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Intergenerational Learning and the Elderly-friendly Learning Society

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Abstract: Nowadays, as the value of lifelong learning grows, the topics of how to build a learning society and how to promote lifelong learning are becoming increasingly important. Research has suggested that intergenerational learning can be a bridge to convey the concept of lifelong learning while missing parts about connecting the elderly to it. By incorporating the paper and research reviews, this paper will first discuss what intergenerational education is and why it is needed in Chinese society today. Additionally, this paper will examine the existing case study to present and analyze how intergenerational education can help build an elder-friendly learning society and the benefits that will be brought by constructing an elder-friendly learning society. Intergenerational learning, as a mutual learning process, benefits both adolescents and the elderly in aspects of learning, family relationships, and social contribution. Meanwhile, building an elderly-friendly society to help the elderly have a stronger sense of values, belongings, and social participation.

Keywords: intergenerational education, lifelong learning, elderly-friendly society, adolescents and the elderly, mutual learning

1. Introduction

Lifelong learning has gained importance in recent years as China's economy and technology have progressed significantly. Lifelong learning is considered a strategic approach to enhance the quality of the workforce and public health, especially in today's China, particularly the country's increasingly aging society. Based on the National Evaluation Report on Ageing and Well-being in China, which the World Health Organization issued in 2016, 402 million elderly people, or nearly 28% of the society, could even live in China by 2040 [1]. In an era of rapid information technology development, the disconnect between information and the use of technology is a big problem for the elderly. Intergenerational learning promotes mutual learning among people of all ages. Through communication between people of different generations, there is an increase in interaction and bonding, while at the same time, there is a need to enhance the spread of traditional culture and help the elderly adapt and contribute to this era of rapid technological development. In most studies, population aging has been identified as an important issue to be addressed. Much of the literature and data discussion has focused on economic and technological aspects. For example, by analyzing the collected data, the Asian Development Bank points out that aging leads a labor force shortage, which in turn helps boost average wages while weakens the economy's capacity to compete [2]. In

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addition, the article reported that the aging of the population directly contributes to the shortfall in the national pension system [3]. In terms of intergenerational education, the construction of a learning society friendly to the elderly is possible, and an alternative solution is proposed for the aging population. Today, as the elderly population becomes more numerous, it is important to find a way to make society friendlier for them and let them play important roles. In this essay, different case studies relating to intergenerational learning will be presented and analyzed. Case studies will be discussed to demonstrate why it benefits intergenerational learning, how it can promote intergenerational learning and an elderly-friendly society, and why it is critical to promote intergenerational learning and build an elderly-friendly learning society. By building an elderly-friendly society, economic and technological issues caused by an aging population can be alleviated. At the same time, intergenerational learning, as the platform to construct an elderly-friendly society, helps the elderly use newly developed technologies, which relieves the technological issues brought by an aging population.

2. Intergenerational Learning and Its Importance

2.1. Intergenerational Learning

In recent years, intergenerational learning has attracted attention. According to the European Network for Intergenerational Learning (ENIL) Project, which is supported by the EU, intergenerational learning is “a means for individuals of all age groups to learn together and from each other at the same time” [4]. Intergenerational teaching, in which people of different ages study together to acquire new knowledge, perspectives, and abilities, is an essential part of lifelong learning. In other words, intergenerational learning is a strategy for lifelong learning and aging populations. While cooperation and communication are fostered during intergenerational learning, this implies that intergenerational learning plays a significant role in enhancing intergenerational relations, cultural continuity, and educational advancement.

2.2. Why Intergenerational Learning Is Important

Intergenerational learning benefits young individuals in a wide range of ways as shown by research. According to a study conducted in 2013 by Melissa Powers and colleagues on 32 teenagers who took part in it, intergenerational learning fosters interpersonal communication and collaboration abilities via age disparities [5]. The advantages of intergenerational learning for student empowerment are also demonstrated in the uninterrupted intergenerational learning experiment [6]. The investigation also indicated that the influence on younger pupils increased with the length of the intergenerational learning intervention. This study of 81 fourth-grade students enrolled in the school illustrates that communication and interaction are indeed enhanced [6]. Both research findings demonstrated that young people’s capabilities are improved in many ways by enhancing intergenerational learning. As students participate in intergenerational learning, individuals unconsciously improve their capacity for empathy and teamwork due to the required interaction and collaboration.

The elderly groups, as well as young individuals, greatly benefit from intergenerational learning. Mendel Singer and Daniel George claim that an intergenerational volunteering program in the US decreased elderly people’s stressful situations and enhanced their quality of living [7]. According to Herrmann et al., intergenerational learning enhances older people’s social engagement, psychological development, and physical well-being [8]. In other words, older individuals get new information about technological devices and interact with younger people while taking part in intergenerational learning. Moreover, since intergenerational learning serves to improve communication across generations, it mutually shows the benefits of learning between various

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generations. In an interview with 38 preschoolers conducted in 2009 in the United States, Christine Holmes found that half of the pairs described their sentiments towards their parents in a disparaging manner. However, following a year-long intergenerational learning program, every participant's perception of their parents was changed for the better [9]. This indicates how better communication between parents and their children is a result of intergenerational learning. They learned about, understood, and had varied perspectives on one another through dialogue. Both sides modified their perspectives as a result of improving their mutual understanding. UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) performed a global research that found that intergenerational education can assist strengthen family connections [10]. In addition, according to Elizabeth Mulvaney and Carol Burgman, intergenerational learning can improve the mutual attachment between generations, fostering reciprocal, symbiotic bonds [11].

3. The Way Intergenerational Education Helping Build an Age-friendly Learning Society

3.1. Strengthening the Interaction Between Grandparents and Grandchildren in the Family

Among the importance of intergenerational education listed above, there are many experiments on grandparent-grandchild interaction shown as examples that discuss the effectiveness of grandparent-grandchild interaction and some of the benefits this brings. This section will start the discussion by analyzing how the approach can build an age-friendly learning society and present. Both home and school are important components of modern intergenerational education. Home, students and grandparents spend most of their free time at home. At the same time, in schools, teachers can create a special platform to implement intergenerational education.

In the family, as in the experimental way presented by Lyu et al. to get grandchildren to interact with each other [12]. However, getting them to interact with each other is not easy. Adolescents in the present society are easily attracted to their peers and video games. As a result, when starting a program about intergenerational learning, a mandatory approach should be used at the first stage. By enacting mandatory measures, grandparents and grandchildren in the family should use their free time on weekends to interact with each other, and then use online platforms to set assignments for students to submit some feedback about the week's interactive activities. After a period of mandatory interaction, the good atmosphere and habits in the family will help intergenerational education to be more effective and more natural. With such interactions, grandchildren can teach their seniors how to use their newfound electronic devices through repetitive interactions with them, teach them how to message family members, make video calls, and even teach them how to shop online.

The two pilot schools for the UNESCO Intergenerational Learning Project created a rather detailed calendar of classroom teaching. Each lesson and exercise focused on a distinct learning subject, and was complemented by a discussion of observations or findings [13]. As reported by UNESCO, this program also had a good response. They conducted Family Intergenerational learning (FIL) in the form of a pilot class called "Learning Skills from Grandchildren". The program's initial version was developed through classroom discussions between teachers and students, and it included the entire program's objectives, curriculum, and evaluations [13]. The youngster and elders collaborate to create a learning plan that is appropriate for their circumstances and preferences based on the overall project plan. Family conferences are held for this reason and are supervised by the family [13]. The grandchildren engaged in their intergenerational learning activities throughout the vacation. The implementation of FIL included the signing of grandparent agreements, carrying out inter-family sharing, customizing the learning plan to each family, and finally presenting and evaluating it at school.

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3.2. The Reason Why Approach Presented Can Build an Age-friendly Learning Society

3.2.1. Case Study

In this program, clear steps and clear goals were both key factors for success. First, the signing of the agreement is similar to the mandatory measures illustrated above. An agreement implies a commitment. By making this commitment there is a greater likelihood that the plan will come to fruition. In addition, a customized learning plan helps a lot. Every family is different. Some seniors are not interested in learning about new products, so parents, children, and teachers need to work together to discover their hobbies and make them more interested in learning about new products. For example, some grandmothers like to square dance, so families can use this to tell seniors that they can learn to use their phones to learn new square dances faster and better; some grandfathers like to play chess, so families can tell them. Furthermore, sharing between families and showing evaluation is also an essential part of the program. Sharing between families can help share lessons learned between families and make the next intergenerational learning experience more effective. At the same time, the evaluation will improve the way their own families approach intergenerational education in the future. In schools, schools can choose to have professionals provide guidance, such as lectures on new-age technology for seniors in senior colleges and weekly lectures on intergenerational education for students in middle and elementary schools.

3.2.2. Benefiting Both the Elderly and Teenagers

Building such a society can be beneficial for the elderly themselves. First, for the elderly, it can be analyzed on a personal level, a relationship level, and a community level [14]. They can improve their daily limited activities and change their mobility. Elders can interact with relatives, neighbors, and larger social groups using the information and skills acquired from the younger generation. This could also help them feel more independent and give them useful assistance in their daily lives [15]. The development of QR code payment has caused significant problems for the Chinese elderly in particular. Many older people are even looked down upon when purchasing with cash. Learning how to use QR code payments can make their lives more convenient. Because they are the most vulnerable group in society, learning to use new technologies and devices can help them gain a sense of value.

Meanwhile, through summary of two qualitative research conducted by Krzeczkowska et al., a positive increase is shown on both sense of belongings and participation in the communities [16]. According to the interview to one of the grandmothers who took part in Lyu's project, she expressed that by participating in intergenerational education, which means interacting with her own granddaughter, she has made her otherwise boring retirement more interesting. She realized that older people can continue progressing and that grandchildren can gain various things [11]. After spending time with and learning from their own grandchildren, they can strengthen their relationship with them, which is good for themselves and for the family atmosphere. More importantly, on a relational level, they can make friends with more young people after learning how to use the Internet, thus reducing their sense of isolation [14]. One of the pre- and following-test trials found that the overall social isolation score significantly decreased [15]. At the same time, they can also get involved in community activities, share the use of technology with their peers and participate in volunteer activities to help seniors who have more difficulty learning to use new technology to communicate and pass on their knowledge in the language of the elderly. Studies have shown that Intergenerational learning has the ability to foster intergenerational connections through commonalities, time spent around each other, and actions, and even supported the growth of social contacts beyond the project [17]. The benefits are not only for the elderly, but also for the

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young. Their sense of social responsibility will increase after they have experienced intergenerational education. Their own self-confidence and sense of worth will also increase because of the experience of teaching the elderly in their homes to use electronic devices.

To sum up, closer relationships with grandchildren, an enhanced sense of value, and social engagement are the main benefits gained from intergenerational learning for the elderly. The elderly are increasing their social participation by learning more about modern technology. All aspects above show perspectives on building an elderly-friendly society.

4. Traditional Culture Can Be Fostered as Well

The elderly has more opportunities to learn about modern technologies because of this collaborative learning, which improves their quality of life and offers them a special platform from which to pass on traditional culture to the next generation. In a research by Lyu, K. et al., teachers Li, Tang, and Zhu concentrated on traditional Chinese culture and history, allowing grandchildren to learn from and interact with their grandparents as well as acknowledging that elderly people are talented in a variety of fields [12]. In an interview, a student claims that he and his grandfather talked about how they used to celebrate the Lantern Festival, the rationale behind why they were able to answer the riddles involving lanterns, and the relevance of the riddles throughout the exercise. He found it intriguing that there were other practices that he was not aware of and was motivated to learn more about them [12]. Another student by the name of Lyu claimed that his grandparents not only taught him how to do calligraphy but also how to embrace lifelong learning. He realized that studying is a lifetime pursuit after seeing his grandparents actively enroll in numerous classes [12]. Intergenerational learning offers an opportunity to pass on a heritage of indigenous values, as we discovered via this study and interviews with the students who took part in it. It enables the transmission of some aspects of traditional Chinese culture to subsequent generations, such as calligraphy and lantern riddles during the Lantern Festival. Values from several generations are also transmitted along with culture. Similar to how Lyu's student discussed the elderly's love of lifelong learning and the sharing of values during the period, traditional values could well be transmitted via the platform of intergenerational learning.

5. Discussion

Intergenerational learning as a mutual learning process is a platform to expand the way of schooling and can contribute to the development of society. Grandparents and children are both developers and learners, according to Lyu et al. They design programs for education, social and cultural communication, and individual knowledge [12]. In addition to the previous analysis, the growth on the personal basis emphasizes the encouragement of feelings and the sharing of values between generations; the development on the social side is reflected in the transmission of culture, passing traditional culture from generation to generation while incorporating the beliefs and values of youngsters, focusing on the best, reducing a worst, and maintaining and enhancing cultural heritage. Furthermore, the process of learning from one generation to another reflects the development of education. In the education system, the intergenerational model is a new learning model that not only conveys the concept of lifelong learning, but also creates more possibilities and possibilities in the education system. The potential and benefits shown by intergenerational education have promoted more people to engage in it. In this case, more young people are able to master traditional cultural knowledge and more older people can keep up with the pace of social development.

However, to some extent, all methods and theories have limitations. The methods presented in this essay are also included. In today's society, the more important thing for most elderly people is to go grocery shopping and cooking to meet the basic needs of their families. In addition, some

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older adults have limited literacy skills due to historical issues, thus limiting their interest in intergenerational learning. Moreover, because of the different skills and literacy levels of older learners, it is difficult to assign a standard learning program to a wide range of people, so at this stage intergenerational education has to be customized and tailored to the needs of the individual. Under this circumstances, even though intergenerational education has many benefits, it must be improved by addressing the above-mentioned issues before it can be scaled up to achieve the goal of building an age-friendly society. Meanwhile, in the cases analyzed, intergenerational learning almost always takes place in a customized manner in each family, making it difficult to proceed with bringing intergenerational education to scale. In a country with a large population like China, effective intergenerational transmission is difficult. Further research and study are needed to find a way to apply intergenerational education to large-scale families, and then build an age-friendly society.

6. Conclusion

Overall, it's worthwhile to research intergenerational learning. Regarding the statements above, intergenerational learning can help build an elderly-friendly learning society. Mutual learning is effective in families. Learning between generations helps adolescence, the elderly, and society from the perspective of fostering traditional culture. Through the implementation of intergenerational learning in families and schools, the elderly can learn from their grandchildren and schools about information that relates to their lives. Furthermore, interaction between the elderly and adolescents improves family atmosphere; learning about technologies and newly developed skills fosters a sense of belonging and values; and knowing or mastering new skills improves the elderly's social participation. As a new educational paradigm, it also helps to strengthen the educational system and plays a significant part in the transmission and development of cultural assets. Intergenerational learning, a field that has gained more attention in recent years, still needs a lot of improvement, but as soon as it starts happening, it will benefit both individuals and society. Additionally, various nations and regions can set up reliable intergenerational learning systems in accordance with their particular circumstances, fostering cross-cultural interaction and educational advancement. The author used two case studies to show the process of conveying intergenerational learning. To emphasize the role intergenerational learning plays in building an elderly-friendly society, more case study analysis could be included. Furthermore, the actual pilot experiment has not yet been carried out in this paper. Under the circumstances, the practicality is unknown. For instance, some old people are illiterate. It is difficult to entice them to learn or to succeed in the learning process. In future studies, pilot experiments based on the methods in this essay can be executed to test the feasibility of the method as well as discover more possibilities. Also, the results of the experiment can better help demonstrate the importance of intergenerational education and the feasibility of building an age-friendly society.

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