

UDC 37-053.88:316.621-028.42]159.922.63

doi: 10.15330/jpnu.11.3.56-67

## OLDER ADULT EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF AGEING

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**Abstract.** In gerontology, the essence of ageing is traditionally equated with decline and degradation, it is considered a purposeful process of loss of the body's adaptive capacity. Psychologists, in particular representatives of behaviorism, deny this position, instead they consider ageing to be an integral part of the general process of human development. Theories of ageing have progressed from focusing on individuals' declines and losses in later phase of their life course to considering ageing as a continuous process of human development. Psychological theories of ageing are crucial to understanding older adults as learners – their needs, abilities, motivation of learning and expectations from educational activity. They help us to develop comprehensive approaches to building an effective educational environment and improving the learning process of that age and social group aiming to adapt that environment to the needs of older adult learners. The article analyzes the main provisions of psychological theories of ageing, which substantiate the importance and even the necessity of involving older adults in educational activities, because firstly, mental activity contributes to the preservation and even development of a person's intellectual capabilities until old age; secondly, in older people (compared to young people), changes in the ability to learn are insignificant and relate rather to the sphere of perception, attention, motivation, and the physiological state of the body; and thirdly, older people have a growing need for a sense of security, which has a significant impact on their quality of life and is largely realized through communication and learning activities. Based on the main tenets of psychological theories of ageing, in our research we consider older adults as a resource and human capital. We believe that the approach to the problem of ageing and old age from the resource perspective, which is based on the ideas of theories of activity and lifelong personality development, allows us to justify the need for education of older adults and is the basis of educational gerontology.

**Keywords:** older adults, education of older adults, theories of ageing, learning activity, lifelong development.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Changes in the demographic situation in Europe, the USA and the vast majority of other more developed countries caused by the rapid ageing of the population, which has been observed in recent decades, have intensified a number of social and economic problems associated with the increase in the segment of older people (60+). The increase in the number of people over 60, as well as the growth of an average life expectancy became the factors in the rethinking of the late period of human life cycle and, accordingly, the revision of age periodization in psychological, social and pedagogical aspects. "The concept of old age becomes inappropriate, since the population determined by the retirement age becomes more differentiated and includes persons who are quite capable and cannot be considered old people by any criteria" (Błędowski, 2002). As Foster and Walker reported, there has been "a paradigm

shift in the understanding of the life course, (...) the transitions associated with education, paid employment, retirement, and family have become increasingly blurred.” (Foster, & Walker, 2021, p. 2).

Traditionally, ageing is perceived as a process of degradation and decline, however, more and more studies prove that person development also occurs during this period, in particular thanks to life activity and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, which are necessary for improving the quality of life in late adulthood. Ageing is a complex biological, psychological and social process which could be characterized as “universal, intrinsic, progressive and harmful” (Mavristakis et al., 2020, p. 252).

The most important trends in changing the social paradigm of old age observed in the last decades of the 20th and early 21st centuries are the following:

- “rejuvenation” of old age, which means, first of all, a change in the approach of people themselves to their age and a tendency to perceive themselves as persons of mature rather than elderly;
- a change in the structure of the population, consisting in a significant increase in the share of older adults in the total population;
- reduction of professional activity in late adulthood;
- feminization of old age;
- singularization of old age;
- better financial situation of older adults;
- the evolution of the approaches to late adulthood in public perception – from negative stereotypes to various views, depending on the age and psychophysical condition of older adults (Tews, 1993, p. 15; Błędowski, 2002).

Therefore, the ageing population as a social group acquired a special characteristic – heterogeneity. However, the age limit, after reaching which a person begins to be included in the gerontogroup, is not the same in different countries. This is due to a number of reasons: retirement age, average life expectancy and society’s readiness to support the integration of older adults into social life. It should be noted that science still does not have a generally accepted chronobiological classification of the gerontogroup.

In response to the dramatic population ageing in most European countries, the “active ageing” paradigm has become the most eminent scientific and policy approach in EU (López-López, Sánchez, 2020, p. 406). As people live longer, healthier and meaningful lives, “policy discourses and socio-political interventions are increasingly organized around models of active, successful and productive ageing” (Grenier, Phillipson, 2013, p. 55). In recent decades, education in late adulthood is considered as an integral part of that model which leads to constructive changes in society. It should be taken into account, that citizens over 55 may become a valuable human resource and ignoring their professional and social experience, competencies and need for the contributive social roles will cost the society development in political, economic, and cultural aspects. Stereotypes about the limited potential for positive change and learning in the second half of the lifespan can limit older adults’ opportunities for further psychological, physical, or social development (Kornadt et al., 2020). As a result, older adult employees may come upon ageism in the work market or face age stereotypes about their ability to learn and further career growth.

Since the fields of social and educational gerontology have been developing, the theories of ageing in this context have shown increasing complexity in the approaches to longevity, active and successful ageing and well-being in later adulthood. As part of this complexity, as Suitor and colleagues indicate, “social gerontology has become increasingly cross-disciplinary” (Suitor et. al., 2019). What is more important, is that social and psychological theories of ageing have progressed from focusing on individuals’ declines and losses in later phase of their life course to considering ageing as a continuous process of human development, emphasizing that “a person’s ageing process depends on their activities and experiences at all ages” (Komp-Leukkunen, & Formosa, 2024, p. 99).

## 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

Objectives: to explain the concepts, characteristics and significance of psychological concepts of ageing; to identify the influence of psychological concepts on older adult learning process.

Methods: comparative analysis, interpretation and generalization.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. The concept of older adult

In social and educational gerontology, the phenomenon of “age” is studied in four aspects: chronological, biological, psychological and social (Phillips, Ajrouch, Hillcoat-Nallétamby, 2010, p.12–13). J. Wattis and S. Curran added an evolutionary aspect as well (Wattis, Curran, 2006, p. 2) However, the characteristic signs of old age are manifested in all these dimensions for each person differently. Accordingly, the age gradation of the gerontogroup is based on the social situation of development, leading activities and personal achievements.

According to the World Health Organization old age is divided into three periods:

- ageing (early old age): 60–74 years old;
- old age: 75-90 years old;
- longevity: 90 years and older (Nowicka, 2006).

In educational gerontology, the distinction between the middle and old age phases based on the criterion of the completion of a person’s professional activity and retirement, in our opinion, can be generally accepted and formative in age periodization, since a person’s retirement (by age) means a change in social and psychological roles and release additional time for self-realization. However, it is necessary to take into account that there is a gender, professional and social differentiation of the retirement age, which also varies depending on the country; a significant segment of people is not involved in professional activity. It should be noted that systematic studies of middle and old age as a multidisciplinary phenomenon began in the 1980s and coincided with the entry of the generation of “baby boomers” (78 million born in the period 1946-64) in the USA into the phase of old age (Masoro, 2001).

Likewise, the division of old age into two age groups: “young old age” and “old old age” is a relatively new phenomenon in scientific discourse. It is associated with the ageing of industrial societies, and its appearance is a consequence of a significant increase in the number of older people who have relatively good health and live longer post-retirement periods.

The process of demographic ageing of the population has become an integral fact of the social life in the developed countries. In general, this will continue (according to all variants of world forecasts) until 2300, and by the middle of the XXI century, the intensity of ageing societies will definitely increase (Population Division, 2015). It is also important to take into account that in the economically developed countries, in particular in the United States, starting from the end of the 1960s, a new socio-demographic stratum was formed – “the young old”, who, according to P. Lasslett’s Theory of the Third Age belong to the “third age” – a period of fulfilment (Laslett, 1991). The theory posits a new framework for looking at the stages of the life course, consisting of four functional periods (ages).

The American psychologist B. Neugarten in her study “Age groups in American Society and the Rise of the Young Old”, initiated a research discourse on the late phase of human life, the transformation of social and public roles associated with old age and the emergence of a new age cohort – “older adults”. The concept of “older adult” appeared as an alternative to “elderly” and “senior”, which usually mean a person over 65. B. Neugarten defined the “older adult” group as persons aged approximately 55 to 75, “... relatively healthy, relatively well-off and free from traditional responsibilities related to work and family” and who are “... more educated and politically active people” (Neugarten, 1974, p. 187). Reflecting on the impact this rapidly growing age cohort will have on the further development of

society, B. Neugarten positioned “older adults” as “self-realized participants in social life” (Neugarten, 1974, p. 198) which was a challenge to ageist approaches to ageing and old age.

### 3.2. Psychological theories of ageing

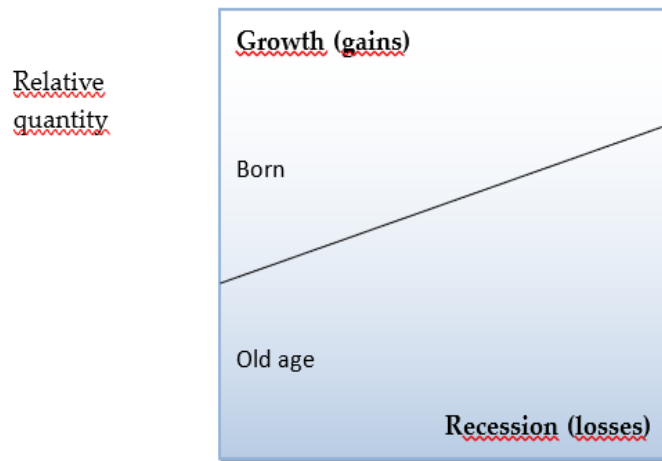
Theories of ageing have a long history of development, beginning with the philosophy of the ancient world. Theory formation can be interpreted as the process of developing ideas that allow understanding and explaining empirical observations. Given the fact that gerontology defines three main components – age, ageing and the old (Cole, Van Tassel, & Kastenbaum, 1992, p. 6) which is a reflection of the concepts “time” and “change”, then ageing theory is an attempt to explain certain changes as a component of the ageing process. For example, J. Baars distinguishes two types of time in gerontological science: “chronological time”, in the traditional sense, and “inner time” – individual and collective understanding of the past, present and future. It is from the perspective of the latter that human ageing must be studied. In the researchers’ opinion, this concept is too broad “to reduce it to chronological age, life expectancy or mortality rate” (Cole, Van Tassel, & Kastenbaum, 1992, p. 6).

Old age should be interpreted as a complex of interrelated physiological, mental and social changes that indicate a general state of regression: physiological – manifested in a decrease in the body's resistance, mental – expressed by dissatisfaction, self-centeredness, escape from reality, memories of past events, feelings of loneliness and loss of life satisfaction and social – related to the loss of performed social roles, professional activity and communication (E. Trafiałek). These changes are mutually determined and testify to the phenomenon of human ageing (Trafiałek, 1998). Reasoning about the causes, mechanisms, differences in the course and sequence of the ageing process led to the development of theories that try to explain the essence of ageing and the actual phenomenon of old age in the biological and psychosocial planes.

Ageing and its consequence – old age are the phenomena of an interdisciplinary nature, so it is necessary to consider them not only from the point of view of biology, but also to study the psychological and social aspects of this process. In the scientific literature, we found different classifications of ageing theories. For examples, the American researchers V. Bengtson, D. Gans, N. Putney, M. Silverstein define three types of theories of aging and old age: biological, psychological and social (Bengtson, Gans, Putney, & Silverstein, 2008). M. Pakula and J. Schroots consider the process of aging and old age in the biological and psychosocial plane (Pakula, 2010), instead, A. Zych singles out biological and social theories of ageing and old age (Zych, 1995). According to A. Chabior, at the time of rapid population ageing, the problem of ageing and old age must be considered in many aspects, in particular biological, psychological, social, and pedagogical scale (Chabior, 2000). In our work, we adhere to A. Chabior’s classification, which characterizes the process of ageing and old age in an interdisciplinary dimension and is most relevant to the subject of research.

In the context of educational gerontology, psychological theories of ageing and old age, which are related to the social interaction of the individual and focus not on the processes of “decline” – the reduction of vital functions of an elderly person, but on positive ageing – have gained wide justification. The main concepts of these theories are adaptation, optimization, compensation and flexibility.

The theory of intellectual development as a lifelong process (R. Havighurst, P. Baltes, G. Labouvie-Vief, N. Denney). The generalization of empirical psychological research on the issue of development throughout life substantiated the integration of ageing into the structure of development; the concept of “development” was rethought and expanded beyond the biological concept of “growth (achievement)” and “progress” to the concept of “change” (Baltes, 1983). Thus, the concept of “development” was defined as any changes (positive or negative) in the adaptive capacity of the organism, as well as the phenomenon of “gain-loss ratio”. Any progress in development simultaneously reflects a new adaptive capacity of the organism and the loss of the previous one (Baltes, 1987, p. 616).



*Fig. 1. Development throughout life: the ratio of gain-loss in the adaptive capacity of the organism (Reflects the assumption of the theory of development throughout life that the total amount of losses and gains in the adaptive capacity of the organism changes proportionally with age)*

The theory of selective optimization and compensation (Baltes P., & Baltes M., 1980), based on the principles of the development of life periods, conceptualizes and explains individual development within the limits of social relationships that are acquired throughout the entire period of a person's life and have a strong influence on his/her health and well-being. The theoretical foundations of the dynamics of relations between gains and losses in the development process were determined (Baltes P., & Baltes M., 1980; Baltes, 1987). The process of selective optimization with compensation has three characteristic features, each of which indicates a "gain-loss" ratio such as:

- a) continuous evolution of specialized forms of adaptation as the main feature of lifelong development;
- b) adaptation to the conditions of biological and social aging with its increasing limitation of flexibility;
- c) individual selective and compensatory efforts aimed at overcoming growing disorders in order to ensure effective aging (Baltes, 1987, p. 616).

The theory of P. Baltes was developed by the American scientists F. Blanchard and A. Kalinauskas, substantiating the importance of the socio-emotional context, which mitigates or compensates for the impact of cognitive decline in older adulthood (Schulz, Noelker, Rockwood, & Spratt, 2006).

The theory of dynamic integration (G. Labouvie-Vief) focuses on the mechanisms of supporting emotional regulation in older adulthood. According to this theory, situations of high activity create escalating levels of emotional arousal in older people much faster than in the young, however, it should be taken into account that older people face difficulties in suppressing high emotional arousal (Labouvie-Vief, 1982).

The theory of cognitive flexibility, formulated by S. Willis, K. Schaie, and M. Martin, is based on the statement that person's development is a process of lifelong adaptation, and therefore is changeable and flexible in all phases of life. The researchers focused on the positive aspects of ageing that are based on the phenomenon of adaptability and explain how the understanding of cognitive flexibility can be applied to improve the lives of older people (Schaie, & Willis, 1986).

Thus, in the field of psychological science, the ageing process and old age are characterized by noticeable age-related psychological and mental changes that lead to difficult controllability of emotional arousal of older adults in situations of high activity. However, the body's adaptive mechanisms work in the direction of the appropriate distribution of cognitive control resources to maintain the emotional state. Important for our research are the provisions of the concept of intellectual development as a lifelong process (P. Baltes), which, firstly, define human development as a process of

changes occurring in the human body throughout life; secondly, they allow the presence of new forms of intellectual functioning in the period of adulthood and old adulthood, or the change of previous ones.

Mental transformations that occur with age are reflected in a decrease in the motor function of the body, changes in the mental and emotional spheres, and a weakening of the cognitive ability of older people. Scientists claim that such processes occur under the influence of quantitative changes in the brain (at the cellular and neuronal levels); however, despite the fact that the human brain decreases with age, it does not atrophy, but degrades if it is not exercised mentally (Coni, Davison, & Webster, 1994, p. 7).

Studies of a person's cognitive ability in different periods of his life have led to certain general conclusions. It has been proven that people after 80, the psychomotor function weakens slightly, but the ability of abstract thinking decreases; also a noticeable weakening of the ability to remember, analyze and reproduce information, while the reaction time to various external stimuli increases (Rybash, Hoyer, & Roodin, 1986; Salthouse, 2016).

Since mental activity of older adults is an effective factor in preserving their cognitive function, and therefore the quality of life in old adulthood (Workforce Investment Act, 1998) the study of this issue occupied a significant segment of research in the field of gerontology. The most controversial in the scientific literature are the conclusions regarding the mental capacity and learning ability of older adults. D. Bromley believes that the physiological capacity for a person mental activity decreases after 25. The processes of memorization and learning are subject to changes under the influence of age, but they have an individual character (Bromley, 1969, p. 117–119). According to the conclusion of J. Birren, with age, changes in the ability to learn are insignificant, and the difference between the learning process in young people and older adults lies rather in the sphere of perception, attention, motivation and the physiological state of the body, than in the actual changes in the ability to learn (Peterson, Thornton, & Birren, 1987, p. 117). A similar position is taken by P. Skawran, stressing that the capacity for mental activity in older age does not decrease, but only changes, therefore it is incorrect to use tests intended for young people for its study (Wisniewska-Roszkowska, 1989, p. 33). According to I. Karney, the development of an adult consists in the growth of his ability to realize the relationship between a person and the environment (Karney, 1994, p. 90). Based on the research of J. Horn, which proves that with age a person's cognitive ability decreases, but mentally active people accumulate knowledge and intellectual experience (Horn, 1976). S. Klonowicz calls this a "phenomenon of a positive transfer" (Klonowicz, 1973). A. Chabior emphasizes that "just as physical activity supports a person's motor ability until old age, so mental activity contributes to the preservation and even development of intellectual abilities until old age" (Chabior, 2000, p. 31). P. Baltes explains this fact by the presence of the so-called reserve of mental activity, which is not used as a potential, but can be launched if more time and energy are devoted to it (Baltes, Freund, & Li, 2005; Baltes, 1987).

That is, mental activity is not only a factor in maintaining a person's cognitive ability in older adulthood, but also an integral condition for his/her lifelong development.

In the field of personal changes of older adults, there is a tendency to increase the external manifestation of the position and behavior that were easily controlled, masked or modified at a young age. The main life position does not change, but becomes more expressive and acute. In the emotional life of an older person, certain changes can be traced, compared to previous age periods, which are manifested in the fact that the older adults are much less prone to emotional breakdowns: an adult experiences an emotion, but an older adult observes and makes sense of it (Chauchard, 1977, p. 71).

Thus, the studies prove that the influence of physiological changes in older adulthood, the reduction of a person's vital abilities, as well as certain social factors lead to an increase in the mental needs of older people, depending on age, gender and their belonging to a social group. The need for a sense of security has a significant impact on the quality of life of older adults, and their attitude to their own and other people ageing and old age is largely determined by their health condition, material and social status.

Discussions regarding psychological changes in older adult functioning have reached a certain consensus. Some changes of a degrading nature in the mental sphere of an older person are accepted as an indisputable fact, indicating, at the same time, two significant conclusions:

firstly, each person's ageing process has a deeply individual character;

secondly, the so-called "compensatory", leveling ability is launched in the body of an older person in the field of mental functioning in old age, which is filled with new experience through various types of activity, in particular, learning.

The sense of life satisfaction and happiness of older people is directly related to their real-life situation. A special role in this is played by the material factor, state of health, sense of security and social integration (Rembowski, 1984, p. 30).

### **3.3. Learning as an integral component of lifelong personal development**

Lifelong education is an effective way of adapting older people to life in the conditions of rapid high-tech development of society, the need for further personal self-realization, intergenerational communication, and preservation of human capital. In this context, the ideas of active and positive ageing, meaningful leisure and learning activities of people in late adulthood, aimed at realizing the intellectual, professional and social potential of people of this age cohort, are developing.

As older adults have been involved to educational activity, the question of motivation to learn remains relevant for research in the fields of psychology and educational gerontology. Some studies have reported that the reasons for learning in late adulthood "are complex because they have both social and individual explanations." (Hachem, 2023, p. 83).

Older adult education (learning) is largely based on the psychological theories (behaviorism, cognitivism, cognitive constructivism and developmental psychology), which considered the learning process as a personality phenomenon. At the same time, in the field of socio-cultural psychology, theory of activity and theory of cognition, research formed an understanding of learning activity as a form of social participation. That is, learning (in various forms) is an integral component of older adult personal development and a mechanism of social interaction and integration of people of this age group.

Learning activity of a person in late adulthood is associated with the quality of his/her life. The quality of life in this age period depends on five main factors: health, socioeconomic status, age, activity level, and social integration (Merriam, & Kee, 2014, p. 131). The last two of the mentioned factors are related to learning, as it is one of the effective mechanisms for maintaining a person's activity (mental and physical) and social inclusion. Social integration, involvement in the social life through productive activities, volunteering, learning (formal or informal) and meaningful leisure have a positive effect on older adult mental and physical health. Moreover, the more diverse a person's activities are, the higher is the quality of their life, compared to those people who lead an isolated and monotonous lifestyle. (Herzog, Ofstedal, & Weeler, 2002, p. 595).

Accordingly, learning actually becomes the main field of activity of older people, through which their social activity, communication and integration are realized, and as a result, the quality of their life may increase. Research by McArthur Study (USA) proved that the involvement of older people in meaningful and useful activities has a positive effect on their health, longevity and life satisfaction, as well as reduces the risk of physical and mental diseases (Butler, 2002, p. 323). Thus, learning in late adulthood performs an adaptive function, as it contributes to the adaptation of a person to the rapid changes in technological, social, financial and health aspects, and hence – changes in the lifestyle. Learning also plays an important integrative function and promotes a positive personal development, i.e. integrity.

The learning model based on the theory of cognitivism is one of the most effective in organizing the learning process for older adults. Unlike the behaviorist model, where learning does not promote deep understanding and conceptualization of knowledge as well as autonomy of judgment, this model focuses on learners existing knowledge and competences rather than on the reproduction of information

or forms of behavior. And this is a fundamental approach in organizing the educational process for older adults, since they have significant social and professional experience that allows applying a contextual approach in learning. Moreover, the theory of cognitive constructivism emphasizes the active participation of the learners in the educational process, in particular while choosing and working out of learning strategies and autonomy in shaping the learning trajectory.

Studying the process of personal development in the period of late adulthood provides an understanding of the principles of the functioning of society. Since learning is related to the process of personality development, psychological theories of development are the main basis of lifelong learning, because they consider a person in the context of his/her development at all stages of the life cycle, but prove that at each stage the most appropriate forms and methods of learning should be used (Tusting, & Barton, 2003, p. 10).

K. Riegel formulated a complex concept of human development, which covers four dimensions: internal-biological, individual-psychological, cultural-psychological and physical (Riegel, 1976). The period of their balance is the exception rather than the rule. When there is conflict between two or more areas of personal development, the potential for change emerges (Tennant, & Pogson, 1995).

Therefore, personal development is a normal, continuous process, and learning activity is an integral component of lifelong personal development.

M. Tennant and P. Pogson, investigating the impact of learning activities on personality development in late adulthood, came to the conclusion that the focus must be shifted to social and cultural processes that contribute to changes and stimulate personality development, and the mechanism of its implementation is also learning as one of the types of social activity of older adults.

The main idea supported by psychological theories of development is lifelong personal development. In the period of older adulthood, it should be considered not as a separate linear process with set goals, but as a historically, socially and culturally conditioned process. Therefore, when talking about learning activities in older adulthood, it is important to know in which social roles, positions and experiences a person is involved. Such an approach would make it possible to organize the educational process effectively and contribute to the further personal development of older adults in the direction they need.

The theory of social constructivism is another important scientific platform on which the foundations of older adult education were formed. Representatives of the theory of activity (sociocultural theory) focused on the study of the mental sphere in the context of constant, meaningful and purposeful interaction with other people, activated by semiotic and material means. In particular, L. Vygotsky proved that the development of higher mental functioning of an individual depends on both biophysical processes (brain maturation) and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978).

The scientist supported the approach of social constructivism, from the perspective of which interaction with other people and cultural artifacts (not only with new ideas) is crucial for learning activity. (Social constructivism is an approach to learning that emphasises student engagement, discussion and the sharing of knowledge, skills or experiences). Cognitive stimulation occurs, first of all, in the social plane, in particular through social interaction, and only then – in the psychological plane. That is, social interaction underlies the development of all higher cognitive functions (thinking, voluntary attention, logical memory).

Unlike J. Piaget, who believed that development should precede learning (Piaget, 1970), L. Vygotsky believed that personality development (in particular, intellectual) occurs in the process of social contacts with other people. This conviction is at the basis of the sociocultural theory of the development of higher mental functions, which to some extent justifies learning in late adulthood as the need for social interaction to maintain cognitive functions and personal development, since in educational gerontology, an older adult is studied from the perspective of development.

The organization of learning for older adults is largely carried out through practical training. The effectiveness of this form was proven by psychologists D. Lave and E. Wenger. These ideas formed the



basis of the theory of situational learning as an alternative to instructional learning. If in the theory of cognitivism mentioned above, knowledge is considered as an abstract value in the mental sphere of a person, then situational learning emphasizes the situations and context in which the educational process takes place. The scientists developed the concept of “learning by working” and actually substantiated the principle of mutual learning in a psychological context (Lave, Wenger, 1991).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The psychological theories of ageing are crucial to understanding older adults as learners – their needs, abilities, motivation of learning and expectations from educational activity. Some theories consider learning in late adulthood as an individual’s natural need and an effective mechanism of further personal growth. Psychological theories of ageing help us to develop comprehensive approaches to building an effective educational environment and improving the learning process of that age and social group aiming to adapt that environment to the needs of older adult learners.

According to the situational model of learning, in older adult education it is important to find the type of social activity in which people of this age group want or need to participate, and to offer opportunities for learning through involvement in such activity.

Moreover, older adults are already involved in various forms of social activity in their daily life, so relying on their experience and competence and using it in educational process is a significant factor of their learning motivation. The role of the teacher is not so much in instructing and teaching as in organizing social interaction and structuring the learning material in such a way that it is actively learned. This approach is the basis of the principle of mutual learning in the organization of the educational process for older adults in Lifelong Learning Institutes and Learning in Retirement Institutes, which function as the structural units of higher education institutions in the USA. Therefore, the educational environment should be built in such a way that theory and practice are combined through social interaction, which will enable older learners to acquire practical competences and experience in the appropriate context.

Thus, learning is an integral part of active ageing in modern society with a characteristic trend of demographic ageing of the population. Education (learning) contributes to maintaining the cognitive ability and mental activity of older adults, increasing their adaptive ability and social interaction. The need for social integration of older adults stems from the need to adapt to rapidly changing living conditions, which include changes in the economic, social and cultural areas of the society. Education in late adulthood is the key to a positive path of personal development, as it enables the integration of the individual into social life. A person, being socially active in the period of late adulthood, feels his/her necessity and usefulness and thus supports his/her emotional, personal and cognitive sphere.

Based on the basic tenets of the theories of ageing, we may consider older adults from the resource and human capital perspective. This approach may allow to justify the need for older adult education and learning and is the basis of educational gerontology.

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**Received:** September 06, 2024; **revised:** September 14, 2024; **accepted:** September 25, 2024; **published:** September 30, 2024.

Чаграк Наталія. Освіта старших дорослих у контексті психологічних теорій старіння. *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника*, 11 (3) (2024), 56-67.

У геронтології сутність старіння традиційно ототожнюють із занепадом і деградацією, вважають його цілеспрямованим процесом втрати адаптаційних можливостей організму. Психологи, зокрема представники біхевіоризму, заперечують цю позицію, натомість вважають старіння невід'ємною частиною загального процесу розвитку людини. Теорії старіння пройшли шлях від зосередження уваги на занепаді та втратах індивідів на пізніх етапах їхнього життєвого шляху до розгляду старіння як безперервного процесу розвитку людини. Акцентовано, що психологічні теорії старіння мають вирішальне значення для розуміння людей похилого віку як учнів – їхніх потреб, здібностей, мотивації навчання та очікувань від освітньої діяльності. Вони допомагають розробити комплексні підходи до побудови ефективного освітнього середовища та вдосконалення процесу навчання цієї вікової та соціальної групи задля адаптації цього середовища до потреб осіб старшого віку. У статті проаналізовано основні положення психологічних теорій старіння, які обґрунтовують важливість і навіть необхідність залучення людей похилого віку до освітньої діяльності, оскільки, по-перше, розумова діяльність сприяє збереженню і навіть розвитку інтелектуальних здібностей людини до глибокої старості; по-друге, у людей похилого віку (порівняно з молоддю) зміни в здатності до навчання незначні і стосуються скоріше сфери сприйняття, уваги, мотивації, фізіологічного стану організму; по-третє, у людей похилого віку зростає потреба в почутті захищеності, що має значний вплив на якість їхнього життя і значною мірою реалізується через спілкування та навчальну діяльність. Спираючись на основні положення психологічних теорій старіння, у дослідженні авторка розглядає літніх людей як ресурс і людський капітал. Доведено, що підхід до проблеми старіння і старості з позиції ресурсу, який ґрунтується на ідеях теорій діяльності та розвитку особистості впродовж життя, дозволяє обґрунтувати необхідність освіти людей похилого віку і є основою освітньої геронтології.

**Ключові слова:** старші дорослі, освіта старших дорослих, теорії старіння, навчальна активність, розвиток упродовж життя.