

THE PURPOSE OF ELDERLY PEOPLE FURTHER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND THEIR CHALLENGES IN ODL

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ABSTRACT

It is important to provide lifelong learning opportunity for senior citizen or elderly to promote healthy lifestyle. Through active lifelong learning, elderly people could maintain their mental and physical fitness. However, at the older age, there are many challenges restricted them in continuous participation in lifelong learning such as aging issue, financial constraints, suitable educational institutions and flexible educational programmes for the elderly. so, the objectives of this paper is to explore the purpose of elderly to enroll as adult learners and identify the challenges face by elderly learners within open and distance (ODL) environment. This study also can assist ODL institution to develop more friendly teaching and learning approach for elderly. The study will focus on 18 old age learners who had graduated from social sciences programmes. In-depth Interview method will be used to obtain the data from the subjects.

Keywords: *Elderly Learners, Lifelong Learning and Challenges.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper will discuss the purpose of elderly people to enroll for higher education degree and the challenges encountered within open and distance learning (ODL) in Open University Malaysia (OUM). Nowadays ODL is an excellent method of reaching the adult to access formal education. Because of the competing priorities of work, home, and school, adult learners desire a high degree of flexibility. As such, the structure of ODL or online studies offers adults the greatest possible control over the time, place and pace of education (Jill M. Galusha, 2009).

In this connection, OUM is one of the higher learning institutions promoting lifelong learning for adults to obtain their degree or post graduate degree through ODL approach. This indicated that ODL created widen learning opportunities for adults to pursue their dreams education programme. To achieve this goal, OUM management attempts to design various academic programmes to meet the need of adult learners. Consequently, there were many elderly people or senior citizen above 60 years old and beyond had enrolled as OUM learners. Based on the statistic from OUM, 81 elderly people had enrolled in (2010), 104 (2011), 26 (2012), 26 (2013), 33 (2014), 42 (2015), 77 (2016), and 54 (2017) as ODL learners.

2.0 PROBLEM STATEMENTS

In the era of technology and borderless world, ODL has become a choice of many adults inclusive of elderly or senior citizens to pursue their tertiary education (Wong Huey Siew, Oo Cheng Keat, Suhaimi J. and Mohd Yusuf; 2019).

The traditional approaches to learning for young people, based on schooling and predetermined syllabuses, are not appropriate for older people and often fail, even at postgraduate level. Older people bring a holistic approach to their learning, based on their whole life experience, and use self-assessment based on personal values to colour what they learn. Learning should improve the autonomy of the learner (Harry Gray; 1999).

There have various studies showed that ODL learners were challenged with a range of obstacles in their course of studies. The most reported challenges were lack of sufficient time for study, difficulties in access and use of ICT, ineffective feedback and lack of study materials Musingafi, Maxwell C. C.; Mapuranga, Barbra; Chiwanza, Kudzai; Zebron, Shupikai (2015).

Generally, many elderly people still keep in touch and pace with current development and also used modern technology for various purposes includes access to mainstream education. Since there is a little study was done locally about elderly people's experiences in ODL and about the aspects of the ODL program that are working or not, so, it is significantly to carry out a research to explore more about the elderly people in ODL particularly related to why they intends to enroll in higher education even after retiring and also to investigate what are the main challenges face by them.

3.0 LITERATURE STUDIES

Today, education opportunities for elderly particularly at the tertiary level have becomes one of the important agenda for all nations. The use of ODL approach as a mode of providing quality education for large groups of learners at low cost has been growing, and various forces have been driving this increased attention to the integration of ODL in education at all levels (Grace Mkandawire Banda: 2017). Thus, many higher learning institutions had expanded their missions to provide higher education opportunities via ODL for adult learners inclusive of elderly people. According to A. Devisakti (2016) ODL had become a first choice of education path for most working adults in order to survive in the current workforce. With regards to this current development, ODL has becomes another significant path for higher learning institutions in reaching out students especially adult learners globally.

According to Zhang Minxuan and Xu Jinjie (2015), "The role of universities in elder education: The experience of Shanghai and Shanghai normal university" that focuses on functions of universities for the older citizens above 60 years old. In their views, there are three significant reasons that the more elderly citizens pursuing in the lifelong education. Firstly, there are more and more middle-aged as well as older people need lifelong education to adapt to the changes in their working lives as a result of the fast and radical shifts in the economic and productive structure in the past few decades.

Furthermore, it is observed that there are huge numbers of the adults in the cities are reaching their retirement age. According to statistics, the percentage of over 60s in Shanghai is around 10 % higher than in other cities in China. (http://news.xinhuanet.com/gongyi/2012-07/20/c_123447770.htm). The third significant reasons are the mix of modern innovation and today's business sector driven economy have urged individuals to learn new methodologies to individual and social life. Hence, Shanghai's Municipal Government has taken several initiatives to adopt lifelong learning like expanding and reforming education system for both

schools as well as universities to be more and flexible to cater the needs of older citizens living in the Shanghai to pursuing their education.

Based on Zhang Minxuan and Xu Jinjie (2015), there are a total of 284 elder education institutions in Shanghai, including (i) four elder universities (EUs) at municipal level: Shanghai University for the Elderly, Shanghai Senior Citizen University, Shanghai Retired Cadres University, and Shanghai University for Retired Workers;(ii) 37 branch EUs universities at municipal level, including 23 elder universities for retired civil servants and 8 elder universities set up by universities themselves, and 4 universities for retired workers;(iii) 29 EUs at district or county level; (iv) 214 elder colleges or schools at community (street or township) level (Zhang Minxuan and Xu Jinjie, 2013 p. 134).

In “Active Life of the Senior Citizens through Education” by Saljakhutdin Fardievich Taziev (2015) has presented the needs to include senior citizens into educational process and adopting the active age model in his research. The reason to include the senior citizens into educational process is a win-win situation. From the senior citizen's point of views, the involvement of them in the educational process will create a system of work to study their needs and demands with the youth. Besides, it will help them to work with the youth in developing and implementing the innovative projects such as concerning work with war and labour veterans, people living in rest homes, as well as the different support of lonely and sick senior citizens. (Saljakhutdin Fardievich Taziev 2015). The involvement of these senior citizens into the education process will spark the interest of the youth to care and understand the senior citizens needs and therefore motivated them to help them too.

In terms of challenges, Generally, the ODL program was characterized by a number of challenges, such as delays in the payment of student allowances, delays in the distribution of study material, inadequate time for face-to-face learning, inadequate professional support in the field, and high teaching loads owing to a shortage of staffing (Grace Mkandawire Banda; 2017). According to Noor Sakinah Aniza (2013) senior citizens are believed to face problems in adopting latest technology because of lack of knowledge and experience in IT. In addition, they also have a health problem.

According to Karnowski, Pape and Writh (2008) cited from Noor Sakinah (2013), elderly persons are less inclined to use mobile communication, however, they are catching up to the levels of mainstream innovation, but largely lag behind in the use of new services integrating into the technology. As such, this paper intends to explore why or what are the main purpose of elderly people decided to enroll for higher education and the challenges encountered within the ODL environment.

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are:

1. To explore the main purpose of elderly people to enroll for higher education programme
2. To investigate the challenges experience by the elderly people within the ODL environment

5.0 RESEARCH QUESTION

This conference paper seeks to address the following research question:

1. What are the main purposes of elderly people to enroll for higher education programme?
2. What are the challenges experiences by the elderly people within the ODL environment?

6.0 SIGNIFICANT

It is a government goals and mission to encourage everyone inclusive of elderly people or senior citizen to continue their studies and widen their general knowledge via lifelong learning. Elderly people should be given the opportunity to participate in a responsible way within the social context of Malaysia. Since the topic relates to elderly people are importance in today's society, The finding and insights gained would beneficial for those with limited experience who are keen to know more about the context and potentialities of elderly or senior citizens engagement in higher education. The implications of the finding also demonstrate how education can be shaped to have greatest impact on their quality of life through lifelong learning strategies. Besides, this paper also could be a useful source of reference to institution or who's will be working with lifelong learning programmes for the elderly people in Malaysia.

7.0 BASIC AND THEORITICAL FREMEWORK

In this paper, two main theories which relates to adult learning principles will be discussed. There are Adult and elderly learners theory and active age model.

7.1 Adult and elderly learner theory

There are some reasons why elderly people return to university. Knowles (1984) theorized adult learning theory also known as Andragogy. An adult is prepared to gain knowledge or to learn when they experience a need to learn in order to gain skills or knowledge in coping with life task or problem (Knowles, 1984). Based on this perspective, adult will learn only believing that learning could aid in solving real life problems. Adults are motivated by many internal factors but external factors are still needed to motivate them to learn. Based on this theory, adult learners as they grow older tend to become more self-directed and internally motivated to be involved in learning (Knowles, 2011). The Adult Learning Theory also becomes base for exploring institutional course design and services that will motivate adult learners to continue to participate in learning.

7.2 The active age model

The active age model which consists the spheres like civil self-determination, national self-determination, environmental self-determination, aesthetic self-determination, value self-determination, behaviour self-determination, health saving, self-determination, labour and professional self-determination, intellectual self-determination and Informational literacy. The objective of using the active age model in this research are to determine the main fields of human self-determination, to set forth an idea of establishing The Active Age Institute, to reveal its actual values, mission and principles. (Saljakhutdin Fardievich Taziev 2015).

7.3 Elderly/senior citizen

In Malaysia, according to National Policy on Senior citizens, those age 60 years old and above are considered the senior citizens (http://www.jpapencen.gov.my/english/senior_citizen.html). In the developed countries, those above 65 years are only considered as the senior citizens. The differences are due to the

fact that those who live in the developed countries have better health level, economic, standard and organised healthcare services, longer life expectancy, higher education levels and other factors.

7.4 Open and distance learning

open and distance learning refers to education and training in which using the learning resources, rather than attending classroom sessions, is the central feature of the learning experience as defined by Commonwealth of Learning (COL, 2003). Sherry, L. (1996) stated that the terms "distance education" or "distance learning" or "online learning" have been applied interchangeably by many different researchers to a great variety of programs, providers, audiences, and media. Its hallmarks are the separation of teacher and learner in space and/or time.

COL's (2009) also defined ODL as "a way of providing learning opportunities that is characterized by the separation of teacher and learner in time and or place; ...the use of a variety of media... [For] two-way communications that allow learners and tutors to interact; [and] the possibility of occasional face to face meetings between tutor and learners.

8.0 METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study is semi-structure interview technique. The total of sample included 18 under-graduates and post graduates elderly learners from cluster of education and Social Sciences (CESS). They had been chosen randomly to participate in this study. They were 12 males and 6 females elderly learners who above 60 years old been interviewed by the researcher. Each interview session took approximately of 20-30 minutes. The focus of the interview was mainly on the purpose of their enrollment to the programme and the challenges faced by them while studying in OUM.

9.0 FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Basically, there have two key researches question raised in this qualitative study. It includes what are the purpose of elderly people to enroll for the higher education programme and what are the challenges encountered by them. Notes: the terms used such as M represent (male), F (female) and R (respondent).

9.1 The purpose of elderly people to enroll for higher education programme

In this part, researcher would like to explore what are the main purpose of elderly people to sign up for higher education programme such as diploma, bachelor degree and post graduate studies. Data were collected from 18 subjects through qualitative (semi-interview) method.

In order to respond this research question, one of the respondent who already reached 80 years old said "I take up psychology degree course because it is my passion to acquire knowledge". In addition to this, he adds that "in the past, I have no chance to study due to poor factor and financial restriction". Therefore, "I have to work and help the family". (M and R1).

Through the study, the finding demonstrated that there have certain reasons for elderly people to enroll for the university programme. For instance, "I signed up for this degree course mainly to occupy my free time". Indeed, she further to elaborate that "after retired, we have plenty of free time and I think that I should find something to do. Otherwise, old people like me would easily get sick". (F and R2).

Besides, data also showing that the purpose of elderly people to further study in local context includes “I want to show myself as a good role model for my grand children. So, I want to inspire them and take me as an example to work harder and become a graduate later”. Thus, “I believed that this is a very good encouragement and motivation to my grand children”. (M and R3).

There have another respondent pointed out that “by enrolled to a degree programme, I can keep my mind active. Now, at least I still have something to do. It indicated that old age people like me still have a goal and mission.” (F and R4).

Meanwhile, the study found that the reason of elderly people to further study associated to lifelong learning efforts as promoted by the government. “I registered for the post graduate programme because I took up the challenge of government policy to encourage people to learn across the lifespan”. Then, “I aware that various higher learning institutions had offered very attractive tuition fees such as 50% to 75% discount. So, it is a very strong stimulating factor to motivate us to further study”. (M and R7).

Finally, the finding found that the aims to sign up for higher education programme among the elderly people were very much due to the democratization of higher education policy in 21th century. For instance, one respondent reiterated as “in the past, it was so difficult to enroll as a university student but, today, it totally different because there are many university either private or public university had been established”. (F and R10).

Besides, this view has been supported by another respondent. “Today, education opportunity is there and it is just depending on whether we want to grab that opportunity are not”. He adds further, “In the previous time, we have heavy family commitment and not afford to finance ourselves to study in university or college” (M and R15).

In summary, the purpose of elderly people to sign up for the higher education can be identified as occupied free time, personal goal and mission, lifelong learning spirits, democratization of higher education, as a role model and maintain the health status.

It is importance to note that adult education at higher age can play an important role in the preservation of autonomy and in the encouragement of social participation in later life. Hence, from both an individual and societal perspective, it is important to promote the educational activities of the elderly. Active elderly people with positive perceptions of self and ageing maintain their mental and physical fitness levels, participate in community associations and politics and engage in intergenerational dialogue (Jens Friebe and Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha; 2013).this scenario also in line with the principles of The active age model and Adults Learning or Androgogy Theory as discussed above.

9.2 Challenges of elderly people in ODL

Based on the literature studies, it could be concluding that the challenges face by the senior people is complex. It mainly due to the aging, physical problems, socio-economic factor, cerebral pathology, emotional attitude and family structure. Cited from www.rguhs.ac.in/cdc/onlinecdc/uploads/05_N013_29948.doc.

In relation to this scenario, elderly people surely would face some challenges in their study. Based on the data collected, many respondents had shared their experiences as presented below.

Through interview, among the major challenges highlighted by the elderly or senior citizen learners are computer competency. For instance, one of the elderly learners said that “elderly people like me are not computer literate and we always have phobia to use such advanced machine. For example, I afraid something might go wrong if I accidentally press the wrong button”. besides, he further to stress that “I have to take some time to learn computer because without computer, life is so troubles”; “since, I am not good in computer, it took

many hours for me to type my assignment because I type very slowly, and it is very tiring.” (M and R11)

Furthermore, the elderly people or learners also cited the family commitment as the primary challenge. One of the respondents highlighted that “We really have limited time for our studies. As a leader in family, we would have many commitment and hardly to have time for doing revision” (M and R9). Besides, one elderly or senior citizen learners cited “weekend is for the family, and it has resulted that he will sometimes skip the class due to the family matters.” According to him again, “The classes held during the weekend were not suitable. It is because the weekend is the family time. I admitted I did skip some classes at times.” (M and R11).

Another challenge faced by elderly learners were the health issue. Based on the interview conducted, the respondent cited that “the physical environment in the learning centre also quite challenging because we were so old and had a health problem, it was so difficult for us to climb up and down the staircase. Not only that, our vision was not good like the young students.” (F and R8). indeed, “we were sick and it would delay our work progress because our assignment would have deadline.” (M and R17).

There was also an issue of the language proficiency. As revealed by one of the elderly learners that “in the tutorial class, we have a bit difficult to catch up because all students come from different background and their language competency were different one another.”; he further to stress that “the module is in English, the tutors also need to explain in BM, so it is fair for those who do not have a good understanding of English.” (M and R13).

Lastly, the time factor also found as another challenge encountered by the elder or senior citizen learners. Undeniably as the age increase, it required a person to spend more time to comprehend the content of the course. One of the respondent commented that “senior or old age student need more time for the study”; “When back to study, old age learner like me had a difficult time to adapt. Besides, elderly student has to work harder because our memory is not good as a young student.” (M and R3).

In summary, the study as presented above had identified several challenges encountered by elderly learners such as computer literacy, family commitment, time constraints, language proficiency, and health related issue. In developed country, institutions that teach seniors (65+ years old or retired) need to address courses to a target group that is not aiming to get a degree or to improve their career opportunities. They must therefore apply different methodologies and also create specially designed courses, activities and materials. From a broader perspective, their main aim is to increase senior learners' well-being and quality of life. (Pilar Escuder Mollon and Salvador Cabedo; 2013)

The knowledge students acquire is important, but other skills, attitudes and aims should not be forgotten such as socialization, integration, adapting to society, active citizenship, etc. (Pilar Escuder Mollon and Salvador Cabedo; 2013)

It is a reality that as elderly people, they participate less and less to further education. This is due not only to individual learning habits, but also to the lack of learning opportunities in different regions and residential areas. In districts that are primarily comprised of people with low standards of living and low education (Jens Friebe and Bernhard Schmidt; 2013). Thus, elderly or senior citizen educational needs must be given a priority in the national social agenda.

10.0 CONCLUSION

In overall, we can conclude that there have several reasons why elderly people to enroll in higher education via ODL in Malaysia. It also happy to say that despite the numerous

challenges faced by the elderly learner, and yet most of them managed to complete their dreams courses in OUM. So, service provider have to be more alert and ready to create programs and services that are sensitized to elderly people needs and learning preferences. Since the finding has pointed out some of the issue and challenges encountered by the elderly learners so that, the management has to be seriously looking into these concerns issue and restriction. Finally, policy makers must think beyond traditional ways of teaching and delivering educational programs within the ODL system which more friendly to elderly or senior citizen learners. Ministry of education and higher education providers should double the efforts to increase senior learners' quality of life through more flexi and innovative education programme.

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