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# The Effectiveness of Classroom Activities in EFL Elementary-Level Courses from Adult Learners' Perspectives

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**Abstract.** This paper aims to identify how adult learners perceive the usefulness of activities implemented in elementary-level courses at the Language Centre of the University of Defence in Brno. The descriptive quantitative research, conducted with 173 military personnel in the form of a questionnaire survey in 2020, concentrated on elucidating which activities employed in classes of adult learners were considered beneficial for improving speaking skills with respect to their age and the type of course attended. The findings underscored the pivotal role of teachers' corrective feedback in instructor-learner interactions, both dyadic and whole-class, which may enable adult beginner learners to acquire a target language more effectively, subsequently, increasing their motivation to learn. The study also highlighted the importance of using the mother tongue in short-term beginner courses, accentuating the substantial value of oral translation exercises in the process of basic grammar acquisition as well as vocabulary development. Overall, the findings did not reflect considerable differences in the perceived usefulness of instructional activities, either among the age cohorts or particular courses.

**Keywords:** classroom activities; adult learners; elementary-level English courses; military environment

## 1. Introduction

Acquiring a foreign language (FL) in adulthood is undeniably a complex process owing to adult personalities and limiting factors (both cognitive and affective) coming to play in adult foreign language acquisition (FLA). More resistant to change, adults integrate their past experiences into their learning and form opinions about how language teaching and learning should be conducted, which is both the basis for new learning and a potential obstacle (Cozma, 2015; Kalaja et al., 2018).

With increasing age, the language learning faculty declines owing to reduced ability to memorise, a tendency towards error systematisation, and frequent use

of native language (L1) transfer (Castañeda, 2017). More time is also needed to acquire the target language (L2). As MacKeracher (2004) states, adults learn best when time pressures are minimised. On the other hand, adults' high motivation and determination to succeed are the driving forces compensating for these weaknesses (Cozma, 2015; Pawlak, 2015).

Factors such as emotion, self-esteem, empathy, and anxiety also affect FL learning success or failure when adults return to schooling after a long absence. According to Pawlak (2015), older adult learners, in particular, "may display reluctance to speak as a result of affective concerns, related to the belief that they cannot express their true personality or expertise in a foreign language" (p. 58).

The Language Centre of the University of Defence in Brno runs lifelong elementary-level language courses preparing military professionals for standardised language examinations, the results of which may decisively influence their future career prospects. Course participants exhibit almost the same adult learning characteristics as indicated above. In addition, courses are provided only for a short period, while learners are exposed to English primarily in classes. As no unique method exists in FL teaching and learning, instructors at the centre employ a range of classroom activities, which form the fundamental part of all language practice, to create a relaxed learning environment and make adult language learning more effective and less difficult. However, teachers' own experiences as learners, along with their pre-service training, personal teaching experiences, as well as the local policy context, may be reflected in their beliefs about teaching a foreign language. These may not be consistent with learners' expectations about how lessons should be conducted, and how they should learn (Abu-Radwan, 2019; Borg, 2018; Enferad et al., 2022; Wach & Monroy, 2020).

Interest in research on learners' viewpoints about FL teaching and learning has persisted for decades. The insights gained from the research allow instructors to adapt classroom activities better to learners' needs, thus contributing to more conflict-free instructional environments. Based on our teaching experience, clashes between teacher and student opinions on effective teaching practices are not rare, especially at the elementary level. Hence, to increase the efficiency of the teaching process in beginner courses within a professional military context, this study aimed to elucidate how adult learners view activities conducted in classes in terms of usefulness.

The specific study questions included the following:

1. Which activities employed in classes do adult learners consider beneficial for improving speaking skills with respect to the course type?
2. Which activities employed in classes do adult learners consider beneficial for improving speaking skills with respect to their age?

## 2. Literature Review

In typical conditions of FL instruction, it is improbable that learners will attain a high level of communicative competence, as “it is primarily a controlled (didactically arranged) acquisition of a quantitatively limited range of selected language means, together with the gradual development of receptive and productive language skills in close association with knowledge of realities and culture” (Jelínek, 2000-2001, p. 3). Thus, language learning activities conducted in a school setting, where out-of-class exposure to a target language is generally limited, undoubtedly influence learners’ L2 acquisition. How decisive this impact might be is demonstrated in a study by Aronsson (2023), who investigated Swedish learners’ perceptions of the types of activities conducted in lower-level Spanish classes as well as the prevalence of those activities. Results revealed a massive dominance of structurally based, non-communicative activity types based on a combination of reading-and-speaking or writing-and-speaking exercises. It was further indicated that because in Sweden Spanish is first learned formally in school and extramural exposure to Spanish is mostly limited, focus on form rather than on meaningful communication, and the emphasis on written language may influence the poor results for speaking abilities in Spanish as L2.

However, explicit FL instruction has its justified place in FL teaching and learning, as articulated in research, for example, by Schurz and Coumel (2020), Li and Xu (2023) and Leow (2018). Employing traditional teaching techniques such as repetition, memorisation of dialogues, and minitalks as well as drilling grammar structures and developing vocabulary through translation exercises help mainly beginner learners to develop accuracy in their language production (Ibrahim, 2019). While form-focused exercises are important for language accuracy, it is crucial to balance them with meaning-focused activities, for example, pair work and small group work, emphasising fluency and communicative competence.

### 2.1. Collaborative Learning

Working in pairs or small groups is a common technique used in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes, the benefits of which such as strengthening motivation, promoting intensive and active participation, and building social interaction, are emphasised in a range of studies focused on EFL learning through collaboration and sharing (Basturkmen & Philp, 2018; Bećirović et al., 2022; Le et al., 2018; Owusu & Cobbold, 2020).

However, when it comes to beginner-level EFL classes, there are some disadvantages to using pair and small group work as a teaching method. One of the most significant drawbacks is limited language input, which can restrict learners’ ability to engage independently in meaningful conversations with their peers (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019). In terms of asymmetrical dyads or small groups, there is also a risk of unequal individual participation due to, for example, differences in learners’ language proficiency as more knowledgeable learners (false beginners) may dominate the conversation while the others (true beginners) remain passive (Le et al., 2018; Young & Tedick, 2016). Nevertheless, as shown in a study by Storch and Aldosari (2013), interpersonal relations in dyads may be of greater significance than proficiency pairing when deciding how to best pair students in heterogeneous classes. This view aligns with Sato’s findings (2013),

stressing that peer interaction is sensitive to social relationships among learners (also see Philp et al., 2014).

Moreover, research on peer interaction indicated that beginner-level learners may provide only limited feedback as they may make mistakes that go unnoticed, or their feedback may be inaccurate (Philp et al., 2014). Research by Adams (2007) demonstrated that “learners may learn each other’s errors, particularly when attention is called to them” (p. 48). Also, a study by Yoshida (2008) revealed that peer correction may be ineffective because beginner learners may sometimes not understand their partners’ corrective feedback (CF), possibly arising from dissatisfaction with the role played during pair work.

Le et al. (2018) state that off-task behaviour seems to be another potential obstacle to effective student collaboration as it may lead to non-target-like production such as engaging in distracting activities which do not contribute to FL development. Resorting to students’ native language in collaborative tasks may also be the reason for teachers’ reservations about beginner peer work. However, as research findings show, L1 is most frequently used for metacognitive talk and metatalk (De la Colina and Mayo, 2009; Xu & Fan, 2021), which appears to be an important tool for effective task completion. In terms of the amount of L1 use when completing collaborative tasks in dyads, Xu and Fan (2021) revealed that learners’ L2 proficiency mediates the effects of task complexity on L1 use, as the lower-proficiency participants had employed similar amounts of Chinese to perform both the simple and complex tasks, unlike the higher-proficiency group that had used significantly more Chinese-speaking turns in the complex tasks than in the simple ones.

## **2.2. Use of L1 in the Teaching and Learning Process**

Research findings devoted to students’ beliefs about L1 use in FL instruction have shown that L1 employment is justified primarily in beginner learners’ classes (Brooks-Lewis, 2009; De la Fuente & Goldenberg, 2022; An & Macaro, 2022; Macaro et al., 2020; Varshney & Rolin-Ianziti, 2006; Wach & Monroy, 2020). In this context, one of the current arguments in favour of the importance of L1 in the L2 classroom is to ensure immediate comprehension. The extent to which L2 classroom instruction incorporating a principled approach to the use of L1 by students and instructors has effects on beginner learners’ development of L2 productive skills’ proficiency, compared to L2-only instruction, was investigated in a one-semester quasi-experimental study conducted in an intensive elementary Spanish course at a private US research university (De la Fuente & Goldenberg, 2022). The results showed that “the principle of avoidance of L1 in the classroom is not supported in the context of beginning FL instruction that is based on a task-based pedagogical approach and incorporates a role for grammar instruction and focus on form” (p. 15). In research conducted with university students in an introductory EFL course in Mexico, Brooks-Lewis (2009) focused on Spanish-speaking learners’ perceptions of their L1 use in FL teaching and learning. The findings revealed their overwhelmingly positive views on including and incorporating L1 in FL instruction as it made the learning meaningful and less difficult. Accordingly, the learners demonstrated a high degree of comprehension as well as active participation.

The importance of avoiding a communication breakdown or a lack of understanding was also demonstrated in studies conducted in English-medium instruction contexts by An and Macaro (2022), Macaro et al. (2020), and Sahan et al., (2022) in which the use of L1 was primarily accepted for this purpose.

Although views on the extent of L1 use in the L2 classroom differ significantly, the prevailing opinion is that ignoring the mother tongue in classroom instruction is irrational. As Ščerba (1947), one of the pioneers in this field, aptly expressed, “experience showed that it is possible to remove the native language from the teaching process, but it is impossible to remove the native language from the minds of learners in school settings” (p. 56) .

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Pedagogical Context**

The Language Centre in Brno provides three types of English elementary-level courses. Intensive courses last 11 weeks with 30 contact hours per week (330 lessons of 45 minutes). As no placement test is required, a group of ten attendees usually includes true and false beginners. Upgrade courses are seven weeks long (210 lessons), and students are selected based on a placement test score. Both courses culminate in a proficiency examination Level 1 in accordance with NATO Standardised Agreement 6001 (STANAG 6001) (NSO, 2016), which assesses the candidates’ language proficiency in productive and receptive skills. As STANAG 6001 (NSO, 2016) bears many similarities to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the Level 1 exam roughly corresponds to CEFR level A2 (Council of Europe, 2023). Refresher courses, in contrast, last four weeks (120 lessons), and course participants should possess a Level 1 NATO STANAG 6001 Certificate in all four language skills prior to commencing study. These courses focus on helping students sustain their English language ability and do not culminate in examinations.

Regarding speaking skills, students attending these courses are expected to understand and produce simple, routine questions and answers as well as short phrases in familiar areas to meet immediate personal needs. They should also be able to participate in simple, short conversations. Nevertheless, the elementary level permits frequent lapses in both comprehension and production.

#### **3.2. Participants**

The population researched in this study are 173 military personnel who attended Level 1 English courses between July 2019 and July 2020. Among them, 112 learners were enrolled in intensive courses, 19 in upgrade courses, and 42 in refresher courses. Over half of the course attendees were between 36 and 45 years of age (see Figure 1), and three-quarters had completed secondary education with a school-leaving certificate (see Figure 2).

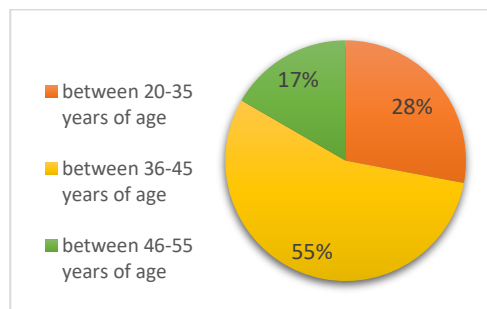


Figure 1: Participants' age

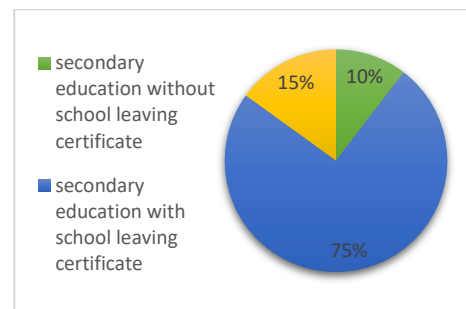


Figure 2: Participants' education

### 3.3. Instrument Development

A descriptive quantitative design based on theoretical concepts underpinned by Creswell (2012), was applied as it was intended to map the views of learners in all courses running over a period of one year. Survey items were adapted from Nunan (1988). Some items were partially modified to provide more concrete information, for example, about valuable ways of using role-play and conversations in class. As all the respondents were non-native speakers, items concerning the use of the mother tongue were added to scrutinise to what extent it is preferred in EFL learning.

The questionnaire for adult learners consisted of 16 items and was divided into two sections. In the first section, respondents provided their demographic data – gender, age, and level of education (three items). The following section concentrated on adult learners' opinions on corrective feedback (one item) and the effectiveness of activities employed by teachers in classes (twelve items). A four-point Likert-type scale was applied, encompassing the answer options 'Not useful at all', 'Rather not useful', 'Rather useful' and 'Useful'. The participants could express themselves freely and in more detail in the section designated for commentary.

Five FL teachers working at the Brno Language Centre were asked to evaluate the original version of the questionnaire to guarantee its validity. They were selected owing to their long-term experience in questionnaire design. Based on their feedback, some items were reformulated for a clearer understanding. A Cronbach's alpha test was applied in terms of the questionnaire's reliability. The test score was  $\alpha = .78$  ( $N=224$ ), indicating internal consistency.

### 3.4. Data Collection and Processing

Participation in the study was voluntary. Nonetheless, after explaining the aim of the survey to the participants and ensuring them that all their responses would remain confidential, all agreed to take part. Participants were assigned numbers to ensure anonymity. No information was shared with other participants or anybody outside the research study.

Data were collected from 1 July 2019 to 30 July 2020. The questionnaire was distributed to the course participants in paper form in the last week of the courses, allowing the participants to reflect on the learning experience gained.

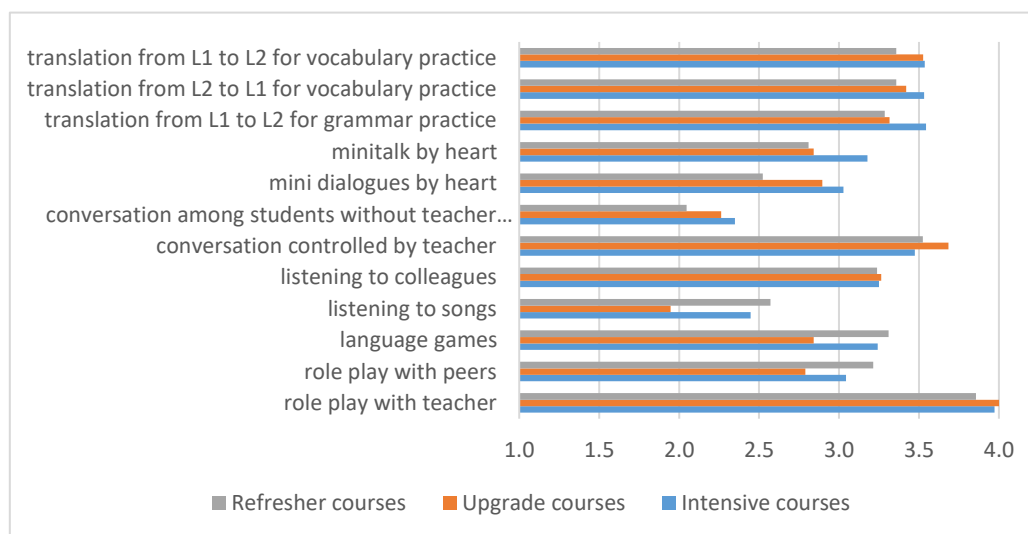
As the research sample represents the whole population, all results and conclusions of the research are related only to this sample and cannot be further generalised.

Collected data were inserted into the data matrix; the original variables were nominal and ordinal. The data collected with the four-point scale were further transformed into new numeric variables (the perceived levels of usefulness) represented by the means calculated for each item. As the answers ranged from 1 (not useful at all) to 4 (useful), the mean values of 3 and higher refer to a higher level of usefulness. The descriptive statistics of the data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27. To specify the relationship between the adult learners' age, course type, and learners' opinions on the usefulness of selected activities, the compare means procedures were used (Mareš, 2015). In cases where exact data evaluation was impossible, a verbal assessment was done.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Findings related to Research Question 1

#### 4.1.1. Data analysis of adult learners' preferences for particular activities employed in classes in relation to course type



**Figure 3: Average levels of perceived usefulness of activities in relation to course type**

The data presented in Figure 3 showed that whole-class interaction controlled by the teacher was highly appreciated in all three types of courses since the average level of perceived usefulness was 3.47 (SD = 0.68) in intensive courses; 3.68 (SD = 0.75) in upgrade courses, and 3.52 (SD = 0.74) in refresher courses. On the contrary, conversation among learners without teacher control was regarded as far less useful as the average level of the perceived usefulness remained low; (M = 2.35; SD = 0.93) in intensive, (M = 2.26; SD = 0.99) in upgrade and (M = 2.05; SD = 0.79) in refresher courses.

In terms of role play, in all types of courses the most suitable were those performed directly with a teacher. Especially, intensive ( $M = 3.97$ ;  $SD = 0.16$ ) and upgrade ( $M = 4.00$ ;  $SD = 0.00$ ) courses expressed a considerably high level of perceived usefulness and homogeneity of the answers. Although the level of perceived usefulness in refresher courses was also high ( $M = 3.86$ ;  $SD = 0.47$ ), the range of responses differed somewhat more. Role play only with peers was viewed as an activity with a higher level of usefulness in refresher courses ( $M = 3.21$ ;  $SD = 0.84$ ), followed by intensive courses ( $M = 3.04$ ;  $SD = 0.89$ ). Regarding upgrade courses, the level of usefulness was lower ( $M = 2.79$ ;  $SD = 0.79$ ).

Only a border value for a higher level of usefulness for learning mini dialogues was identified in intensive courses ( $M = 3.03$ ;  $SD = 0.90$ ). In the other types of courses, the level of usefulness was lower; 2.89 ( $SD = 0.66$ ) in upgrade and 2.52 ( $SD = 0.92$ ) in refresher courses.

Concerning minitalks on different topics by heart, a higher level of usefulness was expressed only in intensive courses ( $M = 3.18$ ;  $SD = 0.85$ ). Memorizing minitalks by heart was characterised by a lower level of usefulness in both upgrade ( $M = 2.84$ ;  $SD = 0.83$ ) and refresher ( $M = 2.81$ ;  $SD = 0.94$ ) courses. Nevertheless, the answers were rather heterogeneous in all three types of courses. On the other hand, listening to colleagues' utterances was perceived as an activity with a higher level of usefulness in all course types, as indicated by the average level of perceived usefulness in intensive ( $M = 3.25$ ;  $SD = 0.69$ ), upgrade ( $M = 3.26$ ;  $SD = 0.73$ ) and refresher courses ( $M = 3.24$ ;  $SD = 0.58$ ).

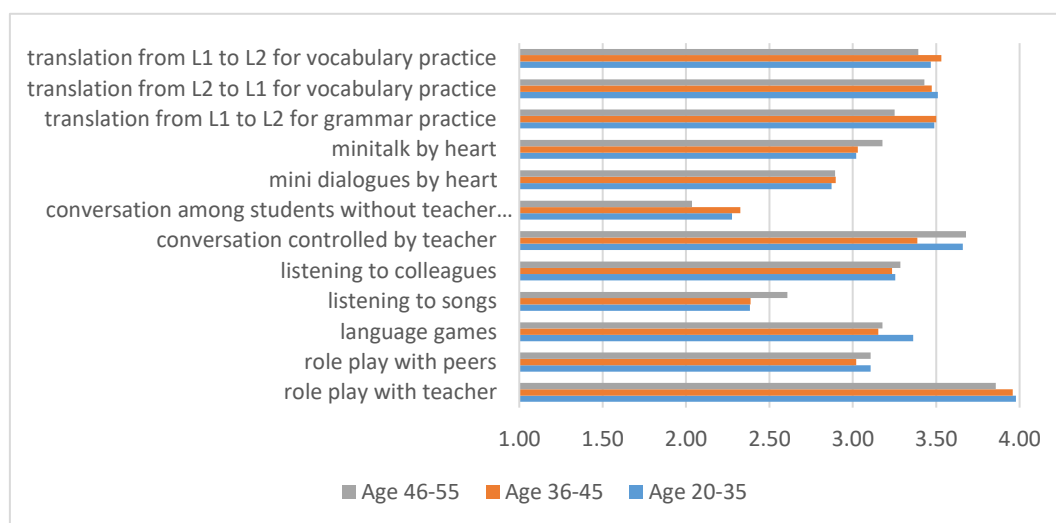
The data also referred to a higher level of perceived usefulness for oral translation exercises from Czech to English in the process of developing basic grammar in intensive courses ( $M = 3.54$ ;  $SD = 0.61$ ), followed by upgrade ( $M = 3.32$ ;  $SD = 0.75$ ) and refresher ( $M = 3.29$ ;  $SD = 0.81$ ) courses.

Translation from Czech to English and from English to Czech was also characterised by a higher level of usefulness in all three types of courses. As for the intensive courses, their responses were consistent concerning the use of both types of translation ( $M = 3.53$ ;  $SD = 0.63$ ). The same consistency was perceived in refresher courses ( $M = 3.36$ ;  $SD = 0.76$ ). However, upgrade courses showed a slightly higher preference for translation from L1 to L2 ( $M = 3.53$ ;  $SD = 0.70$ ) compared to translation from L2 to L1 ( $M = 3.42$ ;  $SD = 0.69$ ). Unlike intensive ( $M = 3.24$ ;  $SD = 0.83$ ) and refresher ( $M = 3.31$ ;  $SD = 0.68$ ) courses, language games appeared to have a lower level of usefulness in upgrade courses, with a wide range of different responses ( $M = 2.84$ ;  $SD = 1.01$ ). Regarding listening to songs, this activity was not supposed to be of high effectiveness in any of the courses, as the average level of perceived usefulness remained quite low in intensive ( $M = 2.45$ ;  $SD = 0.95$ ) and refresher ( $M = 2.57$ ;  $SD = 0.89$ ) courses, and even considerably low in upgrade courses ( $M = 1.95$ ;  $SD = 0.97$ ).

Regarding the findings related to the participants' views on error correction in front of classmates, 89% wished to be corrected immediately during a speech and 10% at the end of a speech. Only one participant demanded to be given feedback later without classmates present.



#### 4.1.2. Data analysis of adult learners' preferences for particular activities employed in classes in relation to age



**Figure 4: Perceived usefulness of particular activities in relation to age**

As illustrated in Figure 4, there was no considerable difference concerning preferences for activities among the particular age groups. Regarding pair work performed directly with a teacher, a considerably high level of perceived usefulness and homogeneity of the answers was indicated in the age groups of 20-35 ( $M = 3.98$ ;  $SD = 0.15$ ) and 36-45 ( $M = 3.96$ ;  $SD = 0.25$ ). The level of perceived usefulness in the age group of 46-55 was also high; however, the range of the responses varied slightly more ( $M = 3.86$ ;  $SD = 0.45$ ). Whole-class interaction controlled by the teacher was viewed as an activity with a higher level of perceived usefulness in the age groups of 46-55 ( $3.68$ ;  $SD = 0.67$ ) and 20-35 ( $M = 3.66$ ;  $SD = 0.52$ ), compared to the age group of 36-45 ( $M = 3.39$ ;  $SD = 0.77$ ).

Conversation among learners without teacher support was characterised by a lower level of perceived usefulness in all age groups, mainly among the learners aged 46-55 ( $M = 2.04$ ;  $SD = 0.84$ ), compared to the age groups of 20-35 ( $M = 2.28$ ;  $SD = 0.85$ ) and 36-45 ( $M = 2.33$ ;  $SD = 0.95$ ). On the other hand, role play only with peers was regarded as more beneficial by the age groups of 20-35 ( $M = 3.11$ ;  $SD = 0.76$ ) and 46-55 ( $M = 3.11$ ;  $SD = 0.99$ ), followed by the age group of 36-45 ( $M = 3.02$ ;  $SD = 0.90$ ).

Only a border value for a higher level of perceived usefulness was indicated for learning minitalks on different topics by heart in the age groups of 20-35 ( $M = 3.02$ ;  $SD = 0.99$ ) and 36-45 ( $M = 3.03$ ;  $SD = 0.85$ ). This activity was viewed as having a slightly higher level of usefulness by the participants between 46 and 55 ( $M = 3.18$ ;  $SD = 0.82$ ). Learning mini dialogues by heart was perceived as having a lower level of usefulness by all age groups (20-35 -  $M = 2.87$ ;  $SD = 0.99$ ; 36-45 -  $M = 2.90$ ;  $SD = 0.89$ ; 46-55 -  $M = 2.89$ ;  $SD = 0.79$ ).

Regarding listening to classmates' utterances, a higher level of usefulness was stated by all age cohorts at a similar level; the age group of 20-35 ( $M = 3.26$ ;  $SD =$

0.64); the age group of 36-45 ( $M = 3.23$ ;  $SD = 0.67$ ); and the age group of 46-55 ( $M = 3.29$ ;  $SD = 0.71$ ).

A rather high level of perceived usefulness for oral translation exercises from Czech into English in the process of developing basic grammar was ascribed by the participants aged 46-55 ( $M = 3.68$ ;  $SD = 0.67$ ), followed by the age groups of 20-35 ( $M = 3.49$ ;  $SD = 0.69$ ) and 36-45 ( $M = 3.39$ ;  $SD = 0.77$ ).

A higher level of perceived usefulness for translation exercises from English into Czech was similarly expressed by all age groups (the age group of 20-35 -  $M = 3.51$ ;  $SD = 0.66$ ; the age group of 36-45 -  $M = 3.47$ ;  $SD = 0.66$ ; and the age group of 46-55 -  $M = 3.43$ ;  $SD = 0.69$ ). Translation exercises from Czech into English were also considered to be of a higher level of perceived usefulness by all age groups (the age group of 20-35 -  $M = 3.47$ ;  $SD = 0.69$ ; the age group of 36-45 -  $M = 3.53$ ;  $SD = 0.66$ ; and the age group of 46-55 -  $M = 3.39$ ;  $SD = 0.74$ ).

Listening to songs was regarded rather unsuitable in all age groups, as the average level of perceived usefulness remained low in the age groups of 20-35 ( $M = 2.38$ ;  $SD = 0.92$ ) and 36-45 ( $M = 2.39$ ;  $SD = 0.96$ ), followed by the participants aged 46-55 ( $M = 2.61$ ;  $SD = 0.96$ ). On the other hand, language games were viewed of a higher level of perceived usefulness, mainly among respondents between the ages of 20-35 ( $M = 3.36$ ;  $SD = 0.79$ ), compared to the age groups of 36-45 ( $M = 3.15$ ;  $SD = 0.81$ ) and 46-55 ( $M = 3.18$ ;  $SD = 0.90$ ).

## 5. Discussion

The findings presented above indicated that beginner adult learners considered whole-class interaction controlled by a teacher and pair work performed directly with a teacher to be highly valuable. Results were consistent across age cohorts and course types. The outcomes corresponded to the participants' views on corrective feedback (CF), as the vast majority reported a preference for teachers' correcting errors immediately during oral performance. This preference might stem from elementary-level learners' beliefs about the teacher as a professional facilitating accurate target language use, and about their peers as their equals with minimal L2 knowledge, and not being able to provide substantive feedback. As Philp et al. (2014) state, correction by the teacher carries the authority of an expert; thus, a different weight. Learners' need for the teacher to provide CF on errors is also articulated in Brown's study (2009), in which students "felt that effective L2 teachers should correct oral mistakes immediately" (p. 54). In Katayama's study (2007) conducted in EFL classes at three universities in Japan, more than three-fourths of respondents expressed a positive attitude toward teacher oral error correction to improve their accuracy in English. However, half of them felt that teachers should not correct all errors that learners make in speaking owing to negative impacts on students' feelings. Also, Jean and Simard's study (2011) on error correction in EFL instruction revealed that 30% of student respondents wanted to be corrected "all the time," while 51% wished to be corrected only when the errors interfere with communication.

The present study further indicated that the learners did not exhibit a strong preference for role play conducted only with their peers. The potential complexity

of peer interactions was demonstrated in Adams's study (2007). The findings of the research with intermediate-level students indicated that learners can acquire forms presented in feedback episodes with their peers; nevertheless, they may also learn each other's errors, particularly when attention is called to them. A case study by Yoshida (2008) revealed that peer correction might not be necessarily effective as in interactions between expert or novice speakers, beginners may not understand why their utterances are incorrect compared to experts' CF. Moreover, novices may not be satisfied with their roles in interactions, being unable to take initiative, which appears to be one of the factors affecting CF understanding in pair work. As can be seen, the proficiency level is one of the factors shaping the characteristics and success of interaction for L2 development (Philp et al., 2014).

The present research also pointed to the importance of listening to colleagues' utterances monitored by teachers, which was underlined by adult learners of all age groups in all course types.

The results further corroborated the usefulness of learning minitalks on different everyday topics by heart, which was stressed by learners of all age groups. The positive influence of content familiarity and task repetition on EFL learners' speaking performance was also indicated in research (Qiu, 2020) at a university in China with undergraduate students at the lower-intermediate and intermediate English proficiency levels in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency. The findings showed that "when repeating familiar topics, learners raised their accuracy and fluency, but their lexical richness dropped slightly, and their structural complexity remained unchanged" (p. 761). In contrast, repeating tasks with unfamiliar topics was more effective in raising structural complexity and more useful for improving lexical richness and accuracy. Also, a study conducted by Doe (2021) with first-year Japanese university students at English proficiency levels ranging from false beginners to high intermediate demonstrated that time-pressured repetition of similar content might facilitate improvement in fluency without a negative impact on complexity or accuracy. Concerning learning mini dialogues by heart, they seem of fairly low value for elementary adult learners of all age groups.

While listening to songs was considered unsuitable by adult learners of all age groups in all types of courses, language games were perceived as worthwhile. This outcome corresponds to the findings of Zondag (2021), who showed the usefulness of language games in terms of increased speaking confidence through enjoyment, creativity, and a safe atmosphere reflected in improvisational activities. Nonetheless, Al-Bulushi and Al-Issa (2017) believe that teaching English through using games may ensure effective learning or increase students' motivation only with an intentional plan of using them to meet specific instructional objectives of the language learning course.

The study results highlighted the importance of L1 use in EFL instruction in elementary-level courses. Learners of all age groups in all types of courses underlined the significant value of oral translation exercises in the process of basic grammar acquisition as well as vocabulary development. In terms of translation

exercises from English to Czech, this is in line with the research study by Castañeda (2017), who detected that adults always want to know what they are saying and need an exact translation of the message in order to feel confident. In the study by Wach and Monroy (2020), almost half of the Polish trainees believed that in relation to learning and teaching vocabulary to lower-proficiency learners, lexical translation is the best for supporting text comprehension. Also, Hunt and Beglar (2002) perceived the direct teaching of vocabulary as the best for beginner students with limited vocabulary. This is based on the assumption that to guess successfully from context, learners need to know about 95% of a text, which requires them to know the 3,000 most common words.

The results corroborated the usefulness of oral translation exercises from Czech to English, which was emphasized by learners of all age groups in all types of courses. This outcome is in line with the study conducted in elementary, middle, and high schools in Ecuador (Sevy-Biloon et al., 2020), highlighting the importance of the use of L1 for grammar explanations and the necessity of speaking L1 according to the students' proficiency levels. Also, in a study by Scheffler (2013), the learners viewed the translation activity from L1 into L2 to be useful in helping them understand aspects of English grammar. Further, in research by Samar and Moradkhani (2014), an explanation of grammatical points in L1 and a comparison between the two languages were cited as motives for ensuring better student comprehension and remembering newly learned issues more easily.

### **5.1. Limitations**

The authors are fully aware of the research limitations as it was carried out through a questionnaire within a specific FL setting and a limited context. The numbers of participants in the particular courses were quite low; this could have an impact on the results of the statistical analyses related to the stated research questions. Since the research sample represented the entire population, all findings and conclusions derived from the study pertain exclusively to this specific sample and cannot be generalised to a broader population.

### **5.2. Implications**

Based on the facts mentioned above, in elementary-level courses, teacher-learner interactions appear decisive in the process of target language acquisition. It is primarily teachers' corrective feedback that enables adult beginning learners to acquire a target language effectively and accurately. Thus, this fact should be taken into account in lesson planning with reference to setting up suitable learning objectives and selecting appropriate teaching methods and activities to achieve the specified objectives.

Furthermore, the authors recognise L1 as a useful pedagogical tool in short-term elementary-level courses preparing adult students for final exams. In view of that, L1 should be incorporated into instruction so as to make L2 acquisition meaningful, less difficult, and less stressful. This might contribute positively to promoting both adults' confidence and sense of achievement.

## 6. Conclusions

The study investigated which activities employed in classes the adult learners considered beneficial for improving speaking skills with respect to their age and the type of course attended. Identifying and understanding adult students' needs and attitudes to FL acquisition appear to be fundamental to the entire teaching process as they may distinctly contribute to preventing conflicts and promoting better communication between teachers and learners (Sato & Storch, 2022). The research findings indicated a crucial role of teacher's corrective feedback in teacher-learner interactions, both dyadic and whole-class, which potentially enables adult beginner learners to acquire a target language more accurately and effectively, and subsequently, enhance their motivation to learn. The study also highlighted the importance of using the mother tongue in short-term elementary-level courses, stressing the substantial value of oral translation exercises in the process of basic grammar acquisition as well as vocabulary development. Overall, the findings did not reflect considerable differences in the perceived usefulness of instructional activities, either among the age cohorts or particular courses.

Nevertheless, qualitative research appears warranted to gain a deeper insight into what activities carried out in classes contribute to the speaking skill development of true and false beginners. It would also be valuable to examine the impact of relationships among military adult learners in the classroom, particularly their effects on the outcomes of different types of peer interactions.

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