

Article

Innovative Model of Care for Older Adults in Taiwan: Implementation of Intergenerational Learning for Older Adults and Young Children

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Abstract: In intergenerational learning, older adults experience benefits such as improved well-being, cognitive engagement, and social interaction. IGL also improves the ability of older adults to address age-specific developmental concerns, including generativity and identity formation. Older individuals can benefit from engaging in learning activities with young children. This article introduces an innovative care model for older adults in Taiwan, and the model focuses on the implementation of IGL for older adults and young children. In addition, it is hoped that this study will give preschool teachers a greater understanding of the essence of IGL to become better educators, and effectively implementing intergenerational learning courses so that older adults and young children can develop a healthy body and mind in the future. To effectively implement IGL for older adults and young children, preschools should develop thematic, interactive IGL curricula, and increase preschool teachers' awareness of IGL and train professionals in this educational approach. Preschools should also utilize available resources and funds to systematically promote IGL, and they should invite parents to participate in activities that can counter misconceptions regarding the capabilities of older adults. Preschools should establish a team of experts to provide assistance and consultations for institutions, and they should develop effective models for promoting IGL.

Keywords: Intergenerational learning, Older adults, Wellbeing, Young children

1. Introduction

Contemporary society has witnessed significant transformations in all economic, social, political, familial, cultural, and demographic structures (Maria Raquel Vaz Patrício & António José Osório, 2016). With an increasing population of older adults and longer life expectancy, people interact across generations more than ever before. However, the technological innovations and shifting social norms have resulted in increased segregation between generations. Engagement in intergenerational programs exhibits significant potential in bridging intergenerational divide and fostering cohesive communities. Promoting relationships and interactions between the young and old generations have been considered as an integral component of social policy. Correspondingly, the World Health Organization (WHO) proposed "respect and social inclusion" as one of the eight important domains to the well-being and participation of older people in the Global Age-friendly Cities Guide (Daniel, Lai, Zhou, Rebecca & Li, 2023).

Intergenerational learning (IGL) is an emerging form of lifelong learning in which representatives of two or more generations engage in a shared activity and exchange knowledge, skills, and experiences. Intergenerational practice is an effective strategy for combating ageism and addressing demographic challenges within societies and organizations. Rapid societal changes have resulted in a need for the creation of new learning opportunities for diverse age groups, including young children and older adults. From a generational perspective, the solutions limited to formal training courses are inadequate. However, professionally conducted IGL can offer feasible solutions (Tambaum, 2022).

Also referred to as intergenerational education, intergenerational programming, or intergenerational practice, IGL facilitates a mutual exchange of knowledge between members of different generations. This process enables amalgamation, enhancement, and

construction of knowledge, wisdom, skills, competencies, attitude, norms, and values across generations (Vodopivec, Partalo, & Šindić, 2022). In IGL, older adults experience benefits such as improved well-being, cognitive engagement, and social interaction. IGL also improves the ability of older adults to address age-specific developmental concerns, including generativity and identity formation (Webster, Norwood, Waterworth, & Leavey, 2023).

Social interaction is important to older adults. Research has shown that social interaction even outweighs physical and mental health condition in affecting older adults's successful aging (Zhang & Kaufman, 2016). Older individuals can benefit from engaging in learning activities with young children. This article introduces an innovative care model for older adults in Taiwan. The model focuses on the implementation of IGL for older adults and young children. It is hoped that this study will give preschool teachers a greater understanding of the essence of IGL to become better educators, and so that older adults and young children can develop a healthy body and mind, and young children become better citizens in the future.

2. Methodology

The documentary analysis method is used by the researcher in this study. By reading and analyzing related studies, the researcher can systematically gather and analyze data from various documents, and providing a robust foundation for understanding the implementation of IGL for older adults and young children. The researcher conducts a thorough review of the selected documents. This involves carefully reading and analyzing the content to extract meaningful data, themes, and patterns that are relevant to the research questions. This article is based on the analysis of studies related to intergenerational learning, and uses deductive and inductive logic to explore the practice of intergenerational learning for young children and older adults in Taiwan's preschools (Shih, 2018; Wang, 1991).

3. Relevant Research Topics

3.1 Implementing IGL for Older Adults and Young Children Can Aid in Establishing an Effective Care Model for Older Adults

According to Erickson's psychosocial development theory, human development is a remarkable process. Older adults may exhibit child-like behaviors as their cognitive functions gradually decline. These behaviors include both sincerity and obstinacy, in addition to a desire for attention and love. Similar to how children engage in repetitive play, older adults often revisit the same topics. In addition, both older adults and young children may exhibit unconventional behaviors to attract attention. This homogeneity between generations facilitates the establishment of a mutual exchange of what each generational member lacks and possesses. Consequently, IGL has the potential to not only renew older individuals' social value but also bridge the generational gap; t h e r e f o r e , IGL is a useful care model for older adults (Chan, 2024; Shih, Wu & Chung, 2022).

In Taiwan, some preschools implement IGL courses. For example, a preschool in Chiayi County collaborates with a daycare center and enables older adults and young children to engage in activities such as growing vegetables together. To foster closer interaction between the two groups, the preschool removed the wall separating the school from the daycare center. Every Friday afternoon, the preschool conducts food and agriculture education classes, which the children eagerly anticipate. These classes provide a unique opportunity for the children to interact with their "older classmates." Each Friday, after exiting the classroom, the children rush toward the daycare center, which is located fewer than 50 meters from the school, and the teachers must remind the children, "some grandparents may still be resting, so let's walk quietly so as not to disturb them" (Chen, 2024; Shih, Wu & Chung, 2022). The grandparents exhibit clear joy upon seeing the children; in the context of IGL, they serve as both classmates and teachers. The open space next to the preschool is a garden established jointly by the preschool and daycare center in 2019. Here, the older adults demonstrate their gardening skills and guide the children in vegetable cultivation, passing on their agricultural knowledge (Chen, 2024).

Older adults and young children similarly participate in learning together in a preschool in Taoyuan City. This area has a large Hakka population, and many preschool children belong to this ethnic group. The preschool recognizes the importance of language in culture, and therefore, it has established local cultural courses in which children can learn the Hakka language through cooking sessions with community elders as a means of passing on both language and culture. These interactions not only bridge the age gap but also facilitate cross-generational and cultural exchange, which enhances the older adults' sense of accomplishment and improves their overall mood and health. These IGL practices for older adults and young children serve as an effective care model for older adults (Chen, 2024).

Older adults and young children participate in intergenerational learning together in another preschool in Taoyuan City.

The intergenerational learning course is "Music Game - Balloon Archway." Older adults follow musical instructions to build an archway for young children to pass through (Figure 1).



Fig.1 Music Game - Balloon Archway

The intergenerational learning course is “Collaboration Games.” Older adults and young children use scarves to carry a ball together (Figure 2).



Fig. 2 Collaboration Games

The intergenerational learning course is “Toss Sandbags.” Older adults and young children toss sandbags to move their bodies together (Figure 3).



Fig. 3 Toss Sandbags

“Music Game - Balloon Archway”, “Collaboration Games” and “Toss Sandbags” are interesting courses for older adults and young children to learn. The goal of these courses as follows: (1) promoting interaction between young children and older adults; (2) helping young children understand the physical aspects of aging such as slowed walking and impaired hearing and teaching them to respect and care for older adults; (3) guiding the older adults through helping young children complete a project and creating a sense of accomplishment (Shih, 2022; Shih, Wu, & Chung, 2022).

In preschool environments, where sharing and cooperation are common values, positive personal relationships exist and there are no prejudices against age. IGL flourishes as it helps teachers improve as individuals. It can be stated that teachers of all three generations feel the need to be a part of knowledge exchange process since they sometimes feel vocationally incompetent and want to acquire new knowledge and skills. As a result of these exchanges, they reciprocally affect each other (Soner Polat & Hande Çiçek, 2015). IGL fosters relationships across generations. It expands and enriches social networks, positively affects the quality of life of older adults, and enhances these adults’ well-being. It also supports the exchange of cultural experiences and aids in preserving traditions and values (Shih, 2022; Simándi, 2018).

3.2 Research related to intergenerational learning between older adults and young children from 2019 to 2023

A list and result of studies on intergenerational learning between older adults and young children from 2019 to 2023 is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Studies on intergenerational learning between older adults and young children from 2019 to 2023

Author	Time	Paper Title	Study Result
Chung, C. F.	2019	A case study on intergenerational learning in preschool	Preschools should establish a team of experts to provide assistance and consultations for institutions, and they should develop effective models for promoting IGL.
Liu, C. M.	2019	Intergenerational learning: A case study of a preschool in New Taipei City.	Enhancing the activity levels of older adults and transforming their outdated and closed-off mindsets can help them rediscover new vitality. This can ensure that the final stage of their lives is filled with beautiful memories and a sense of meaningful value and existence.
Lin, Y. T.	2020	A case study of the implementation of intergenerational music curriculum in a community	Intergenerational learning programs can foster emotional connections between older adults and young children.
Chen, H. W.	2022	Analysis of the effectiveness of intergenerational learning on improving depressive mood in older adults	Intergenerational learning activities can improve depression in older adults.

Lin, Y. H.	2023	Conflict and resolution in intergenerational learning	To help parents better understand the value and significance of intergenerational learning, and enhance public awareness of aging and to foster an age-friendly society free of discrimination.
Ho, S. Y.	2023	A preliminary study of intergenerational learning to improve well-beings for the elderly in community care center	Intergenerational learning through participation in horticultural therapy activities has enhanced the well-being of the elderly at community care centers, resulting in tangible benefits for both their welfare and life satisfaction.

(Source: Chen, 2022; Chung, 2019; Ho, 2023; Lin, 2020; Lin, 2023; Liu, 2019).

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that intergenerational learning programs can foster emotional connections between older adults and young children, and it can improve depression in older adults, and enhance their well-being.

3.3 Effective Design for Implementing IGL for Older Adults

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), people aged 65 or above are considered elderly. A country with the percentage of its population aged 65 and over rising to 7% is called an “aging society”, and when the percentage reaches 14% and 20%, it will then be considered as an “aged society” and a “super-aged society”, respectively. Based on the governmental statistics of 2014, the number of people aged over 65 in Taiwan reached 1.49 million in 1993. This number accounted for more than 7% of the total population then, making Taiwan an aging society, as defined by the WHO. In addition, a 2018 report published by the government revealed that the elderly accounted for 14.1% of Taiwan’s total population then, making the country an “aged society”. This figure is projected to reach 20.6% by 2026, meaning that Taiwan will become a “super-aged society” at that time (Wang, Shao, & Han, 2022).

Longer life brings new possibilities that demand a reconceptualization of a three stage life composed of education, career, and retirement. When living a multi-stage life, we will experience increasingly “age-agnostic” life stages and witness major changes in intergenerational dynamics. These new changes in the twenty-first century, coupled with other social changes as well as the family structure, traditional values and the unique socio-cultural context and policy in Taiwan, pose great challenges on intergenerational learning (Yuan & Wu, 2021).

This aging population is associated with new social issues, such as the increase in cases of elderly people suffering from isolation and loneliness, for whom social and interpersonal relationships could be beneficial. In this scenario, “intergenerational relations” could constitute an opportunity for an exchange of experiences, knowledge and values between generations, as well as improvement in the quality of life of the elderly (Teresa Martins et al, 2019). Many studies have identified challenges related to tensions in intergenerational interactions. These challenges arise as a result of differences in social, emotional, work-related, cognitive, and other competencies among members of different generations, and strategies must be identified to alleviate these tensions (Vodopivec & Šindić, 2023).

Education has a significant role in improving the quality of life and the well-being of the older population by increasing social networks and social support, influencing social solidarity, and fostering economic development. In the same way, intergenerational learning contributes to community and financial cohesion, civic engagement, and intergenerational interactions in relation to late-life learning (Maria Raquel Vaz Patrício & António José Osório, 2016). To effectively implement IGL for older adults and young children, preschools should develop thematic, interactive IGL curricula. They should also increase preschool teachers’ awareness of IGL and train professionals in this educational approach. Preschools should also utilize available resources and funds to systematically promote IGL. In addition, they should invite parents to participate in activities that can counter misconceptions regarding the capabilities of older adults. Moreover, preschools should establish a team of experts to provide assistance and consultations for institutions, and they should develop effective models for promoting IGL. Government agencies should also focus on promoting IGL (Shih, Wu, & Chung, 2022). These interventions can effectively address the challenges of implementing IGL for older adults.

In conclusion, to effectively implement Intergenerational Learning (IGL) for older adults and young children, preschools should (1) identify common themes: select themes that are meaningful and engaging for both older adults and young children. Themes could include topics like history, nature, storytelling, arts and crafts, or cultural traditions; (2) interactive activities: design activities that encourage active participation from both groups. For example, older adults can share stories or life experiences, while children can ask questions and draw pictures based on these stories. Joint projects like gardening, cooking, or simple science experiments can also foster interaction; (3) collaborative learning: ensure that activities promote collaboration rather than a

one-sided teaching approach. Both older adults and young children should feel that they are contributing to and benefiting from the learning process; (4) adaptability: create curricula that can be adapted based on the interests and abilities of participants. Activities should be flexible to accommodate varying levels of mobility, cognitive function, and learning styles; (5) training for facilitators: provide training for teachers and facilitators to effectively manage intergenerational activities. They should be skilled in creating an inclusive environment that respects and values the contributions of both older adults and young children; (6) evaluation and feedback: develop mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of the IGL curricula. Regular feedback from participants can help in refining activities and ensuring that the program remains engaging and beneficial for all involved. By focusing on these elements, preschools can create a rich, interactive learning environment that fosters meaningful connections between older adults and young children (Lyu, Xu, Cheng, H. et al., 2020).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

In 2002, the World Health Organization published *Active Aging: A Policy Framework*, which defines active aging as the process of improving the quality of life of older adults through health promotion, social participation, and safety measures. Aging should be perceived as a positive experience, integrated into national policies, and aligned with cultural values to ensure dignity and high-quality life for older adults (Shih, 2022).

In general, societies, families, and individuals must fully understand the importance of intergenerational care for older individuals. Engaging multiple social actors can maximize the benefits of an IGL approach to care. Such engagement may involve promoting the role of grandparents in caregiving, governmental support for intergenerational programs, facilitation of community activities that foster intergenerational interactions, improvement of mental health services for older individuals engaged in these programs, and moderation of intergenerational care duration and frequency. These efforts can enable active aging, which can affect the potential productivity and happiness of older adults. Healthy, happy old age is supported by positive intergenerational relationships; they should start early, but it is never too late to begin. Intergenerational programs intentionally and actively engage young and older persons in shared programming and/or services. They have been employed effectively to improve young persons' empathy (Jarrott, 2023; Shih, 2022).

According to Han and Xiang (2024), IGL enables intergenerational exchange, that is, interaction and communication between different generations, and provides synergy between life experiences and learning. This concept represents an essential dimension of social capital and social learning that transcends traditional forms of education. Within this dynamic, intergenerational mentoring is essential, with older generations imparting their accumulated experience to younger generations. This can facilitate the development of critical thinking and complex social understanding. In preschool settings, older adults can impart their accumulated experience to younger children. Furthermore, as they participate in interactive learning with young children, the older adults can develop a sense of value and happiness. Therefore, an IGL-based approach is effective as a care model for older adults (Matějka & Kořán, 2024).

In summary, an intergenerational program is a structured set of practices – not just one activity – implemented by people from different generations aimed at facilitating interaction and understanding between these people (See “Intergenerational Relationships”). At its root, any intergenerational program combines three key dimensions. Firstly, it has an intention to facilitate intergenerational encounters. Secondly, it combines differences and similarities: generations involved in the program must be different – hence, distant to each other – but must as well be able to find some way to get proximal and connect some common thread. Finally, all intergenerational programs must embrace at their core a time-related dimension since generations are situated within axes of time (whether demographic, familial, organizational, historic, societal, or individual time). For instance, when we talk about an intergenerational program involving “older people” and “youth people” (Sánchez & Kaplan, 2019). Intergenerational programming in community settings provides younger generations with an opportunity to learn from older adults' lived experience and extend their relationship with older adults beyond their own elderly family members (Shih, Wu & Chung, 2022).

5.2 Recommendations

IGL is an effective strategy for promoting successful aging. Successful aging comprises physical, psychological, and social aspects. The physical aspect involves maintaining good health and an independent life, and the psychological aspect involves adapting well and maintaining normal cognitive function without depression symptoms. “oldness” does not equate to “sickness”. Successful aging has become the core of health policies for older adults worldwide (Lee, Jarrott & Juckett, 2020; Shih, 2022). This article introduces an innovative model of care for older adults in Taiwan. This model involves implementation of IGL for older adults and young children. The article also explores the design of IGL programs for older adults. The recommendations for the

implementation of intergenerational learning between older adults and young children.

5.2.1 Encouraging Intergenerational Communication

5.2.1.1 Intergenerational Communication Training

Provide training on effective communication with different age groups to help bridge generational gaps.

5.2.1.2 Intergenerational Dialogues

Organize events where people of different ages can discuss and exchange views on topics of common concern, such as environmental protection and health.

5.2.2 Promoting Cultural Heritage

5.2.2.1 Traditional Culture Education

Through lectures and performances, seniors can pass on traditional culture, customs, and values to the younger generation.

5.2.2.2 Joint Holiday Celebrations

Organize celebrations for traditional holidays where people of different ages can participate together, allowing young people to understand and experience traditional culture.

5.2.3 Supporting Mutual Understanding

5.2.3.1 Intergenerational Exchange Programs

Develop long-term plans to support and promote continuous interaction and exchange between older adults and young children.

5.2.3.2 Media Promotion

Use media to publicize successful cases of intergenerational exchange, inspiring more people to participate.

By implementing these recommendations, stronger connections can be built between generations, fostering mutual learning and support, and promoting social harmony and progress. This study can promote the enhancement of older adult care and will give preschool teachers a greater understanding of the essence of IGL to become better educators, and effectively implementing intergenerational learning courses so that older adults and young children can develop a healthy body and mind in the future.

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