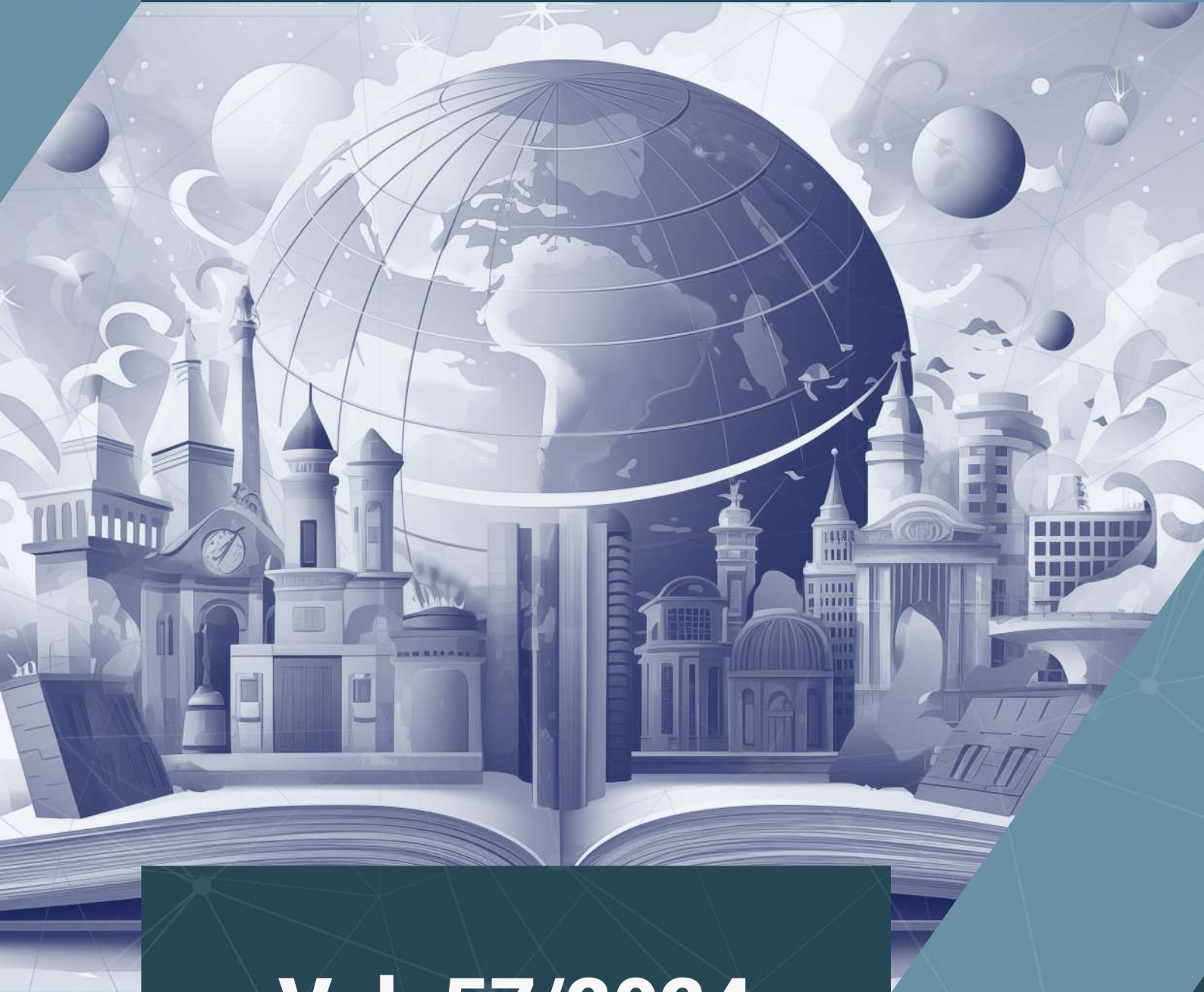




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English proficiency of Japanese third-age learners: A Quantitative Inquiry

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Abstract. The EFL (English as a Foreign Language) participation and engagement of third-age learners, whose ages range from 50 up to 70 and above has received global attention. Japanese third-age learners' pursuit of English competence exhibits broader societal trends and personal desires for lifelong learning. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational approach, the study assessed the level of English language proficiency (ELP) of 59 Japanese third-age learners registered in the 2023-2024 EFL program in five cities of Aichi prefecture, Japan, when they were taken as a whole and when they were demographically grouped by sex, age, educational background, and weekly average study time. The results show that on average, third-age learners in Japan achieve an intermediate level of English proficiency or B1, with variances observed attributed to demographic criteria such as sex, age, educational background, and weekly English study time. The study found a significant relationship between ELP and the respondents' demographic, indicating that ELP levels are influenced by sex, age, educational attainment, and the number of hours spent learning English per week, with males showing higher proficiency and older learners generally showing higher levels. The study underscores the need for tailored English language instruction for third-age learners, taking into account their specific demographics. It also considers the policy implications of institutionalizing programs for third-age learners in Japan, aiming to promote active aging, social integration, and overall well-being. Researchers, teachers, and curriculum designers may use this study as one of the bases for developing tailored curricula and instructional materials for third-age learners.

Keywords. EFL program, English proficiency, Japanese third-age, descriptive-correlational, Japan

1. Introduction

English proficiency in today's global village facilitates international activities like tourism, ease of travel, cultural exchange, and socialization. The EFL (English as a Foreign Language) participation and engagement of third-age learners, whose ages range from 50 up to 70 and above [1], has received global attention from Europe [2,3] to South America [4], and from Africa [5] to Asia [6]. This demographic cohort provides a unique case study for studying

language acquisition as they navigate the complexities of acquiring a new language later in life while dealing with the social, cognitive, and physiological changes that come with aging [7].

The Asian context of responding to EFL and adult English proficiency demands is compelling [8]. Third-age learners in Asia are drawn to EFL programs for various reasons [9,10] as English fluency allows for cross-cultural discourse and participation with a global audience [11]. The growing number of third-age English learners in Asia necessitates teachers to develop teaching strategies [12] and learning management systems [13], and impact government policies and programs related to EFL, like the case in China [14].

In Japan, where traditional values blend with modern aspirations, third-age learners' pursuit of English competence exhibits broader societal trends and personal desires for lifelong learning [6]. With Japan having one of the largest proportions of elderly persons in the world, there is an increasing awareness of the importance of promoting active aging and supporting ongoing educational alternatives for older people [15,16,7]. Against this backdrop, studying the relationship between demographic factors such as age [17,18], sex [19,20,21], educational background [22], exposure [23,24], and English proficiency levels among older Japanese adults can provide valuable insights into the efficacy of language learning programs and the factors that influence language acquisition outcomes in later life. This might help EFL teachers, especially in Japan, design tailored instructional materials, that still need to be studied and explored [7].

One of the researchers not only encountered a scarcity of instructional materials (IMs) for third-age learners but also experienced the challenge of designing IMs for them due to their indeterminate levels of English proficiency. In 2020, using IMs designed for either Junior High School or High School students he began teaching English conversation lessons to two groups of third-grade students in two cities, followed by two more groups in 2021 and 2022. Each group had ten to twenty members and met almost every month. New members joined, while some previous members took a break or moved to other places. Group members or leaders aided the dynamics of attracting more students by recommending or referring the researcher to other groups of third-age EFL learners. The growing number of third-age learners and the absence of IMs designed for them were seriously considered by researchers leading to the conduct of this study.

The researchers explored some studies in EFL programs in the context of Japanese third-age learners. While some studies involved Japanese learners including third-age, the emphasis was not specifically on their English proficiency [1,15,25]. Other studies explored English competency in Japan but were not specific for third-age learners [26,27]. Other than these, there has been a lack of studies, especially those that explore Japanese third-age learners' ELP from which the design of the IMs for third-age learners would be anchored. This is the gap that this study fills in.

Therefore, this study assessed the English proficiency level of Japanese third-age learners engaged in the EFL programs in five cities in Aichi prefecture, Japan, relative to sex, age, educational background, and the average number of hours per week spent learning English. It also investigated the relationship between the third-age learners' demographics and English language proficiency (ELP). The findings may serve as a basis for designing and developing tailored instructional materials for third-age EFL classrooms, particularly in five of the cities of Aichi prefecture, Japan.

2. Framework of the study

This study theoretically assumed that the third-age learners' ELP is related to their demographics: sex, age, educational attainment, and exposure or the weekly average time spent learning English. The assumption was anchored on intersectionality theory by Crenshaw [28]. According to intersectionality theory, the intersections of multiple social identities, such as sex, age, educational background, and socioeconomic class, influence people's experiences. In the context of Japanese old adult or third-age learners' English competence, intersectionality theory underlines the necessity of considering how different demographic characteristics interact to influence language learning experiences and outcomes.

3. Methods

The study utilized a quantitative research design particularly, a descriptive-correlational approach. Specifically, the descriptive approach assessed the levels of English proficiency. Meanwhile, the correlational approach investigated the significant relationship between the ELP and their demographics. There were 59 respondents chosen through the total enumeration method since the total number of the five classes was less than 100.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	f	%
Sex		
Male	20	33.9
Female	39	66.1
Age		
45 years old and below	5	8.5
46-65 years old	22	37.3
66 years old and above	32	54.2
Educational Background		
High School	10	16.9
Undergraduate	36	61.0
Graduate	13	22.0
Hours		
Seldom	36	61.0
Regular	15	25.4
Always	8	13.6
Total	59	100.0

The researchers used a researcher-made test questionnaire to assess the English proficiency level of the respondents. The questionnaire contains 60 items; the first thirty items, which assessed the reading skills of the respondents, include multiple-choice items and sentence completion using brief texts. The instrument's validity and reliability were tested before its utilization in the actual data gathering. Using Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio (CVR), the questionnaire was validated by ten (10) experts in the field and yielded 0.99. It was pilot-tested and yielded a reliable Cronbach's alpha score of 0.94. The English proficiency levels were based Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This CEFR is an international standard to describe language ability across reading, writing, listening, and speaking [29]. The scales used to interpret English proficiency were proficient (C2), advanced (C1), upper intermediate (B2), intermediate (B1), elementary (A2), and beginner (A1).

Descriptive and correlational analyses were employed to analyze the data. The descriptive analysis assessed the English proficiency level using mean and standard deviation.

Meanwhile, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine the normality of the variable. The normality test revealed that the variable proficiency [KS=0.159, p=0.001] was not normally distributed. Hence, the use of nonparametric statistics for inferential questions. Rank biserial and Spearman rank correlation correlated the third-age learners' level of English proficiency and the demographics. Lastly, to guarantee the ethical soundness of the study, the researchers addressed the general principles of respect for persons, justice, and beneficence.

4. Results and Discussion

English Proficiency Level of Japanese Third-Age Learners

Table 2 presents the English proficiency level of Japanese third-age learners participating in the English Foreign Language Program. The English proficiency level as a whole (M=24.39, SD=6.99) is B1 or Intermediate. When grouped according to sex, the proficiency level of females (M=21.46, SD=5.27) is in the lower intermediate or lower B1, while males (M=30.1, SD=6.46) are in the higher intermediate level or higher B1. In terms of age, 45 years old and below (M=21, SD=3.67) and 46-65 years old (M=22.14, SD=5.77) are in lower B1 level of proficiency while 66 years old and above (M=26.47, SD=7.56) are in higher B1 level of proficiency. Regarding educational background, high school graduates (M=19.2, SD=5.98) are in higher elementary level or A2, undergraduate (M=22.72, SD=4.77) respondents are in low B1 of proficiency, while graduates (M=33, SD=5.63) are in upper-intermediate or B2 level of proficiency. For an average number of hours spent learning English per week, respondents under the seldom (M=20.19, SD=3.58) category are in A2 or upper-elementary level of proficiency, while respondents under the regular (M=30.33, SD=6.55) and always (M=32.13, SD=4.45) categories are in B1 (upper intermediate) and B2 (lower upper-intermediate), respectively.

Table 2 indicates comprehensive data on the English language proficiency levels of Japanese third-age learners enrolled in English as a foreign language program. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the overall level of English proficiency, with a mean score of 24.39 and a standard deviation of 6.99, is classified as B1 or Intermediate. However, interesting patterns show up when looking at the proficiency levels depending on various demographic factors.

Firstly, there is an obvious disparity in the skill levels of the sexes. Males display a higher mean proficiency score (M=30.1, SD=6.46), suggesting a higher intermediate level or higher B1, whereas females have a lower mean proficiency score (M=21.46, SD=5.27), suggesting a lower intermediate or lower B1 level. The B1 level can understand texts that consist mainly of high-frequency everyday or job-related language and can understand the description of events, feelings, and wishes in personal letters, emails, SMS, etc. They can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. They can understand the main point of many radio or TV programs on current affairs or personal or professional interest topics when the delivery is relatively slow and clear. The discrepancy between the sexes could point to possible variations in the program's learning environments, learning styles, motivations, or opportunities for language practice between the sexes.

The results of the study, when looking at the disparity in the skill levels of the sexes, the age-related advantage, educational background, and consistency in language practice pose pedagogical implications. The reported discrepancy in English proficiency between male and female learners suggests a need to explore and figure out potential gender-based differences in learning environments, styles, motivations, and opportunities for language practice. EFL

teachers, as a significant factor in learning a language in later life [30], should endeavor to create supportive and inclusive learning environments [7,31] that accommodate the diverse learning motives and needs [32] and preferences of both male and female learners, ensuring equitable access to language learning opportunities and resources.

Secondly, the respondents with the highest mean proficiency score ($M=26.47$, $SD=7.56$) are those 66 years and older. On the other hand, the respondents with the lowest mean proficiency score ($M=21$, $SD=3.67$) are 45 years of age and younger. This suggests that their B1 level of competence is lower. A commitment to language acquisition over time, cognitive aptitude, or previous exposure to English could all contribute to this trend.

Although this might not always be the case in every situation, EFL instructors should leverage age-related advantages. The finding that older learners typically have higher levels of English competence highlights the significance of considering age-related benefits when learning a language. By creating lesson plans and activities that match their interests and strengths, EFL teachers can acknowledge and benefit from the life experiences and cognitive development that older students have accrued. By incorporating the older learners' experiences in the lessons, the entire class may benefit, especially the younger ones.

For instance, EFL instructors may utilize the older learners' knowledge and experiences of cultural exchange or intercultural discussion and awareness that proved to be necessary in the process of globalization [33] that Japan has been experiencing due to the influx of foreigners to aid its aging workforce. Furthermore, providing older learners with opportunities for meaningful language practice in real-world contexts might improve their language mastery even more, helping them increase their chances of global involvement [34]. Another pedagogical implication of this finding is the possibility for EFL instructors to pair older learners with younger learners, reflecting the learner-centered approach for adults in Saito's back-to-the-basics theory [35]. This may allow the younger learners to learn from their older counterparts while the older ones utilize their experiences and skills within the context of the EFL program.

The respondents' levels of English proficiency are also influenced by their educational background. The lowest mean proficiency score is seen in high school graduates ($M=19.2$, $SD=5.98$) at the elementary or A2 level. An A2 level can read concise, simple texts; can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday materials such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus, and timetables; can understand short, simple personal letters, emails, SMS, and so on. They can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of immediate personal relevance (e.g., fundamental personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). They can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.

On the other hand, graduates have the greatest mean proficiency score ($M=33$, $SD=5.63$), indicating an upper-intermediate or B2 level. A B2 level, based on CEFR, can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt attitudes or viewpoints and can understand contemporary literary prose. They can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar; they can understand most TV news and current affairs programs and most films in standard dialect. Then, the undergraduates have a slightly higher mean proficiency score ($M=22.72$, $SD=4.77$), placing them in the B1 level. This implies that a greater education may improve language skills, possibly due to more exposure to academic settings or English language training.

The relationship between educational background and English proficiency levels emphasizes how crucial it is to meet learners' unique demands and ability levels from different educational backgrounds. Its implication in the classroom setting may require differentiated instruction that should be incorporated into EFL programs to meet the needs of students with varying proficiency levels. Besides differentiated instruction, EFL instructors may facilitate goal setting among the learners [36,2], both the overall learning and daily session goals. One way to encourage the learners, without so much emphasis on those with less formal education, is to follow the suggestion of Yamauchi [37] regarding the use of topic-based teaching where EFL instructors may use the topics as "interest triggers" that create the need for learning. This will allow learners with less formal education to benefit from additional support. In contrast, learners with higher educational attainment will have opportunities to practice advanced language and help their younger counterparts. Moreover, with a clear overall learning goal, such as the goal to go higher from A2 to B1, EFL instructors, as suggested by Yamauchi [38], may provide the students with individualized materials or resources to help them achieve their goals.

Lastly, the average weekly hours spent studying English have an impact on proficiency levels as well. Respondents with higher skill levels invest more time in studying the language. The individuals classified as "regular" (M=30.33, SD=6.55) and "always" (M=32.13, SD=4.45) had higher weekly learning hours in English and exhibited proficiency levels that were respectively intermediate (B1) and upper-intermediate (B2). On the other hand, those who answered "seldom" (M=20.19, SD=3.58) spend less time studying the language and have elementary (A2) skill levels.

Emphasizing consistent language practice is important, especially if the third-age learners' goal to achieve a higher proficiency level is clear. Otherwise, consistency may be optional. In case the goal is to achieve a higher level of proficiency [38,36,2], instructors of EFL should motivate students to set aside enough time for consistent English study and offer plenty of opportunities for language practice in [37] and outside [38] of the classroom. Authentic materials and interactive activities can support ongoing language competency development and reinforce language abilities. EFL instructors may provide these authentic and interactive activities for third-age learners' consumption either inside or outside the classroom geared toward language acquisition and international consciousness [40].

Table 2. *English Proficiency Level of Japanese Third-Age Learners*

Variable	M	SD	Interpretation
Sex			
Male	30.10	6.46	B1 (higher Intermediate)
Female	21.46	5.27	B1 (lower Intermediate)
Age			
45 years old and below	21.00	3.67	B1 (lower Intermediate)
46-65 years old	22.14	5.77	B1 (lower Intermediate)
66 years old and above	26.47	7.56	B1 (higher Intermediate)
Educational Background			
High School	19.20	5.98	A2 (higher elementary)
Undergraduate	22.72	4.77	B1 (lower Intermediate)
Graduate	33.00	5.63	B2 (lower upper-intermediate)
Hours			
Seldom	20.19	3.58	A2 (higher elementary)
Regular	30.33	6.55	B1 (higher intermediate)
Always	32.13	4.45	B2 (lower upper-intermediate)
Whole	24.39	6.99	B1 (intermediate)

Relationship between demographics and English proficiency level

Relationship between the Third-age Learners' Sex and English Proficiency. The nonparametric statistical data analysis reveals a relationship between third-age learners' English proficiency levels and demographic characteristics (see Table 3). The rank biserial correlation coefficient shows a significant relationship ($r_s = -0.578$, $p = 0.000$) between sex and English proficiency, indicating that sex influences English proficiency. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted since there is a significant relationship between the third-age learners' English proficiency and sex.

The result of this study is different from the study of Alkhawaldeh and Khasawneh [41] in Saudi Arabia, Zhu [42] in China, Lasekan [43] in India, and Galantomos [44] in Greece. In the findings of Alkhawaldeh and Khasawneh, females outperformed males in both speaking and writing proficiencies. Zhu found that females outperformed males, particularly in listening, but males outperformed females in writing. Likewise, Lasekan and Galantomos discovered that female learners (undergraduate and adult) have higher English competence than male learners. Furthermore, the result of this study is also opposite to the result of the study of Rianto [45] in Indonesia, Meniado [46], and Serquina and Batang [47] in the Philippines in which gender was negatively correlated with the learners' level of proficiency; Fattahi and Nushi [48] in Iran (though the respondents were undergraduate students) in which gender did not influence students' metaphor use, which is an integral part of English proficiency.

This finding has implications for teaching EFL to third-age learners. Educators should contemplate including strategies that tackle possible gender-based variations in language acquisition methodologies and inclinations [32,7]. To meet the needs and interests of both male and female students, this may involve providing various educational resources and activities [49].

Furthermore, it could be necessary for educators to provide focused assistance and motivation to female students to close the proficiency difference found in this research. Likewise, the disparity in results when compared to other research conducted in Saudi Arabia [41], Greece [44], the Philippines [46,47], China [42], and India [43] highlights the significance of contextual elements and the demand for customized methods of teaching English as a foreign language in Japan. EFL teachers need to be aware of these differences and adjust their methods of instruction accordingly to meet the diverse needs of third-age learners and eventually achieve gender-neutral language learning outcomes.

Relationship between the Third-age Learners' Age and their English Proficiency. There is a significant relationship between age and English proficiency ($r_s = 0.291$, $p = 0.025$), suggesting that age affects English competence. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted since there is a significant relationship between the third-age learners' English proficiency and age. The result differs from the findings of Serquina and Batang [47], who found that age has little effect on the respondents' English proficiency. However, it agrees with the findings of Meniado [46], who reports in his study that there is a significant difference in the level of English proficiency and the age of adult language learners. The differences in findings might be due to various environmental, contextual, and individual factors that influence the effects of age on second language acquisition [50] or cognitive aptitude and linguistic comprehension [7,30]

This finding has important implications for teaching older learners English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The results indicate that older people have greater proficiency levels overall, suggesting that teaching strategies that leverage their accumulated life experiences and cognitive maturity may benefit them. To avoid demotivation [51], EFL educators must

acknowledge the potential benefits of age-related variables, such as greater exposure to language learning opportunities and improved cognitive abilities, in supporting third-age learners' language acquisition.

Additionally, instructional strategies should be modified to consider the special requirements and learning preferences of older students and the needs of younger old-adult learners [7]. Examples of these modifications include incorporating culturally relevant materials that speak to their experiences and offering opportunities for meaningful language practice in authentic settings that are always suitable for their age [52]. The outcome deviates from other research in that it emphasizes the impact of contextual and individual factors on age-related effects in language acquisition; nonetheless, it does create a strong reason to emphasize the significance of taking age into account when creating effective EFL programs for learners in the third age [3]. Educators can optimize the potential for language proficiency development for older learners by creating learning environments that are supportive and empowering by recognizing and utilizing the strengths that come with age [49].

Relationship between the Third-age Learners' Educational Attainment and English Proficiency. A significant relationship ($r_s=0.587$, $p=0.000$) between educational attainment and English competency suggests that those with more education are more proficient in the language. This result emphasizes how crucial educational achievement is to third-age learners' development of language proficiency. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted since there is a significant relationship between the third-age learners' English proficiency and educational attainment. The results of this study, in terms of educational attainment, are in line with the findings of Rizvi et al. [53], who stated that prior education, including region and neighborhood poverty level, strongly predicted overall learning outcomes. Likewise, they agree with the findings of Meniado [46], who affirmed that there was a significant difference in the adult respondents' level of English proficiency and their educational attainment.

The results indicate the potential advantages of higher levels of formal education in language acquisition and emphasize the significance of educational background in determining language proficiency levels among third-age learners. Teachers should be aware of how past experiences in school might help students acquire a language, and they should use this understanding in designing tailored instructional materials that cater to the differing needs and skill levels of students from different educational backgrounds [35,7]. Furthermore, to promote the development of language proficiency, instructional strategies should build on the information and abilities that students already possess [52]. This can be achieved by offering chances for advanced language practice and intellectual engagement. Although in line with earlier studies, the outcome highlights how important it is to eliminate educational gaps and support older individuals' fair access to language learning opportunities. Acknowledging the impact of educational attainment on language proficiency outcomes, educators can support third-age learners in achieving their proficiency goals and creating opportunities for lifelong learning by implementing tailored interventions [3].

Relationship between the Third-age Learners' Average Number of Hours Spent Learning English per Week and their English Proficiency. The most significant relationship ($r_s=0.741$, $p=0.000$) has been found between the number of hours spent learning English per week and proficiency levels. This suggests that regular practice and dedication greatly influence language acquisition among this population. With this, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted since there is a significant relationship between third-age learners' English proficiency and the average number of hours spent learning English per week.

The results of this study are in line with Al Zoubi [24], Domingo [23], and Marabe and Petalla [54], who affirm that exposure to a target language significantly impacts language ability, including reading, writing, and speaking. Teachers should provide more opportunities for language interaction in the classroom for students to learn and become proficient in a second language. On the other hand, the result does not agree with the findings of Bacus and Aldala [55], who affirm the absence of a relationship between English proficiency and language exposure.

Table 3. *Relationship Between the Third-Age Learners' English Proficiency and Demographics*

Variable	rs	df	p
Sex	-0.578*	57	0.000
Age	0.291*	57	0.025
Educational Background	0.587*	57	0.000
Hours	0.741*	57	0.000

Note: *correlation is significant when $p \leq 0.05$

Synthesis

The results highlight the significance of consistent practice and commitment in language acquisition for this demographic, underscoring the need to provide plenty of opportunities for language practice and interaction in EFL classrooms [52] for them to engage freely and savor the joy of learning [16]. To promote language competency development, educators should prioritize developing immersive learning environments that promote active engagement with the language [30]. These environments should include various communicative activities and authentic resources that could be given partly implicitly [56].

Moreover, the outcome is consistent with other studies demonstrating the significant influence of language exposure on language proficiency, implying that augmenting one's exposure to the target language within and beyond the educational setting can foster enhanced reading, writing, and speaking abilities. While the current result differs from some previous findings—which could be explained by contextual or methodological differences—it nevertheless emphasizes how important it is for teachers to give language exposure and practice top priority when teaching EFL to third-age learners [23]. Teachers can help older adults meet their language learning goals and improve their overall English competence by giving them meaningful opportunities for consistent language practice that promote their cognitive capacities [57] and overall well-being [58,59,3,].

Given the preceding discussion, where does the government of Japan stand on this phenomenon of EFL programs for third-age Japanese learners? From the onset of this paper, the Japanese government recognizes and supports EFL instruction in Japan [60] and advocates lifelong learning. Nevertheless, institutionalized programs for third-age citizens who resort to EFL learning are non-existent, as this paper was written. The programs are mostly organized by volunteers and enthusiasts, at least in the areas where the data for this study were gathered.

Since Japan's third-age population is increasing every year, the number of EFL learners is expected to also increase in the coming years. For this reason, and given the results of this study, one of the implications is the question of how the government responds, through its local government unit, in exploring the possibility of institutionalizing programs like EFL due to its benefits in many areas like the socio-cultural and economic aspects, psychological and neurological health, active aging and overall well-being. With the help of the respective government agencies, a proper response will be made with proper consideration of the Japanese

third-age learners' sex, age, educational background, and motivations that set the duration of their participation in an EFL program.

The study theorized the third-age learners' ELP is related to their demographics: sex, age, educational attainment, and exposure or the weekly average time spent learning English. The assumption was anchored on intersectionality theory by Crenshaw [28]. This assumption was validated by the result of this study because the findings showed that there was a significant relationship between the third-age ELP and their targeted demographics. The findings imply that the respondents' demographics affect their English language acquisition and competencies. Moreover, intersectionality theory posits that ELP is influenced by various factors other than the specific demographics addressed in this study, the need for further investigation considering other factors can be warranted.

5. Conclusion

The study provides an understanding of Japanese third-age learners' English proficiency along with several factors that influence their language learning journey. On average, third-age learners in Japan achieve an intermediate level of English proficiency, with variances observed attributed to demographic criteria such as sex, age, educational background, and weekly English study time. The study found that ELP is significantly correlated with the respondents' demographics, indicating that ELP levels are influenced by sex, age, educational attainment, and the number of hours spent learning English per week, with males showing higher proficiency and older learners generally showing higher levels. The study underscores the need for tailored English language instruction for third-age learners, taking into account their specific demographics and learning preferences. It also considers the policy implications of institutionalizing programs for third-age learners in Japan, aiming to promote active aging, social integration, and overall well-being.

6. Limitations of the Findings

The study was limited to five cities of Aichi prefecture in Japan whose respondents were those enrolled in the school year 2023-2024. The study was limited to quantitative methods using descriptive and correlational analysis. The findings were limited to the information and data captured by the researcher-made questionnaire that covered only the reading and listening macro skills of the respondents. It further investigated the correlation of third-age learners' ELP and their demographics including sex, age, education, and study time.

7. Practical Value of the Paper

The study is useful in responding to specific concerns that would improve the level of English proficiency of Japanese third-age learners, not only in the five cities of Aichi prefecture but also in other parts of Japan or other countries with the same EFL program for third-age learners. The concerned departments in both local and national government, non-government, and private organizations may utilize this study as one of their references in institutionalizing EFL programs for the growing number of third-age in Japan. Likewise, researchers, teachers, and curriculum designers may use this study as one of the bases for developing tailored curricula and instructional materials for third-age learners.

8. Direction for Future Research

This study has quantitatively investigated the level of ELP of Japanese third-age learners. Despite its clear findings, qualitative research may be undertaken to delve deeper into

the causes of the data presented by this study. The respondents may be able to elaborate further on the results and important details this study collected owing to the qualitative investigation. By providing answers to the "why" and "how" questions about the outcomes, the qualitative data may also be used to complement the quantitative data. Besides qualitative studies, other research designs may also be considered like mixed-method designs. Future studies may also consider a bigger number of samples from a wider geographical setting. The ELP of third-age learners may also be explored considering the four macro skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking.

9. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

No potential conflicts of interest relating to the research, writing, or publishing of this work were disclosed by the authors, according to their report.

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