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Lifelong Learning and Self-Directed Learning among Older Adults for Community Well-being: A Phenomenological Study of University–Community Learning Spaces in Chae Son Subdistrict, Mueang Pan District, Lampang Province, Thailand

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Introduction

Population ageing has become one of the most significant demographic transitions worldwide, highlighting the importance of promoting lifelong learning and active ageing among older adults. Community-based learning environments, particularly those established through university–community partnerships, provide opportunities for older adults to engage in meaningful learning, social participation, and health promotion. Although previous studies have emphasized the benefits of lifelong learning for healthy ageing, limited attention has been paid to how older adults experience self-directed learning through participation in intergenerational activities with university students. This study therefore explores the lived experiences of older adults participating in community-based intergenerational learning activities and examines how these experiences contribute to lifelong learning and community well-being.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the lived experiences of older adults participating in university–community intergenerational learning activities.
2. To examine the development of lifelong learning and self-directed learning among older adults through community-based participation.

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative Research using a Phenomenological Approach

Participants

Twenty-two older adults enrolled in the Elderly School, Chae Son Subdistrict.

Research Site

The Elderly School, Chae Son Subdistrict, Mueang Pan District, Lampang Province, Thailand.

Data Collection

- Semi-structured Interviews
- Participant Observation
- Reflective Conversations
- Field Notes

Trustworthiness

- Data Triangulation
- Member Checking
- Peer Debriefing

Data Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Findings

Five interconnected themes emerged, illustrating the students' pathway of inner transformation.

Theme 1: Rediscovering the Joy of Learning

Theme 2: Learning through Intergenerational Relationships

Theme 3: Becoming Self-Directed Learners

Theme 4: Building a Sense of Belonging

Theme 5: Lifelong Learning as a Pathway to Healthy Ageing



Discussion

The findings indicate that community-based intergenerational learning promotes lifelong learning, self-directed learning, and active ageing among older adults. Collaborative learning environments encourage positive perceptions of ageing, meaningful community participation, and continuous personal growth, supporting theories of Lifelong Learning, Self-Directed Learning, Active Ageing, and Community-Based Learning.

Conclusion and Recommendations

University–community learning spaces promote lifelong learning, self-directed learning, healthy ageing, and community engagement among older adults through intergenerational interaction. Future initiatives should expand university–community partnerships, integrate intergenerational learning into health promotion programs, and conduct comparative studies across diverse communities to strengthen evidence for sustainable lifelong learning and community well-being.

References

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