oxford (2018), some of the physical changes imply a reduction in vision, audition, and coordination, whereas changes in cognition, as Drachmann (2006) explains, may involve

memory decrease, slowed responses, prolonged reaction times, and decreased “creativity” as well as some gross and microscopic brain changes. The central question between ageing and memory seems to be related to working memory (WM), which is in charge of manipulating, processing, and maintaining information during cognitive processes and is essential to transfer new information to long-term memory (Singleton, 2018). Contrary to what has been mentioned previously, at older ages, as Drachmann claims (2006: 1341), “other cognitive abilities, such as vocabulary, past knowledge, previously acquired skills, considered to be “crystallized intelligence” or wisdom, often remain intact until advanced age”.

Despite being aware of the physical and cognitive implications of ageing and how these may affect language learning, little research has been conducted to assess cognitive performance in senior L2 learners. One of the studies in relation to this topic was conducted by Mackey and Sachs (2012), which investigated the communicative performance of native speakers of Spanish who learned English as an L2 and who interacted with native speakers (NSs) of the language. This group of NSs also provided interactional feedback in response to non-target like question forms. In their results, the researchers observed that participants with a higher WM showed an improvement on the target question forms. In a study conducted by Kliesch, Guiroud, Pfenninger and Meyer (2018), the authors found both WM and L1 fluency to be strong predictors of L2 proficiency after they conducted an intensive 3-week course with Swiss German senior learners who learned English as a foreign language (EFL). However, it is important to emphasise that in both mentioned studies they also found that individual differences could be more predictive of L2 progress than age.

2.2.2 Age-related psychological changes

According to Oxford (2018), in order to understand the main characteristics of this population, it is fundamental to have some general understanding on their emotions. Some of the positive emotions that characterise this period of life are happiness, curiosity, pleasure, and joy (Frederickson, 2001, 2003, 2004; as cited in Oxford, 2018). However, ageing may come with some more difficult emotions. In most countries, as Ramírez Gómez (2016) states, senior learners have a positive view about retirement, as it entails a release of the stress working environment. However, it also implies the loss of many financial, social, and psychological elements, such as a salary, a role in society, social

networks, and a life purpose (Ramírez Gómez, 2016), and therefore, retired adults find themselves in the need of readjusting to a new lifestyle and searching for sources that bring these financial, social, and psychological elements. In the effort of finding new life purposes and social networks, many individuals may experience social inhibition, a lower self-confidence, and less tolerance to making mistakes (Ramírez Gómez, 2016).

Some of these emotions can also be seen in the results of the interviews conducted by Andrew (2012) with Hector and Felix, two retired Mexican EFL learners. In this study, Hector claimed feeling more alone and less attached to his family and friends as a typical result of this period of life; something that he describes as a ‘flattening of affect’. Felix, the other interviewee, expressed having plunged into a severe depression after being abruptly asked to retire at the age of 56 and feeling distressed after noticing the downturn of some cognitive and physical capacities.

2.2.3 Healthy ageing

Facing a considerable growth of the ageing population and ageing being a natural, unavoidable process, promoting healthy ageing in order to prevent neurocognitive diseases and increasing quality of life seems a relevant subject to have on the agenda.

It is believed that learning a foreign language can improve cognitive plasticity as it enhances memory load, concentration, and organisation of information of the brain, which, in turn, leads to better expression of thoughts and feelings and can improve lost brain capacity as well as social and affective skills (Gabryś-Barker, 2017, p. xx). This can be observed in several studies, such as the one by Bubbico, Chiacchiareta, Parenti, di Marco, Panara, Sepedel, Ferretti, and Perruccil (2019), in which they proved that a short intensive foreign languages course can lead to considerable improvement in cognition and increase functional connectivity. In another study, conducted in the Czech Republic by Valis, Slaninova, Prazak, Poulouva, Kacetl and Klimova (2019), the researchers aimed at exploring to what extent L2 learning may enhance healthy senior learners’ cognitive functions. The results of their research show a slight enhancement of the cognitive abilities of those belonging to the experimental group, who received English language training.

Similarly, other studies report that bilingualism may have potential to delay neurocognitive diseases such as Alzheimer’s Disease (AD). Craik, Bialystok and Freedman (2010), for instance, collected data from a total of 211 monolingual and bilingual patients diag-

nosed with probable AD and were able to confirm that bilingualism is a cognitive operation that contributes to cognitive reserve and prove that this condition postpones the onset of symptoms of AD. Moreover, as Pikhart and Klimova (2020) found, language learning not only improves brain functions but also increases quality of life, as it is closely linked to subjective feelings of happiness. In their study, the researchers explored the aspects of positive psychology related to second language learning by means of a questionnaire and observed that senior learners, in contrast to younger learners, associate much more their feelings of happiness with L2 acquisition. On a psychological level, similar results appear in Pfenninger and Polz's (2018) study, in which they examined the potential linguistic, socio-affective, and cognitive benefits of language learning on L2 German speakers after a four-week EFL training course, they confirmed the enhancement of cognitive abilities as well as linguistic self-confidence, communicative skills, and subjective wellbeing. In their study, 12 participants were split in two different groups; 6 of them were German/Slovenian bilinguals and the other 6 were German monolinguals. From the responses to the questionnaire that they utilised to investigate the social and psychological impacts of language learning, they observed that 83% of the monolinguals see the English course as an activity that positively affects their social life by increasing conversations with family, friends, and neighbours, and being praised by others when they would talk about their engagement in a language course. Some of them also expressed an improvement in their personal wellbeing and emphasised that their self-confidence improved, and that they generally considered language learning a valuable experience.

2.3 Individual differences

As Dörnyei (2006: 42) put it: "IDs are a prominent feature of SLA because a great deal of the variation in language learning outcomes is attributable, either directly or indirectly, to various learner characteristics". In view of the issues affecting senior learners that have been analysed in the previous sections, it follows that IDs may have a very relevant role in the second language acquisition (SLA) process in this population, since it is very important to stress that these factors may help make these differences in cognition less visible between groups of different ages (Mackey & Sachs, 2012) and may be determinant in how successful a learner of an L2 is.

According to Griffiths and Soruç (2021), beliefs, motivation, and strategies can be considered factors of importance in the language classroom, and even though *age* is considered an individual difference itself that interacts with the rest, in contrast with the others, it has a totally different nature, as it is biological, whereas the three individual differences investigated in this study are psychological.

2.3.1 Beliefs

According to Ellis (2008), learners' *beliefs* about language learning clearly impact the process and the product of learning. As Barcelos (2006: 11) defines this term, beliefs are "preconceived notions, myths and misconceptions" about language learning. Horwitz (1987) developed the most frequently used questionnaire on beliefs – the *Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory* or *BALLI*, which explores the importance that learners believe the English language has, their motivation to study it and the opportunities it may bring to their lives. It also investigates difficulties, learning, and communication strategies, as well as their expectations with the language (Horwitz, 1987). According to Griffiths and Soruç (2021), beliefs can potentially shape how effective language learning is.

In the previously mentioned interviews conducted by Andrew (2012) with Hector and Felix, they both acknowledged feeling disadvantaged in relation to younger learners due to their age. However, Felix expressed that enthusiasm may help counteract other age-related cognitive losses. In the case of Hector, he linked his study of English with an increased status and self-esteem and questioned whether learning a foreign language at older ages requires an age-related learning ability, or whether you only need motivation. Other researchers such as Pikhart and Klimova (2020) have investigated senior learners' thoughts on language learning and how they experience it. In their study, participants answered a questionnaire that consisted of 20 statements about the possible impact language learning can have into their lives. From their results, not only we can infer that those respondents see language learning as an activity that brings cognitive benefits increasing their memory and concentration, but also enhances feelings of happiness and satisfaction, as it improves social relationships.

Up to date, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no questionnaire has been developed to explore beliefs about learning Spanish as an L2 and how it may contribute to senior learners' life.

2.3.2 Motivation

Another psychological construct involved in L2 learning that has generated an increasing interest for the last sixty years is *motivation*. This is primarily because it is widely recognised as a variable that clearly impacts the L2 learning process and seems to be determinant to the learner's achievement of a language (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). It also impacts the learners' success, if understood not only as ultimate attainment but also as other behavioural outcomes such as persistence in learning (Ushioda, 2019). Originally, Gardner and Lambert (1959) identified two types of motivation based on the reasons for engaging in language learning, namely *instrumental*, and *integrative motivation*. A language learner with an instrumental motivation may study a language for a practical reason, such as a salary bonus or a better career prospect. On the other hand, the latter refers to the learner's interest to communicate and be part of a target language community by speaking their language.

However, little attention has been paid to senior learners' motivation and few studies have been conducted to explore this variable in this population. Moreover, most of them included participants who studied English as a foreign language and not Spanish. This is the case of the study conducted by Schiller and Dorner (2019), in which they investigated 30 Hungarian senior learners' motivational profile by means of a 93-item questionnaire about language learning motivation. From their results, we can observe that the most influential factors were positive attitudes towards EFL, as well as having defined goals with the language. However, unlike young adult language learners, integrativeness does not seem to be one of the main motivational factors, as senior learners less often engage in language learning in order to integrate into the target language's community. In a study conducted by Pfenninger and Polz (2018), where they explored the linguistic, cognitive, and socio-affective effects of an intensive, four-week EFL course, 12 German-speaking senior learners (6 German/Slovenian bilinguals; 6 German-speaking monolinguals) were asked through a questionnaire about their motivation to learn English. The researchers found that the main motivation for monolinguals was a general interest in the English language, a desire to read and understand written English, communicating with English speakers, travelling, and taking up a new challenge. With regards to the bilingual group, the main motivation was to communicate with English speakers. They also observed that

all participants developed their own personal goals with the language that could involve “mutual learning”, “being able to communicate with others”, “ambition and thirst for knowledge”, “curiosity”, “fun”, “reading”, “thinking”, “writing” and “laughing”. On the other hand, in the interviews conducted by Andrew (2012), both participants’ main incentive to engage in EFL at older ages was a need to have an active lifestyle after retirement.

2.3.3 Learner strategies

As previously explained, ageing comes with many biological and social changes, which may affect the process of foreign language acquisition. As seen in Piechurska-Kuciel and Szyszka (2017), senior learners may use compensatory strategies to counteract age-related losses. *Compensation* in SLA encompasses those strategies used by a learner in order to make up for the deficits in linguistic knowledge during the development of foreign language acquisition (Piechurska-Kuciel & Szyszka, 2017). These strategies have been classified as *language learning strategies* and *communication strategies*. The first group deals with the strategies used for comprehension and production despite the existence of gaps in grammar or vocabulary. Following Oxford’s (1990) classification of language learning strategies, we can distinguish two main groups: *Direct* and *indirect strategies*. According to her, *direct strategies* involve the use of the target language. In this group we observe three subcategorisations: *Memory*, *cognitive* and *compensation strategies*. The former represents strategies used for the retrieval of new information by linking images and sounds, the second entails direct manipulation of the learning materials such as note-taking and summarising, and the latter refers to the ways in which a learner deals with the gaps they encounter in their knowledge, such as guessing, gesturing, or using synonyms. On the other hand, *indirect strategies* involve supporting oneself with strategies that imply “focusing”, “planning”, “evaluating”, “seeking opportunities”, “controlling anxiety”, “increasing cooperation and empathy”, etc. This latter group encompasses three subcategorisations: *Metacognitive*, *affective*, and *social strategies*. *Metacognitive strategies* are those used by the learner to regulate their learning process, some examples involve planning and evaluating their own process. *Affective strategies* represent how learners deal with their own emotions in the learning process, and *social strategies* involve interaction with others through questions and cooperation.

With regards to *communication strategies*, they deal with the techniques used by a learner when he/she encounters difficulties during the interaction with an interlocutor and how he/she tackles them (Dörnyei, 1995). According to the findings of a study by Mora, Quito, Macías, Fárez, and Quinde (2018), in which they investigated the strategies used to learn English as a foreign language by 66 Equatorian senior learners through a questionnaire, learners use metacognitive strategies more often than they use memory, cognitive, compensation, affective and social strategies. This implies that senior learners tend to have clear goals, do a lot of planning to maximise their productivity with the language, and seek opportunities to practice it. They also use other strategies such as note-taking and summarising, and seem to employ the strategies of guessing, use of synonyms and gestures, and so on.

Research questions

Bearing in mind the main characteristics of senior learners and the implications of ageing, the present study will aim at exploring the learning of L2 Spanish by senior learners, as well as their reasons to engage in it, and thus, will seek to answer the following research questions (RQs):

1. Which beliefs do L1 English senior learners of L2 Spanish hold about learning Spanish?
2. What is the main motivation of senior learners to engage in L2 Spanish learning?
3. What strategies do senior learners use to tackle the difficulties encountered in the process of learning L2 Spanish?

3. THE STUDY

3.1 Participants

The participants selected for this multiple case study consist of 9 L1 English learners of Spanish (3 female, 6 male) as a foreign language (FL) who are based in the United Kingdom and were taking online classes because of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of the study, their ages ranged from 61 to 81 years old. The participants used for this study

form a convenient sample due to the fact that all participants are or have been students of the researcher or because they are students at the school where she teaches.

In order to ensure the homogeneity of the sample, a background questionnaire was administered as a preselection procedure so as to collect further information. Participants who did not meet the proposed criteria for the study were disregarded. More specifically, a total of 2 participants were excluded from the study because they had more than one L1 (1 female) or to the context in which they were learning Spanish, in this case, a Spanish-speaking country (1 male). *Table 1* below presents an overview of the participants in terms of their gender, age, L1, country of origin, occupation, and knowledge of other languages.

Gender	Age (y/o)	L1	Country of origin	Occupation	Other languages
Female	61	English	Ireland	Retired	German; French
Male	63	English	UK	Retired	French; Italian
Male	63	English	UK	Full-time	French
Male	64	English	UK	Retired	None
Female	66	English	UK	Retired	None
Male	69	English	Ireland	Retired	None
Male	78	English	UK	Retired	French; German; Russian; Catalan
Male	79	English	Ireland	Retired	Irish; French
Female	81	English	UK	Retired	French

Table 1. Participants' features

3.2 Instruments

In order to carry out this study, a mixed-methods approach was followed to gather the data; the instruments used were a background questionnaire, a questionnaire on beliefs, motivation, and strategies, and a fifteen-minute semi-structured interview with each participant, which are described below.

3.2.1 Background questionnaire

As mentioned above, in order to learn more about each of the participant's background, a background questionnaire was designed. This background questionnaire provided the information included in *Table 1*, as well as some general questions about their previous and current use and experiences with languages (see appendix A).

3.2.2 Questionnaire on beliefs, motivation, and strategies

In order to explore senior learners' beliefs about language learning, motivation for studying and strategies to tackle the difficulties encountered in the learning process, a questionnaire that consisted of 36 statements to be rated on a five-point Likert Scale was distributed (see appendix B). The reason for using Likert Scales is that, according to Horwitz (1987), beliefs about language learning can be measured through Likert scales questionnaires. Moreover, the *SILL* questionnaire, designed by Oxford in 1989 to study strategies used by language learners, consisted of a list of statements to be measured with the use of five-point Likert scales as well. The statements included in the questionnaire were defined based on previous studies referenced in the literature review section, mainly those by Pikhart and Klimova (2020), Pfenninger and Polz (2018), and Mora et al. (2018). More specifically, in this questionnaire, statements 1 to 6 and also statement number 9 were adapted from the questionnaire used in the study by Pikhart and Klimova (2020); statements 7 and 8, and 13 to 18 were adapted based on the results from the study by Pfenninger and Polz (2018); and finally, statements 25 to 36 were adapted from the study by Mora et al. (2018), whose statements used were the ones from the *SILL* questionnaire (Oxford, 1989). The rest of the statements (10, 12, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24) were designed by the researcher. The questionnaire also included a final section for the participants to leave any comments they wished to make, which also helped in the development of the semi-structured interviews, as described in section 3.2.3.

3.2.3 Semi-structured interviews

Based on the information obtained from the background questionnaire and the questionnaire on beliefs, motivation, and strategies, an outline for the interviews was designed (see appendix C). This outline included a distinction between those who had previous experience with other languages and those who did not. In these fifteen-minute interviews, the researcher made emphasis on their goals with the Spanish language, their interest in travelling or potentially integrating in a Spanish-speaking community, some of the strategies and resources they found useful and, in the case of those who had studied other languages in the past, how all of these compare to their previous experiences with other languages. All interviews were conducted in English, their L1, in order to obtain complete explanations.

3.3 Procedure

To conduct the present study, the researcher contacted the potential participants via email and sent them a consent form in which they were informed that the study was about the analysis of acquisition of foreign languages by senior learners.

After the background questionnaire was designed, it was piloted with a senior learner who shared the same characteristics as the participants of this study, and a few changes were made to it before its distribution, such as including a question about their occupation, and including two different questions to differentiate between resources used to learn Spanish in the past and in the present. After reading the responses to the background questionnaire and excluding two potential participants, the questionnaire on beliefs, motivation, and strategies was also piloted with the previously mentioned senior learner. Only after that, participants were asked to answer this second questionnaire.

From the information extracted from the questionnaire on beliefs and the comments added at the end of the questionnaire by the participants themselves, a guideline for the semi-structured interviews was designed. Before conducting the interviews, a pilot interview with the participant who had piloted the previous questionnaires was also conducted in order to see the effectiveness of the questions, as well as to find out if other thoughts or ideas arose during the interview. This pilot interview provided a general overview of questions that could be expressed differently and possible ideas for the actual interviews. After the piloting, a fifteen-minute semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant and then transcribed using Otter (see extracts from interviews in appendix C.1).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Results from the questionnaire on beliefs, motivation, and strategies

This questionnaire can be split into three different parts, as it covers relevant topics on beliefs, motivation, and strategies. For the sake of clarity, in order to analyse the responses of the questionnaire, they were merged into three blocks; *Strongly agree* and *agree* became one first block called *Agree*, *Neither agree nor disagree* became the second defined as *Neutral*, and *Disagree* and *Strongly disagree* became the last one, namely

Disagree. Similarly, results will be specified by gender to reveal possible differences, which, nevertheless, is not the objective of the present study. Figures 1, 2 and 3 provide an overview of their responses based on the previously mentioned three blocks.

Questions 1 to 10 investigated the participants' beliefs about the learning of L2 Spanish (see *Figure 1*). From their responses in questions 1 and 2, we can observe that 8 of the 9 participants find this activity beneficial for their cognitive skills, whereas just one of the participants remained neutral. However, he added a comment in the last section of the questionnaire where he expressed the impossibility to answer this question, as he did not recall having any difficulties remembering things or concentrating before he started learning Spanish. Out of the 9 participants, only 3 of them (2 female; 1 male) link this activity with an enhancement of their capacity to learn other things, whereas the rest appear to be neutral, as seen in the results from question 3. Questions 4, 5, 6 and 7 reflect their subjective thoughts on how learning Spanish may improve their social life (questions 5 and 6) and bring positive feelings such as an increased self-confidence and joy (questions 4 and 7). In total, 6 respondents (1 female; 5 male) out of the 9 acknowledged finding this activity useful to enhance social bonds and 4 of them (2 female; 2 male) manifested that it helped them understand other realities, whereas the other 5 remained neutral. All participants agreed that learning Spanish brings them feelings of joy and 6 of them (2 female; 4 male) expressed an increased self-confidence linked to this activity. An improvement in wellbeing and life activity was also perceived from questions 8 and 9, where 5 of the respondents (2 female; 3 male) agreed that this activity contributes to their overall wellbeing and in total, 7 of them (3 female; 4 male) found that it helped them remain busy and active. In question 10, 6 of the respondents (3 female; 3 male) expressed that learning Spanish may be easier the younger you are. However, it is important to emphasise that from these 6 respondents who agreed with the statement, 3 of them had no previous experience learning other languages, whereas the participant who disagreed has a wide experience studying languages in the past.

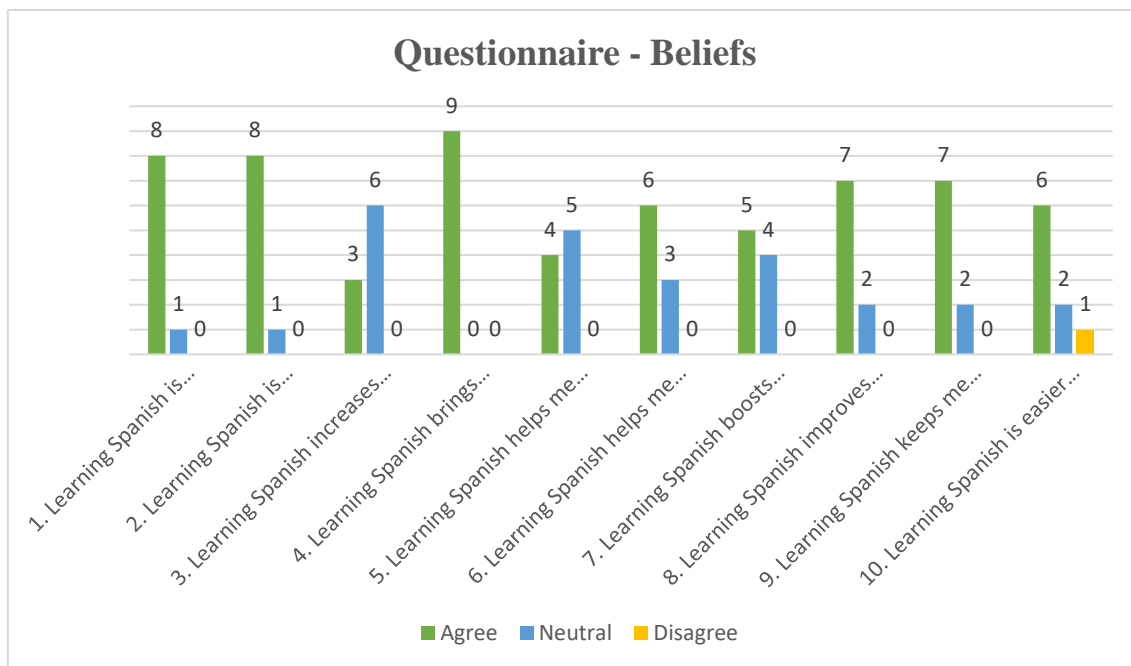


Figure 1. Overview of the responses to the questions on beliefs

In relation to motivation (see *Figure 2*), questions 11 to 24 covered different topics related to goals, integrative motivation, and general thoughts on their Spanish lessons. Question 11 shows that 6 (2 female; 4 male) of the 9 respondents set themselves goals with the language. These goals, as seen from questions 12, 13 and 14, express a desire to understand both oral and written Spanish, but only 5 of them (2 female; 3 male) see fluency as a main goal. Question 15 proves that all respondents wish to travel and communicate with native speakers, but only 3 of them (3 male) have an actual desire of integrating in a Spanish-speaking community (see question 16). From questions 17, 18 and 19, we can perceive a general interest in both language and culture, and general desire for learning new things, as 7 of the respondents (3 female; 4 male) expressed being interested in the language, 7 of them (2 female; 5 male) in the culture and 6 of them (3 female; 3 male) a desire to learn new things. Even though 5 participants (1 female; 4 male in both cases) acknowledged feeling unable to learn the language sometimes (questions 23 and 24), none of them have reported thinking of dropping their classes nor feeling discouraged by the challenges of the language. Instead, 7 of them (3 female; 4 male) expressed feeling happy with their progress with the language.

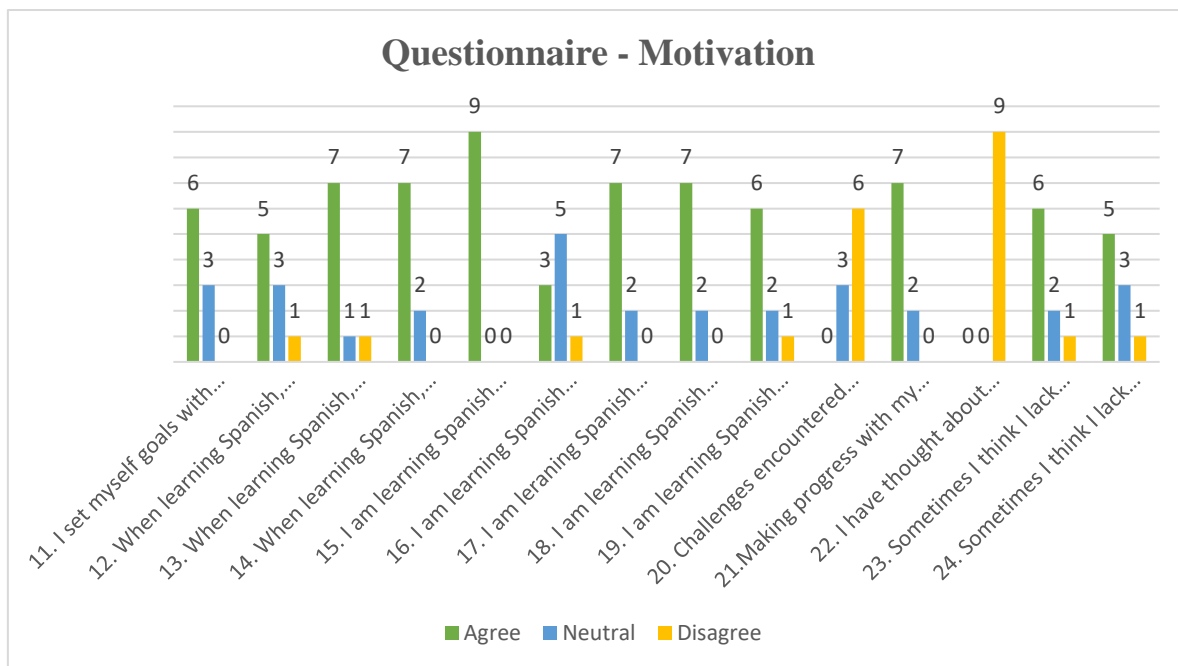


Figure 2. Overview of the responses to the question on motivation

With regard to learner strategies (see *Figure 3* and questions 25 to 36), responses from question 25 show that only 3 participants (1 female; 2 male) associate new knowledge in Spanish with languages they have learned previously, 3 of them (1 female; 2 male) were neutral and the other 3 (1 female; 2 male) do not seem to employ this strategy, consistent with the fact that two of these three participants have no previous experience learning other languages. Moreover, participants do not employ *memory strategies* often, since only 4 participants (1 female; 3 male) expressed using the sounds of English to remember new words in Spanish (question 26) and only 1 of them (1 male) seems to use the images of a word to recall new vocabulary (question 27). Results from question 28 and 29 reveal that at least 5 participants (5 male) review their Spanish lessons periodically and 5 participants (2 female; 3 male) take notes during their classes. From responses to question 30, we can observe that most participants (3 female; 4 male) use their reasoning to find patterns in the Spanish language. Only 5 participants (2 female; 3 male) attempt to find ways to talk to native speakers. Regarding questions 32, 33 and 36, participants' responses reveal a frequent use of the target language as a *compensation strategy* when encountering gaps in their knowledge, as in the three questions, 8 participants acknowledged inferring the meaning of new words from context, attempting to formulate differently and asking interlocutors to slow down or repeat. However, in question 34, 4 participants (1 female; 3 male) also acknowledged code-switching to English when they did not know the word in Spanish. Participants also make use of other resources such as

gesturing (question 35), as 6 respondents (3 female; 3 male) agreed with the statement. Question 36 shows that respondents interact with native speakers in the target language, as 8 (5 male; 3 female) of 9 respondents expressed asking their interlocutors to repeat or slow down when they do not understand, which is a *social strategy*.

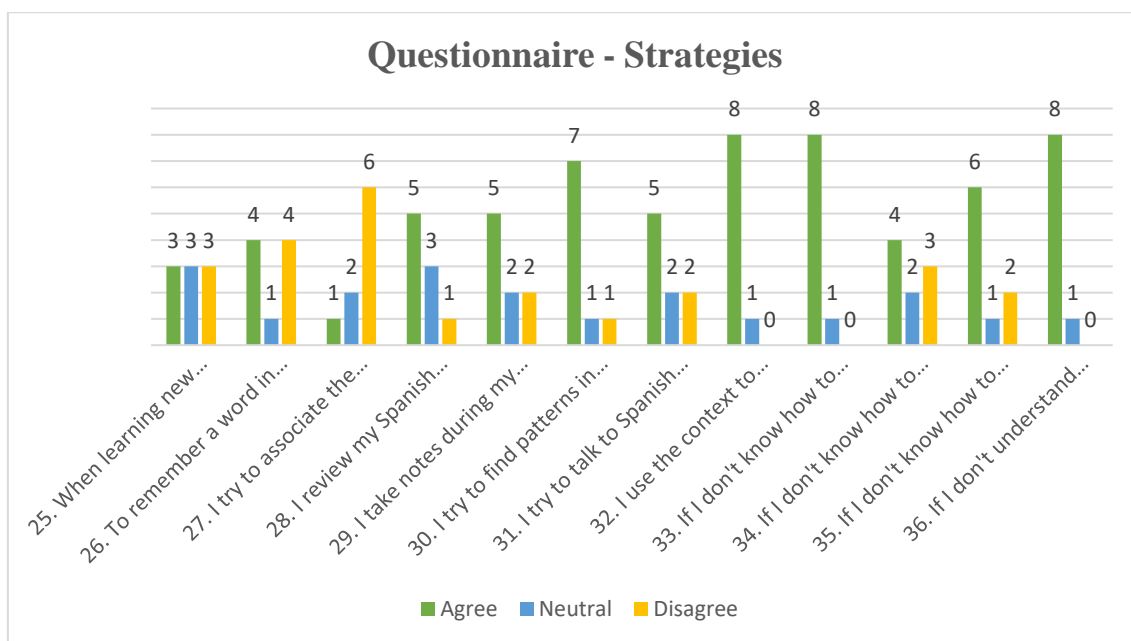


Figure 3. Overview of the responses to the questions on strategies

4.2 Results from the semi-structured interviews

Following the division used in the previous questionnaire, the semi-structured interviews aimed at gaining deeper knowledge on each participant and their beliefs, motivation, and strategies used to learn Spanish as an L2, and therefore each interview can be divided into these three topics (extracts from the interviews can be found in Appendix C.1).

During the interviews, 3 participants (3 male) out of 9 mentioned seeing their age as a handicap to learn Spanish and believe this activity is much easier to do at younger ages:

“The brain remembers things better when you are younger.” (Mark)

“I think 30 years ago, 40 years ago, my brain was sharper. But it had to be sharper, because of the nature of the workout I was doing. There were many more stimuli.” (Paul)

However, one of the participants (1 male) thinks that, even if learning a language at older ages might be slightly more difficult, you still can do it:

“There is a view that you can't learn a language as an adult, because you just can't. And I think that's wrong. I think that's wrong. I think it's a bit more difficult, obviously, than for a 17-year-old or a 12. But if you make the effort, you can get somewhere.” (Michael)

One participant (1 female), who had started learning Spanish at the age of 20 and then resumed her classes at the age of 58, expressed that in her case it had been easier to learn the language when she was younger because she learned it while she was living in Spain and the experience was completely different.

Nevertheless, 4 participants (1 female; 3 male) also expressed the benefits of conducting this activity at older ages, making emphasis on the amount of time they have now to do different activities as well as feeling a relief of external pressures:

“Because I'm now retired, I can organise my day the way I want to organise my day. So for many people, it's a case of after a hard day of working and not having much time and having family to take care of them... For them, it's much more difficult. And for me, this is now a very good time for me to get stuck in and properly immerse myself.” (Emily)

“It's easier now [to learn a language] because I have more time. And there is not so much pressure. But I think if I had started earlier, it would have been good.” (Paul)

All participants stated that learning Spanish is an activity that brings benefits to their life; at least three of them (1 female; 2 male) believe this activity is beneficial for cognition:

“I think it's very good cognitive practice. [...] It's very important to stay motivated to keep testing yourself, to keep learning, to try and find anything new.” (Emily)

“I think if you want an activity that is going to keep your mind alert, then one of the things you can do is to do crosswords, and Sudoku puzzles and things like that. And the other thing you can do is start to learn a language.” (Bill)

“It's a habit that helps your memory.” (Jim)

Moreover, 7 participants (3 female; 4 male) expressed that this activity brings positive emotions such as happiness, enjoyment, pleasure, willingness to travel, openness, interests, and activeness to their lives, even if it can be frustrating at times, as expressed by Mark:

“I think it's definitely changed my life because it's like having a presence, a friend. [...] It's made a difference, huge difference.” (Michael)

“The reality of getting older is that your life does get narrower. You do less things, you meet less new people. You just do less things. And whilst Spanish has some frustrations or many frustrations with viability, I know that it's also stretching me and expanding my mind and my life.” (Mark)

Increased social relationships or the possibility to interact with speakers of the language was also mentioned by 4 participants (1 female; 3 male):

“It's an opportunity to talk to people. And it's also an opportunity to see the way other people react in relation to the events of the world.” (Bill)

Out of these 4 participants, 2 of them (1 male; 1 female) also mentioned having been praised or treated differently by native speakers after using Spanish to communicate with them:

“If I'm in London, and there's some Spanish people in there and they're lost, or they don't understand something, I've often been able to help them and they've been like oh, amazing that I've been able to help them and speak to them in their language” (Annie)

With regards to motivation, among the different main reasons to learn Spanish, the one most frequently mentioned had to do with travelling around Spanish-speaking countries, which was expressed by all participants. Other reasons mentioned were speaking to family and friends (2 female; 3 male), increasing cognitive practice (1 male), and interest in the language and the culture (1 female; 2 male). Some participants mentioned more than one of the reasons listed. As previously explained, all participants manifested that their primary incentive to start learning the language was a desire to be able to communicate in Spanish when travelling:

“I suppose initially, it was being in Menorca with Caroline, my wife, Caroline plays bridge. But this meant that while she was playing bridge, I didn't really have anything to do. But nor could I talk to the local people other than in English. And I much prefer to speak in their own language. And so I therefore began to speak Spanish or to learn Spanish. And that was the start.” (Bill)

Three of them (1 female; 2 male) expressed having interest in both the language and the culture:

“In 2016, I did an English teaching course. CELTA, they call it CELTA. [...] And the end of the course, the lady in charge said the way to make yourself a better English teacher is to learn another language. And for me, that was the trigger. That was the prompt that I needed to start learning Spanish. So that's what I did. [...] I was always interested in Spain, in its history, in the Civil War.” (Michael)

“It's not just the language, it's learning about Spain and learning about a different culture. Because I think so much of our history is in common.” (Mary)

Although it was not the aim of the interview, at least 6 participants (1 female; 5 male) talked about the use of English around the world both seen as a native speaker and as someone who travels around the world and wishes to practice a language. Some of them (3 male) referred to the fact that since English is the language of communication, native speakers of the language often become lazy to learn other languages and were critical about the learning of foreign languages as part of the curriculum at school:

“In general, at school in the UK, languages are not learned very well. They do not have the same importance in school, as Maths and English and other subjects.” (Mark)

“I feel embarrassed for our country that we can’t speak another language.” (Jim)

However, it is in this sort of situations where some participants saw the need of acquiring a new language.

“It seems normal to speak to Spanish speaking people in Spanish, as I find it normal to speak to Catalan speakers in their language, if and when I can.” (Bill)

On some occasions, at least 4 participants (1 female; 3 male) saw the widespread use of English as an impediment to put their Spanish into practice:

“When you go into a hotel, it would be nice to actually be able to say we've reserved a room for the two people, we're here for three nights and not immediately speak in English. Even though I know that probably they will instantly come back to me in a very good English. It's a plus of being English. But it's also a minus when you travel.” (Phillip)

“Some people who insist on speaking English to you, because they are doing what I like to do, which is speak the language they have learned.” (Bill)

Another question posed in the interview dealt with the goals each participant had with the Spanish language. From their responses, we can observe that most participants (8 out of 9) see native-like fluency as nearly unachievable regardless of the big difference between their ages (Emily was 61 years old, whereas Mary was 81):

“I'm not interested in fluency because I'm not particularly brilliant at languages. It's never interested me too, because people will always know I'm English.” (Phillip)

“I think fluency is not achievable.” (Mary)

Out of the 9 participants, only one of them (1 male) aims at reaching a native-speaker level of fluency:

“My goal is to become as fluent in both reading, writing, and speaking Spanish as I am in French. And my French is as good as my English. So, I want to be perfectly trilingual.” (Bill)

In the interview, this participant mentioned he had particular interest in literature and politics and wishes to be able to discuss any topics that are related. Unlike this previously mentioned participant (Bill), two participants (1 female; 1 male) have a desire to be “fluent enough to communicate easily” about different topics without aiming at a native-like level of proficiency:

“I would like to be fluent enough to be able to converse with anybody easily.” (Emily)

“I would like to have a level of fluency not like a native obviously, obviously, but a level of fluency so that I can live in Spain, live in South America, and have a slightly different life.” (Michael)

Four participants (1 female; 3 male) also mentioned that they do not wish to discuss profound topics in the language, but rather to get by when they are travelling around Spanish-speaking countries or wish to speak to someone:

“To be able to find a train destination, get on the train, be polite and ask for directions, have meals, interact with people, but not to discuss the philosophy of economics or the politics of the Franco era.” (Paul)

“Not to speak about philosophy or plays or anything, just to say: ‘How are you?’, because that's polite. I'm not expecting to have long in-depth conversations.” (Mary)

Another participant, Mark, also linked his goal to having an increased confidence when travelling around Spanish-speaking countries. His aim is not only to get by in certain situations, but also to feel confident when using the language:

“I enjoy trying to learn the language, and I suppose, you know, my goals are to get better at it so that when I go to Spain or South America, I can feel more confident.” (Mark)

Participants Emily and Annie also referred to the importance of grammar and speaking correctly:

“Some people would say that I'm already there [at a level of fluency] because I can have a conversation. But for me, no, I make way too many mistakes.” (Emily)

“I know that grammar is not everybody's cup of tea. And I know people say ‘look, it's not important. The communication is the important thing. And, you know, don't worry about the grammar.’ But I do worry about the grammar. I want to speak correctly.” (Annie)

From the 8 participants who see fluency difficult to achieve, 2 male participants (Phillip and Mark) mentioned the dedication, ambition, and time investment it requires and how without them, the likelihood of achieving native-like fluency drops:

“Probably I will never get to a particularly high level. Everything is a question of how much time you want to put into something, isn't it?” (Phillip)

“I am quite a lazy and unambitious person, really. So I don't set myself goals. And I don't have targets.” (Mark)

Out of the 9 participants, only 1 participant (Michael) wishes to integrate into a Spanish-speaking community in the future by living in a Spanish-speaking country for some time, but not forever. Michael was the only participant working full time at the time of the study. The rest of them only wish to be in Spanish-speaking countries for short visits,

even though at least 2 of them (1 female; 1 male) have considered the options at some point or would like to do it but their lives hold them back:

“In my fantasies, yes. But my reality is here, with my wife, with my dogs with, you know, with providing the base for the family. So I know that I can’t do that.” (Mark)

In the interviews, close attention was paid to the motivation to learn other languages in the past, in contrast to their motivation to learn Spanish. As we have been able to see, most participants wish to learn the Spanish language to travel or to speak to native speakers of the language. However, when asked about their experiences with languages studied in the past, most participants (3 female; 3 male) expressed that learning French or German was imposed to them at school, as it was part of the English school system. Out of these 6 participants, 3 of them (1 female; 2 male) claimed not having learned anything at all. Others continued to learn the language for different reasons, such as for work (2 male) or to live in a different country for a while (1 female; 3 male). Other reasons to study languages had to do with curiosity (1 male) and interest in their own country, in the case of Jim, who wished to learn some Irish because it is the language of his country.

When remembering past times learning other languages, some participants (1 female; 3 male) commented on how different it would have been with the existence of the internet and being able to find a method and strategies that works for them.

Linked to the topic of strategies and contributing to keeping themselves motivated with the Spanish language, all participants expressed having found materials that work for them. From the results we can see a mixture of resources they found useful, putting special emphasis on those provided by the internet:

“I watch absolute rubbish on Netflix. The *telenovelas* for me are fantastic because you get used to the characters, and then you get used to the phrases that they use, because each personality within telenovela has a particular way of speaking and a particular vocabulary that they use. And the more I hear that, the more I’m able to understand what they say.” (Emily)

“I listen to half an hour of the TV, *24 horas* in Spanish, and I also have online the digital version of *El País*.” (Bill)

All participants use internet resources such as online platforms (Yabla, SpanishDict...) and apps; more specifically 5 of them (3 female; 2 male) make daily use of Duolingo:

“I know, an awful lot of people don't agree with it, or don't think it's very good, but I still do Duolingo every day.” (Emily)

At least 4 participants (1 female; 3 male) specifically mentioned the importance of the internet nowadays, and define it as a fundamental resource in their process of learning Spanish, especially those who studied other languages in the past and have the possibility to contrast their own past experiences with their experience learning Spanish nowadays:

“When I was doing French and Italian, the internet didn't exist. And it was a very different thing learning a language then than it is now you have the whole of the internet and all the resources and all.” (Michael)

“It was very difficult before the internet; the internet is a great help. Well, I think it's been a help.” (Jim)

Not only did they say that it provides them with lots of resources but also that it helps them to do some research and be able to explore the different methods that may work for them, as expressed by Michael:

“Before I started learning Spanish, I did some research. And I decided not to try and speak for 18 months. And so, I just absorbed, read stories, listened. [...] And this is a method that some people use, it may not be the best. Yeah, it may not be the best, it may not be the right method for everyone. But I think it suited me. And also, as an adult, an older person, I had the luxury of researching, and exploring various different things on the internet, particularly, to help me learn Spanish.” (Michael)

Besides the internet, 6 participants (2 female; 4 male) make frequent use of *cognitive strategies*, since they read graded books, Spanish literature or English literature translated into Spanish; 7 participants (3 female; 4 male) also emphasised finding useful listening to oral Spanish using different resources such as apps to listen to the news, watching series, listening to podcasts, or watching videos.

In terms of strategies used to improve their Spanish and acquiring new words and structures, Bill, who has studied at least 5 different languages, commented on how his knowledge of different languages can be helpful to understand and retain new rules and structures in Spanish:

“You know what you're looking for when learning a foreign language, particularly one which has the same roots. So you'll know that there are masculine and feminine, you know that the adjectives go with those masculine and feminine nouns. You know there are different tenses. Whereas a lot of British people without language knowledge, they may know it, but it's not an active part of their way of being, until you know that, and you know what you're looking for. And when it comes up, you say 'ah, that's the way they say it in Spanish, or that's different'. But if it's different, you register it as different.” (Bill)

Unlike Bill, Emily and Mary find that learning other languages at the same time or the knowledge you have can be misleading at times or cause accidental interference:

“I’m a bit scared that if I start to learn German as well as Spanish, I’ll start getting confused with some Spanish words coming into German and German words coming into Spanish, for example.” (Emily)

“French sometimes misleads you. I mean *nombre* in French is *number*.” (Mary)

5. DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to examine beliefs, motivation, and strategies used by nine senior learners of L2 Spanish. Results can be divided into these three thematic groups. In relation to the first, namely *beliefs*, results from both questionnaire and interviews suggest that most participants associate learning Spanish with the enhancement of cognitive skills or, at least, as an activity that might be good to carry out at older ages. Not only they believe it improves cognition, but they also experience an increase of positive emotions such as joy, pleasure, and enjoyment. Such findings are in line with those in the study conducted by Pikhart and Klimova (2020), who concluded that senior learners found that L2 language learning brought positive feelings such as happiness and satisfaction. These positive emotions were mentioned by most participants when they were asked about what Spanish brings into their lives, which suggests that most of them consider learning Spanish as a valuable activity closely connected to positive emotions, regardless of difficulties and frustrations encountered along the learning process. In addition, most participants linked this activity with an increased self-confidence, something also expressed by participants in the study by Pfenninger and Polz (2018) and by Hector, the EFL senior learner interviewed by Andrew (2012). Responses to the questionnaire and questions posed during the interviews may also point to the fact that most participants find that this activity increases their possibilities to interact with other people, and some of them also mentioned feeling valued by native Spanish speakers when making use of the language. In addition, most participants manifested finding this activity easier at younger ages, as they expressed feeling that their brains and memory used to function better in the past, something which conditions their expectations with the Spanish language, as will be discussed further in the discussion. These thoughts were also expressed by the interviewees Hector and Felix in Andrew’s (2012) study, who saw their ages as a drawback to learn a language. Interestingly, even if some of the participants feel handicapped by their age, they also see retirement as the perfect time to engage in such activity, as they feel relieved from external pressures such as work or children and have more time

to organise their day. This idea was also expressed in the interview Andrew (2012) conducted with Hector, in which he stated that senior learners have more experience and time to dedicate to this activity, whereas younger learners do not see language learning as a priority. This thought is very important, considering that most of the participants proved being aware of how much time acquiring a language requires and see time as a factor that plays a key role in the learning process.

Regarding *motivation*, results from the questionnaire suggest the existence of goals with the language that do not necessarily have to do with fluency. This was also observed in the answers provided by the participants themselves when they were asked about seeing fluency as a goal during the interviews, in which most participants except one (who has wide experience learning languages) saw native-like fluency as ‘unachievable’. Rather, they aim at achieving a ‘good communicating level’ or a level that suits their needs with the language. Moreover, most participants referred to their age as a limitation, which shows that the implications of ageing can be determinant in their expectations with the language. Results also revealed that despite encountering challenges or at some point feeling unable to learn the Spanish language, they still wish to continue to learn and do not feel discouraged by any of these, probably linked with the previously mentioned positive emotions brought by this activity. Regarding this idea, the study by Pikhart and Klimova (2020) also reveals that senior learners see language learning as a major motivator, regardless of their outcomes with the language. In addition, answers to the questionnaire as well as those obtained from the interviews show a growing interest in travelling around Spanish-speaking countries, which constitutes the primary incentive to learn the language. In Andrew’s (2012) study, both interviewees also mentioned travelling frequently to the United States as another main reason to learn English, together with a desire to remain active after retirement. When asked about integrating in Spanish-speaking countries, only one participant seems to have a desire to do it in the future, whereas the rest only wish to enjoy speaking the language for short visits, as evidenced by the findings in the study by Schiller and Dorner (2019), whose results revealed that integrativeness is not the main motive to learn a language among older populations. Interestingly, the participant who wishes to live and integrate in a Spanish speaking community is the only who works full time; this could indicate that this participant is planning his own retirement. This was the only distinctive answer by this participant. In the study by Pfenninger and Polz (2018), German-speaker monolinguals seemed to have a general interest in the

target language as well as a desire to travel and communicate with native speakers of the language, something that can also be perceived from the responses provided by the participants of this study, regardless of having experience learning languages or not. By conducting the interviews with English native speakers who learn Spanish, and in some cases, who have previously learned other foreign languages, we could also gain insight into their thoughts about English as a language of global communication, which some participants see not only as an impediment to practice the languages they have learned at some point, but also as the main reason for many native speakers to not engage in second language learning.

The third topic that the present study addresses is the use of *strategies*. Responses to the questions posed during the interviews reveal that all participants seem to have found resources that help them to learn the language and to keep themselves motivated. From the participants' comments about the materials they use, together with responses from the questionnaire we can infer a high use of *cognitive strategies* since most participants acknowledged reading for pleasure or watching series or films in the Spanish language, as well as trying to find patterns in the language. Their interest in travelling and in the culture, as well as their willingness to communicate with NSs reveals a high use of *social strategy* too. We also observe a high use of the target language as a *compensation strategy*. Moreover, the existence of defined goals, together with a determination to seek opportunities to practice shows a frequent use of *metacognitive strategies*. On the other hand, *memory strategies* are used with less frequency. These findings are partially consistent with the ones by Mora et al. (2018); in their study, *metacognitive strategies* were the ones most frequently used by senior learners over other strategies. However, in this study, although they seem to be relevant, other resources such as *compensation*, *social*, and *cognitive strategies* seem equally important. This might be because the present study relies on a much smaller sample and did not explore learning strategies in as much detail as they did.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The present study aimed at answering three RQs. With regard to RQ1: “What beliefs do L1 English senior learners of L2 Spanish hold about learning Spanish?”, we have been able to observe that senior learners consider Spanish learning a valuable activity that

brings positive feelings and emotions, that may improve cognitive skills and that they do not feel discouraged by the implications of ageing and the challenges encountered learning the language, even if they hold the belief that in order to learn the language, it is easier to do it at younger ages. In order to answer RQ2 “What is the main senior learners’ motivation to engage in L2 Spanish learning?”, we can observe that their willingness to travel constitutes the main incentive to learn the language, and that their goals with the language are mostly shaped by their needs and beliefs they hold about their own skills and progress. However, we can also perceive that the positive emotions brought by this activity, together with the interesting materials they have all found keep them motivated enough to continue engaging in Spanish learning. Finally, the present study aimed at answering RQ3: “What strategies do senior learners use in order to tackle the difficulties encountered in the process of learning L2 Spanish?”. Most participants seem to have goals with the language and to seek opportunities to put it into practice. Moreover, they also seem to read for pleasure, watch video content or series, and employ compensation strategies to counteract the gaps in their knowledge. Their interest in travelling and interacting with NSs of the language reveals the frequent use of social strategies as well.

Despite the fact that the present study has analysed an under-researched population and a foreign language other than English, it is not without limitations. First, the sample used for this study is rather small and results cannot be generalised; this implies that a similar study should be conducted on a larger scale with more senior participants in order to validate these findings. Ideally, a similar study could be conducted with senior learners of other languages besides Spanish. Secondly, ages of participants of this study ranged from 61 to 81 and have been considered part of the same population. However, if this study was conducted with a larger sample, maybe we could observe big differences between younger and older senior participants, as well as from those who are retired and those who are not.

Considering the findings of this study and, as explained by Pikhart and Klimova (2020), if positive emotions imply an improvement of quality of life, this study reinforces the importance of not neglecting this growing population in order to provide them with tools and activities that may improve their overall wellbeing and will help them remain active. In addition, it also proves that positive feelings brought by this activity and interesting materials can contribute to senior learners’ motivation and progress.

(Words: 10,537)

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Appendix A – Background questionnaire

My name is Júlia Montañés Ballesté and I am a student at the University of Barcelona currently writing my MA Thesis.

Thank you very much for participating in this study.

This is a background questionnaire to learn a little bit more about each of the participants.

Please note that the questionnaire will take 5-7 minutes to complete.

1. Name

2. Age

3. Occupation

- Full time
- Part time
- Retired
- Voluntary work
- Unemployed

4. Country of origin

5. What is your country of residence? If different from country of origin, please specify how long you have been living there.

6. Have you lived in any other countries? If so, please specify where and how long for.

7. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Primary school
- Secondary school up to 16 years
- High school / college graduate, diploma or equivalent
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree
- Prefer not to say

8. What is your language from birth? If more than one, please specify.

9. Do you know any other languages? If yes, please specify which ones.

- 10. If you know other languages, please specify level for each of the languages (beginner, elementary, intermediate, advanced, proficient).**
- 11. a/b/c/d. How have you studied other languages? Please specify the language you studied in the section "Other" and select the corresponding boxes to indicate how you have learned that language.**
- Attending classes
 - Speaking with friends and family
 - Watching films and series
 - Using online resources or apps
 - Listening to music and podcasts
 - Living abroad
 - Other:
- 12. What language(s) do you speak at home?**
- 13. a/b/c/d. If you use other languages on a daily basis, please select the option that best describes in what percentage you use them. Please specify the language in the section "Other".**
- Less than 25%
 - Between 25% and 50%
 - Between 59% and 75%
 - More than 75%
 - Other:
- 14. What are your reasons for learning Spanish?**
- To speak with family and friends
 - To communicate better when travelling
 - For work
 - To improve or maintain mental fitness
 - Out of interest in language and culture
 - For fun
 - To live in a Spanish speaking country
 - Other:
- 15. How long have you been studying Spanish? Please specify years and months.**
- 16. Please select what activities you have done IN THE PAST to learn Spanish from the ones listed below:**
- Online private lessons

- Face to face private lessons
- Online group lessons
- Face to face group lessons
- I listen to music and podcasts
- I read books, papers, and magazines
- I keep a journal
- I watch films, series, or videos in Spanish
- I watch films, series, or videos in the original language with Spanish subtitles.
- I use online resources and apps such as Duolingo
- I do grammar exercises
- I communicate with speakers of the language to practice

17. Please select what activities you do AT THE MOMENT to learn Spanish from the ones listed below:

- Online private lessons
- Face to face private lessons
- Online group lessons
- Face to face group lessons
- I listen to music and podcasts
- I read books, papers, and magazines
- I keep a journal
- I watch films, series, or videos in Spanish
- I watch films, series, or videos in the original language with Spanish subtitles.
- I use online resources and apps such as Duolingo
- I do grammar exercises
- I communicate with speakers of the language to practice

Appendix B – Statements from the questionnaire on beliefs, motivation, and strategies

1. Learning Spanish is beneficial for my memory.
2. Learning Spanish is beneficial for my concentration.
3. Learning Spanish increases my capacity for learning other things.
4. Learning Spanish brings me joy.
5. Learning Spanish helps to expand my social circle.
6. Learning Spanish helps me to understand other realities.
7. Learning Spanish boosts my self-confidence.
8. Learning Spanish improves my overall wellbeing.
9. Learning Spanish keeps me busy and active.
10. Learning Spanish is easier the younger you are.
11. I set myself goals with Spanish.
12. When learning Spanish, my main goal is to achieve fluency.
13. When learning Spanish, my main goal is to be able to understand written Spanish.
14. When learning Spanish, my main goal is to understand oral Spanish.
15. I am learning Spanish because I would like to travel and communicate with Spanish speakers.
16. I am learning Spanish because I would like to integrate in a Spanish-speaking community.
17. I am learning Spanish because I am interested in the Spanish language in general.
18. I am learning Spanish because I am interested in the culture.
19. I am learning Spanish because I would like to learn something new.
20. Challenges encountered while learning Spanish discourage me.
21. Making progress with my Spanish makes me happy.
22. I have thought about dropping my Spanish classes.
23. Sometimes I think I lack the ability to speak Spanish.
24. Sometimes I think I lack the ability to write in Spanish.
25. When learning new things in Spanish, I try to associate them with other languages I know.

26. To remember a word in Spanish, I associate the way it sounds with words that sound similar in the English language.
27. I try to associate the sound of a new word in Spanish with a picture of the word.
28. I review my Spanish lessons often.
29. I take notes during my Spanish classes.
30. I try to find patterns in the Spanish language.
31. I try to talk to Spanish native speakers.
32. I use the context to guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word in Spanish.
33. If I don't know how to say something in Spanish, I try to formulate it differently.
34. If I don't know how to say something in Spanish, I switch to English.
35. If I don't know how to say something in Spanish, I gesture.
36. If I don't understand what someone is saying in Spanish, I ask them to repeat or to slow down.

Appendix B.1 – Overview of the responses to the questionnaire on beliefs, motivation, and strategies

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Learning Spanish is beneficial for my memory.	2	6	1	0	0
2. Learning Spanish is beneficial for my concentration.	2	6	1	0	0
3. Learning Spanish increases my capacity for learning other things.	0	3	6	0	0
4. Learning Spanish brings me joy.	5	4	0	0	0
5. Learning Spanish helps me to expand my social circle.	2	4	3	0	0
6. Learning Spanish helps me to understand other realities.	1	3	5	0	0
7. Learning Spanish boosts my self-confidence.	1	5	3	0	0
8. Learning Spanish improves my overall wellbeing.	2	3	4	0	0
9. Learning Spanish keeps me busy and active.	3	4	2	0	0
10. Learning Spanish is easier the younger you are.	4	2	2	1	0
11. I set myself goals with Spanish.	0	6	3	0	0
12. When learning Spanish, my main goal is to achieve fluency.	2	3	3	1	0
13. When learning Spanish, my main goal is to be able to understand written Spanish.	2	5	1	1	0
14. When learning Spanish, my main goal is to understand oral Spanish.	3	4	2	0	0
15. I am learning Spanish because I would like to travel and communicate with Spanish speakers.	5	4	0	0	0
16. I am learning Spanish because I would like to integrate in a Spanish-speaking community.	0	3	5	1	0
17. I am learning Spanish because I am interested in the Spanish language in general.	2	5	2	0	0
18. I am learning Spanish because I am interested in the culture.	1	6	2	0	0
19. I am learning Spanish because I would like to learn something new.	3	3	2	1	0
20. Challenges encountered while learning Spanish discourage me.	0	0	3	6	0
21. Making progress with my Spanish makes me happy.	4	3	2	0	0
22. I have thought about dropping my Spanish classes.	0	0	0	3	6
23. Sometimes I think I lack the ability to speak Spanish.	3	3	2	1	0
24. Sometimes I think I lack the ability to write in Spanish.	2	3	3	1	0

25. When learning new things in Spanish, I try to associate them with other languages I know.	0	3	3	2	1
26. To remember a word in Spanish, I associate the way it sounds with words that sound similar in the English language.	1	3	1	3	1
27. I try to associate the sound of a new word in Spanish with a picture of the word.	1	0	2	5	1
28. I review my Spanish lessons often.	0	5	3	1	0
29. I take notes during my Spanish classes.	3	2	2	2	0
30. I try to find patterns in the Spanish language.	3	4	1	1	0
31. I try to talk to Spanish native speakers.	1	4	2	2	0
32. I use the context to guess the meaning of an unfamiliar word in Spanish.	1	7	1	0	0
33. If I don't know how to say something in Spanish, I try to formulate it differently.	1	7	1	0	0
34. If I don't know how to say something in Spanish, I switch to English.	1	3	2	3	0
35. If I don't know how to say something in Spanish, I gesture.	2	4	1	2	0
36. If I don't understand what someone is saying in Spanish, I ask them to repeat or to slow down.	1	7	1	0	0

Appendix C – Interviews' outline

With those participants who have studied other languages:

- Compare experiences, motivation, goals and maybe discuss differences between learning before and now (young vs. old).
- Compare strategies used before and the ones used now (what resources, methods they find useful to learn).
- Discuss goals with the Spanish language (maybe here discuss the possibility or interest in travelling and integrating in a Spanish-speaking country).
- What does learning Spanish bring to their life? Is this an activity they would recommend?

With those participants who never studied other languages:

- What strategies do they find useful to learn?
- Discuss goals with the Spanish language (maybe here discuss the possibility or interest in travelling and integrating in a Spanish-speaking country).
- What does learning Spanish bring to their life? Is this an activity they would recommend?

Appendix C.1 – Extracts from the interviews

Beliefs on language learning at older ages:

“I'm afraid it's a lot easier when you're younger.” (Jim)

“The brain remembers things better when you are younger. I mean, you know that I love music. But I can't remember the names of albums, the names of tracks of artists that I listen to. Nowadays, I can tell you every track of my favourite albums in the 1970s and who the band members were, I can tell you everything about Chelsea Football Teams in the 70s and the 80s. But I can't remember the recent ones as well.” (Mark)

“I guess it was easier. And also, because I was sort of immersed into it. [...] I learned more probably in those three months than I have... I wouldn't say it's more than what I've learned now. But certainly, the first probably four years it was more than I'd learned. So in that three months, I learned a lot.” (Annie)

Beliefs on the benefits of engaging in Spanish learning at older ages:

“I keep trying to improve. And what you find as you get older, is that you don't push yourself because you don't have to.” (Mark)

Beliefs on how learning Spanish contributes to their lives:

[...] It's important for us to do that across the board. But for learning the language, it's challenging, and it makes you think, you have to start thinking about things. And I think that's a very good thing to do, as soon as one gets older.” (Emily)

“I enjoy it. I get great pleasure out of it.” (Annie)

“It brings to a lot of happiness, would you believe, brings something to do, which is something more than I would have done otherwise.” (Bill)

“I am also aware, sensitive to the fact that other people aren't as interested as I am. So, I try not to become too much of a Spanish bore, but it is part of my life.” (Michael)

“I've got some friends in Almería. Lots of teachers over you know, in Spain, and like you, and I mean, in London, who you know, I suppose I call them friends, you know, they are people I'm in contact with all the time.” (Michael)

“Actually, in Spain, in my three months sabbatical, you notice even at my quite low level, you get treated differently by Spanish people; you get treated differently because you can speak a bit.” (Michael)

Motivation to learn Spanish:

“We started to go to Spain in particular, places like Tenerife, and none of us spoke any Spanish. And I don't like not being able to understand. So I decided that yes, I could improve my German but no, it actually was more worthwhile, that one of us learned to speak Spanish. And so therefore I started.” (Emily)

Opinions on the widespread use of English:

“We don't have to learn languages. Obviously, it's part of the school system. But the reality of life is that you don't have to learn. Because the world's second language is English, as you know, it makes us lazy.” (Michael)

“They [English native speakers] do not get any rich enrichment out of that process [speaking English to non-native speakers of English].” (Bill)

The widespread use of English as an impediment to speak Spanish:

“All the workers want to speak English because that's their skill. That's why they're working. Many times you go to some restaurants or bars in Madrid or Barcelona, they want to talk English.” (Mark)

“I like going to Spain and speaking Spanish there. Although most of the time they speak back to me in English. And I've got like, my husband says ‘she's learning Spanish speak to her in Spanish or whatever’.” (Annie)

Goals with the Spanish language:

“I mean, I can't imagine that I'll ever be fluent. But I can be fluent if it's a simple conversation, obviously.” (Annie)

“I'm realistic, in what I have, what I can achieve. [...] I think it would be foolish to try to speak like a local person.” (Paul)

“It's perhaps a bit of a pipe dream, to want to achieve complete fluency.” (Emily)

“I'd like to understand, to speak Spanish too when I go over to Spain, and hope that they will understand me.” (Jim)

“I just want to have a good communicating level. If I could get it to my French level, which most people would think it's pretty good.” (Phillip)

“I'm prepared to do probably two hours per week, but I don't want it to be two hours every day because I have other things to do in my life.” (Phillip)

Materials and use of the internet:

“But unlike nowadays, we didn't have the internet, for heaven's sake, no internet.” (Emily)

“The most important resource at the moment, I would say is online with something like Duolingo, Spanishdict... In Duolingo I find... what is it? Well, first of all, it's free. [...] In terms of getting familiarity a revision is very simple, very good. I would think that if I had if these facilities were available to me 20 years ago, 40 years ago, I would have learned a language much sooner.” (Paul)

“What Steve Kaufman says, the Canadian guys speak 17 languages or whatever, he's 70 something, you know, you need three things: time, motivation, and interesting material. Without those three things, you know, and then Richard says,

there's one more which is ability to notice differences in language and things like that. But basically, time, motivation, interesting material. In most schools, you know, most students aren't motivated and then you haven't got interesting material. You're doing grammar exercises in that book.” (Michael)