

A Study on the Current Situation of Geriatric Education in China under the Vision of Lifelong Education

Yufei Shi^{1,a,*}

¹*Education Study—Sociology, Durham University, Durham, DH1 3LE, United Kingdom*

a. yufeishi2@durham.ac.uk

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Lifelong education is an important direction in the development of education in today's world, and is of great significance in promoting social development, even affecting the stability of the social structure. Within China, with the development of education, the idea of developing education for the elderly is becoming more and more popular. The worsening problem of ageing has led to increasing attention being paid to education for the elderly. Although education for the elderly in China has achieved relatively satisfactory results under the leadership of the Government, it still faces difficulties and challenges of one kind or another. How to better develop geriatric education and solve the problems encountered in the process of carrying out geriatric education has become an urgent task. This paper will take China's geriatric education as the research object, and analyse and elaborate on the current situation of China's geriatric education, the necessity of carrying out geriatric education, the problems and solutions of carrying out geriatric education, and the outlook for future development of geriatric education, etc., to illustrate that under the background of lifelong education, China's geriatric education has begun to see the results of its development, but there is still much that can be improved.

Keywords: Elderly Education, Lifelong Education, Educational Resources.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the global demographic structure has shown the trend of aging. In this global context, the aging of geriatric education has become an important way to improve the quality of life of the elderly and promote the harmonious development of the society, and how to use the development of geriatric education to solve the problem of aging has become a worldwide issue. The development of geriatric education under the vision of lifelong education can analyse geriatric education more thoroughly. The concept of lifelong education emphasises the necessity and possibility of continuous learning throughout one's life, and requires the education system to provide diversified learning opportunities for people of different ages and with different needs. In the context of an aging society, geriatric education, as an important part of lifelong education, is of great significance in meeting the learning needs of the elderly and promoting social stability and harmony.

Documents such as the Education 2030 Action Framework issued by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provide policy guidance for the development of global geriatric education [1]. China has actively responded to the call to incorporate geriatric education into the national development plan, and introduced a series of policies and measures to

clarify the goals and directions of the development of geriatric education, which has provided institutional guarantee for the rapid development of geriatric education.

However, the development of geriatric education still faces many problems. Taking China as an example, the problem of unbalanced development of urban and rural geriatric education is still very serious; more and more elderly people are involved in geriatric education, but the problem of insufficient teachers is getting more and more serious; the curriculum of geriatric education is not compatible with the learning needs of the elderly, etc., a series of problems need to be solved urgently.

This paper focuses on China and discusses the current situation of gerontological education in China, the necessity of carrying out gerontological education, the problems and solutions of carrying out gerontological education, and the outlook for the future development of gerontological education in China, and so on, in order to make analyses and expositions.

2. Theoretical Framework: Lifelong Learning and Geriatric Education

2.1. Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is active and inherited, enabling an individual to experience learning throughout his entire life [2]. Jarvis believes that lifelong learning gives people the opportunity to engage in learning their whole life, regardless of age (such as kindergarten, pre-school, in-school, and after-school), regardless of childhood, regardless of adolescence, adulthood, so as to improve the integrity of the individual whole body and society, and has a great positive significance to the economy of the whole society [3]. Thus, lifelong learning is related to the formation of society as a whole and a knowledge society.

In recent years, governments and international organizations around the world have attached great importance to education for the elderly, and the standardized education system does not adapt to the rapid development of society. As the situation of population aging is becoming increasingly severe, society generally actively explores feasible policies and measures for education for the elderly. As UNESCO has pointed out, learning can enable people to maintain a higher standard of living and thus make more contributions to individuals and society [1]. Education includes formal school education (education stage) and a variety of informal, non-passive, non-institutionalized, non-certified experiential opportunities (continuing learning stage). Especially in the context of an aging society, the elderly need to continue "teaching" and education not only to obtain economic benefits, but also to gain significance for the purpose of existing personal knowledge development and social existence [4].

2.2. Education for the Elderly

Elderly education is the implementation of the elderly, an important way about the education of the whole life, aims to maintain cognitive vitality, learn new skills, social integration, and contribute to the growth, growth, in old age [5]. It is associated with elderly education, also with more extensive social integration, elderly health care, intergenerational relations, etc.

Many countries, including China, no longer simply attach importance to education for the elderly, but give geriatric education the function of lifelong education, and get recognition and support from society and family [6]. With the rapid increase of the elderly population in China, the problem of the elderly doctrine will become more and more prominent, and it is of great significance to carry out gerontology education.

3. Current Situation of Education for the Elderly in China

Clearly, in the next five years, all kinds of universities for the elderly will add more than 76,000, a total of more than 2 billion yuan [1]. The development of education for the elderly in China has been relatively sound, which is inseparable from the active promotion of the country. To a certain extent, it is also closely related to the happiness of the elderly and the well-being of the people.

Although the above changes should be welcomed, on the whole, the universality of education for the elderly in China is relatively low, which provides a broad space for the deepening and popularization of education for the elderly. For example, at present, medical and health education programs for the elderly have been enriched in some urban areas, but they are difficult to use by the elderly in rural areas [7]. The comparison between the two not only reflects the overall asymmetry and imbalance of the society in China, as well as the imbalance of resources in the country; but also reflects the domestic call for health education for the elderly to be more "inclined" to the remote and underdeveloped areas.

Moreover, the rich diversity of older learners is an important feature of China's geriatric education system, each with a different educational background, literacy level, and learning goals. Some older people may view education as a means to enrich their personal lives or participate in social activities, while others may view education as an opportunity to develop new skills or improve employability [7]. This results in these older learners having completely different learning needs, and meeting these different needs requires a more flexible and responsive educational system offering a range of learning opportunities for different older learners.

4. Challenges Facing Education for the Elderly in China

Despite some progress in education for the aged in China, some challenges remain.

4.1. Unbalance between Supply and Demand

One of the main challenges facing education for the elderly in China is the serious imbalance between the supply and demand of educational programs. With the aging population, more and more elderly people have shown interest in participating in education programs for the elderly [7]. However, the education system has been slow to progress in expanding educational programmes to meet growing needs. Existing education programmes for older adults are limited in scope and accessibility, resulting in many older people interested in participating in education not having the opportunity to do so.

4.2. Lack of Qualified Educators

A major obstacle to the development of geriatric education is the lack of qualified teachers. Many educational institutions strive to find teachers with the necessary expertise and experience to be able to effectively educate the elderly [5]. Teachers specializing in the education of the elderly have limited career development, leading to few people choosing to pursue the profession.

4.3. Uneven Distribution of Educational Resources

Education programs for the elderly are more common in urban areas, especially in first-tier and second-tier cities [6]. In contrast, such programs are often lacking in rural and remote areas, which disadvantage older adults in these areas in access to education. This difference reflects the broad social inequalities within China.

5. Solutions and Government Interventions

The government has been aware of the problem of elderly education and made some work, such as: raising perfect Qinghai-Tibet agreement education funds or focusing on elderly education training to provide effective funding, more for the elderly information education, improving the quality of education platform can provide some possible opportunities for the elderly.

5.1. Increasing Government Investment

Government investment is an important way to improve the education and development level of the elderly in China. At present, the Chinese government is gradually increasing the financial input to the education for the elderly, especially in the places where the regional input of the education for the elderly lags behind [6]. In this process, colleges and universities and educational institutions need to work constantly to cover a wider range of regions and timely supplement the deficiencies in the service needs of elderly learners.

In addition to providing financial support, some national governments have also introduced relevant policies to support the development of education for the elderly. For example, local governments are encouraged to set up universities for the elderly and carry out lifelong learning centers for the elderly, strengthen cooperation and development of education and lifelong education for the elderly, strengthen cooperation between schools at all levels and enterprises and social organizations, and organize and develop more diverse and multi-level innovative courses for the elderly to choose from [7].

For example, some countries encourage universities and vocational colleges to make full use of existing resources to set up geriatric courses, and some even offer geriatric courses for free [8]. These measures make full use of the existing conditions to reduce the educational cost of promoting the elderly to join the geriatric system.

5.2. Strengthening Teacher Training Programmes

A major barrier to expanding geriatric education is the lack of qualified educators specializing in geriatric education. To address this problem, the Chinese government has prioritized the development of teacher training programs focusing on gerontology. Professional development programs for in-service educators, as well as specific programs for teacher training schools, aim to train more teachers who can specifically teach older students [9]. These courses are designed to improve their professionalism and teaching skills and to give them the skills necessary to meet the unique learning needs of older adults [3].

In order to address the imbalance in the development of urban and rural geriatric education, the Government encourages cross-regional cooperation, and vigorously develops the participation of educators from urban educational institutions in exchange programmes or distance-learning programmes, in order to address to the greatest extent possible the shortage of teachers for geriatric education in rural areas, as well as the imbalance in the development of urban and rural geriatric education.

5.3. Digital Learning Platform and Technical Solutions

As part of China's strategy to improve access to education for older persons, the Government attaches great importance to digital learning platforms. The use of technology in education has the potential to narrow the gap between urban and rural education for older persons by providing online educational resources. E-learning platforms specifically for older persons have been developed in response to their speed of learning and level of technology [10].

Integrating digital tools into the education of older adults is particularly beneficial for older adults in remote areas where exposure to physical learning institutions may be limited [11]. At the same time, online learning offers greater flexibility, as older people can participate in educational activities anytime, anywhere. Programs that combine traditional face-to-face teaching with online learning (often known as "mixed learning") have also become more popular, providing a more balanced and stable approach to lifelong educational learning [6].

While older people tend to have lower levels of digital knowledge than the younger generation, people are working to improve their technical skills. Basic computer and smartphone training is currently being incorporated into educational programmes to enable older adults to fully engage in digital learning. Another benefit of these efforts is to bridge the digital divide and help older people better connect with family, friends and communities [12].

6. The Future of Geriatric Education in China

Looking into the future, with the growth of the demand of population aging, the development of education for the elderly in China will be significantly expanded. To ensure that the geriatric education system continues to evolve for the benefit of all older adults, several key factors must be addressed.

6.1. Expanding the Access Scope for Rural Areas

One of the most critical areas for future development is the expansion of educational opportunities for older people in rural and remote areas. Although urban areas provide rich educational opportunities for the elderly, the resources available to rural communities often lag behind in this regard [13]. To address this imbalance, the quality and level of infrastructure in underserved areas must be upgraded, including on-site teaching venues and digital learning platforms.

Establishing community learning centers, mobile lecturers and mobile educational units are some potential solutions to provide educational resources to the rural population. Moreover, expanding Internet access in rural areas is essential to ensure that older adults benefit from online learning programs [14].

6.2. Promoting Intergenerational Learning

Another important trend in elderly education is to promote intergenerational learning opportunities. Gathering people of different ages in the classroom promotes mutual understanding and respect, while also benefiting older and younger learners [8]. For example, intergenerational curriculum seniors and younger students allow the exchange of skills and knowledge, younger students often help older students develop digital skills, and older adults share their life experiences and professional areas [9].

These programs contribute to increased social cohesion and foster a culture of lifelong learning across generations. In addition, intergenerational learning eliminates stereotypes and age discrimination, in which people of all ages can participate, learn what the elderly and the young never know, and complete the complementarity of knowledge [15].

6.3. Using Partnerships between Government, Academia, and Civil Society

To ensure that education for the elderly continues to flourish, cooperation between government, academia and civil society is crucial. Multiple collaborations help to meet the diverse needs of older learners, while also pooling resources and enriching expertise to create more comprehensive and effective programs [8].

In recent years, new and innovative educational programs for older people have been developed through a collaboration between universities, nonprofits, and government agencies. For example, the Third Era University (U3A), which has been successful in Europe and other parts of the world, is an educational campaign to provide informal learning opportunities for older adults [9]. China is adapting and implementing similar initiatives to create an accessible, more flexible learning environment for education for the elderly.

7. Conclusion

The development of geriatric education under the perspective of lifelong education is an inevitable trend of social development, which can not only accelerate the process of social development, but also make the whole social system stable and perfect, and play a great role in the ageing society. In our country, the development of geriatric education has made initial progress, but it still needs to solve some problems that have been foreseen, so that it can play a better role in the future, better promote the harmonious development of society, and make the social system more sound and perfect. The relevant departments should pay more attention to geriatric education, actively respond to the various new problems and new social contradictions that have arisen in geriatric education, better develop geriatric education, and maximise the advantages of geriatric education.

References

- [1] UNESCO. (2015). *Education for older persons: Lifelong learning and education for all*. UNESCO Publishing.
- [2] Aspin, D. N., & Chapman, J. (2007). *Lifelong learning: Concepts and contexts*. Routledge.
- [3] Jarvis, P. (2009). *The sociology of adult and continuing education*. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59(3), 255-271.
- [4] Penso, G., & Freeman, L. (2012). *Lifelong learning in aging societies: The case of Italy*. *Educational Gerontology*, 38(5), 295-307.
- [5] Phillipson, C. (2013). *Ageing and the politics of place: The role of intergenerational relationships*. *Social Policy & Administration*, 47(7), 746-763.
- [6] Wang, Y., & Yuan, J. (2015). *Education for the elderly in China: Challenges and opportunities*. *Educational Gerontology*, 41(7), 486-499.
- [7] Wang, Z., & Yuan, J. (2015). *Geriatric education as lifelong education*. *Educational Gerontology*, 41(3), 185-196.
- [8] Schuler, R., & Watson, K. (2009). *Building partnerships for adult education: An integrative approach*. *Adult Learning*, 20(4), 22-28.
- [9] Formosa, M. (2019). *The role of higher education in lifelong learning for older adults*. *Journal of Adult Learning*, 26(1), 45-62.
- [10] Yamashita, S., et al. (2020). *E-learning and digital literacy for older adults: Bridging the digital divide*. *Educational Gerontology*, 46(4), 223-233.
- [11] Rubenson, K. (2011). *Lifelong learning and the future of education: Perspectives from Canada and Sweden*. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 30(3), 309-325.
- [12] Hiemstra, R. (1995). *Adult learning in the digital age: A review of the literature*. *The Adult Educator*, 21(3), 145-152.
- [13] Tanglou, Y. (2014). *Educational disparities in rural China: A focus on older adults*. *Educational Gerontology*, 40(5), 335-347.
- [14] World Bank. (2016). *Aging in China: The role of education in shaping the future*. World Bank Publications.
- [15] Glenenning, C., & Bartersby, C. (1990). *Intergenerational learning: Bridging the gap*. *Educational Gerontology*, 16(2), 149-160.