Exploration and Optimization of Elderly Education Empowering Senior Volunteering from the Perspective of Service-Learning Theory

Zheng Fang

Ningbo Open University, Ningbo 315016, China.

Abstract: With the aging of the population, there has been a major topic about how to improve the social participation of the elderly and enhance the awareness of elderly services. Based on the connotation and practices of the service-learning theory, this paper takes the functionalization of elderly education as a starting point, and studies the interactive direction of elderly education and Senior Volunteering from different perspectives on a basis of the examination and analysis of the current senior volunteering situation. Through the analysis of the characteristic mechanism, this paper proposes an optimized path for elderly education to reinforce Senior Volunteering.

Keywords: Elderly Education; Senior Volunteering; Service-Learning Theory; Active Ageing

Introduction

Aging is a prominent social problem. At present, the issue of population aging is becoming more and more serious in China. According to the results of the seventh demographic census, China's elderly population over the age of 60 was 264 million by the end of 2020, accounting for 18.7% of the total population, of which about 190 million were aged 65 and above, taking a portion of 13.5% in gross population. This means that China is about to become a "moderately aging" society, causing a decrease of total human resources which also affects the human resource supply from every household, and the labor force will continue to age, given the prospect of age structure. Therefore, it is particularly important to explore how to give incentives to the elderly to solve the problem.

Education for the elderly meets the psychological needs of the elderly for learning, enriches the spiritual world, improves the quality of life, build up healthy personalities and positive emotions, improves cognitive skills, and enables them to better integrate into the digital life. At the same time, elderly education promotes the development of human resources from the elderly, and guides the elderly to actively participate in volunteer services with their own awareness and interests, so that elderly volunteers can become a new force in the general communities, alleviating dilemma of labor force reduction, improving people's happiness index, as well as accelerating the process of building up a society with "high-quality well-off" and common prosperity.

1. Overview of Service Learning Theory
1.1 The origin and development of the theory

Service-learning theory originated from the empirical education theory at the end of the 19th century. After nearly a century of development and evolution, it really became a mature educational concept and practice method in the second half of the 20th century. At present, service-learning theory has become one of the mainstream theories in the field of education, and has been widely used in educational activities at all levels and in various categories around the world. The service-learning theory aims to achieve the all-round development of people, while it pays attention to the combination of theoretical learning and service.

Service learning is an experiential educational philosophy that promotes student learning and development by designing organized, purposeful activities that engage students in activities that meet human and community needs. Experiential learning is an important theoretical basis for service learning. The experiential learning process is a cyclic process, including four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract generalization and action application. Service learning enables learners to combine the spiritual world with the material world outside in the practice of service.

1.2 Application of the theory

As an important part of lifelong education, elderly education plays an important role in the development of human resources from the elderly and in motivating the elderly to serve the society. In China, geriatric education is still in the stage of being more like a welfare or entertainment, it lacks an understanding of the developmental and productive functions of geriatric education, we also don't have specific provisions on social participation and social services in the relevant policies of geriatric education. Under the background that service-learning theory has been widely used in various educational activities, we will examine the role of elderly education in promoting volunteer services for the elderly from the perspective of service-learning theory, and explore the theoretical connotations to guide the development of elderly education so that it can better improve the comprehensive life quality of the elderly.

Based on the service learning theory, it can be divided into the following three aspects. The first is reciprocity in the process: service learning is based on learning, which is obviously different from the traditional volunteer service by the elderly, which enables the elderly students to achieve a reciprocal relationship with the community. In another word, students help the community solve social and public problems, while improve their own skills, gaining a sense of identity and spiritual satisfaction. The second is reflection in the process: service-learning is more of an experiential education, which guides people to reflect on what they have observed and experienced in activities, so that they can better participate in activities in the future. For example, elderly students reflect on the process of introducing and promoting intelligent software to other elderly people, and improve the way of helping the elderly and vulnerable groups in the community to conquer the gap created by the digital times. The third is guidance in the process: service-learning also emphasizes structured teaching combined with the curriculum. In the whole process, professional senior educators should play a guiding role, and can help senior students and the community to make overall planning of learning goals and service methods, and evaluate the effectiveness of later services.

2. Current situation of senior volunteering

Senior volunteering is the act of participating in social welfare and social service but not being driven by rewards. Volunteer services in China are mainly professional services and community services. For example, there are retired doctors volunteer teams carry out silver-age actions, and retired teachers support teaching teams to provide professional services. Elderly education volunteers are a group of volunteers that have grown with the development of elderly education in recent years. For example, in Shanghai, a volunteer service team for elderly education was established and the number of volunteers is more than 290,000.

Promoting the development of the senior service team is an important measure to build the elderly service system. It can take advantage of their proximity, convenience, and familiarity to the communities to help the elderly under various circumstances such as meal assistance, medical assistance, cleaning assistance, trip assistance, and emergency assistance. According to relevant surveys conducted by senior scientific research institutions, the "post-60s" who participated in volunteer services accounted for 24.21% among the elderly who received sample surveys in various places, and the "post-50s" accounted for 18.60%. Relatively young generations generally have greater willingness to participate, and the differences between generations are gradually narrowing.

With the promotion of active aging policies and the development of community education for the elderly, senior volunteering has achieved a good momentum in its development, but there are still some problems.

First, the mechanism is not perfect. The system is faulty, which is manifested in the fact that the cadres of basic level management in local areas do not have a deep understanding of the significance of senior volunteering, neither do they hold

a positive attitude towards supporting, guiding, and guaranteeing elderly volunteers. Although many places have established corresponding volunteer service organizations, there are no personnel, few plans, and hardly any activities in specific operational areas such as volunteer recruitment, publicity, planning and executing, and event organization. The working funds is unguaranteed and insufficient, and a multi-party financing mechanism such as financial subsidies and social donations has not yet been formed.

Second, the service level is not high enough. The team lacks professional learning and training, and the volunteer service activities are not under a systematic and long-term, project-based thinking and operating mode, resulting in low-quality volunteer services, tedious contents, unprofessional skill-learning, less rigorous organization of activities, and short-term, repetitive service activities, which makes it nothing but formalism. There is a lack of harmonious linkage with other volunteer service systems, and a network of mutual support has not been set up. Also, the knowledge, ability, experience and skills gained by the elderly are not well used in doing volunteering.

Third, prominent differences are found in different areas in terms of how these projects are carried out. Affected by factors such as economy, culture and natural conditions, there are inevitably various differences in the status of volunteer services by the elderly, which are manifested in the overall imbalance of services, significant differences between urban and rural areas, low participation rates, and great gender differences. The number of participants in urban areas is much higher than that in rural areas, and the proportion of men participating in various volunteer activities by the elderly is significantly higher than that of women. With the development of the economy and society and the steady progress of common prosperity, this difference will gradually narrow.

It is necessary to overcome and solve the problems existing in the current volunteer service by the elderly, so that the elderly can keep playing as a role model to pass the merits of their deeds down to the next generation through these service jobs.
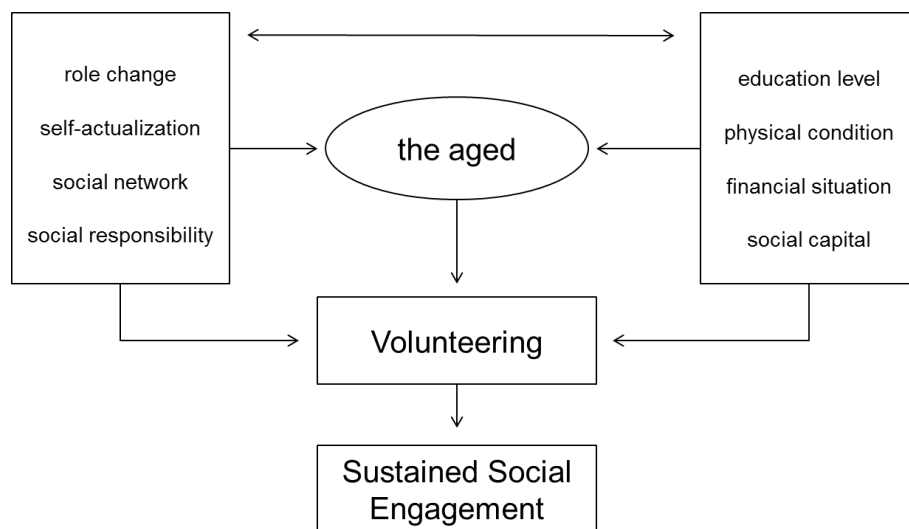

Figure 1 The internal mechanism of elderly education empowering senior volunteering

Motivation is an internal psychological thrust that guides, stimulates and maintains individual activities. Then the motivation of the elderly to participate in volunteer service can be regarded as the internal state that promotes the elderly to meet their psychological needs, which can be divided into self-interest motivation and non-self-interest motivation. Through materials review and investigation from interviews, on the basis of understanding and refinement, we can generally believe that the motivation of the elderly to participate in volunteer service mainly consists of the following aspects:

(1) Realization of role change. Volunteering is the process of the elderly seeking new social roles, reflecting the process of socialization. It is not a passive transformation process, but a transformation process that exerts the conscious initiative of the elderly. The smooth realization of the role change can enable the elderly to better adapt to their old age, and also enable the elderly to play their social functions.

(2) Realization of self-value. The most highly demanded value of people in social development is similar to the spirit of volunteer service. As a noble dedication, the elderly participate in volunteer service to help them meet their own individual needs, enjoy the feeling of being needed, and promote self-realization.

(3) The establishment of interpersonal network. The social network of the elderly is gradually shrinking, and the compensation is to participate in activities, and volunteer service activities provide a very proper medium and platform to promote social participation and network build-up, while it meets the real needs of the elderly to develop interpersonal relationships.

(4) Fulfillment of social obligations. The elderly have a strong desire to fulfill their social responsibilities, and they take volunteering as one of the ways. This motivation is deeply influenced by the social and historical background of the elderly's path of life, and it reflects the times we live in.

There are many factors that affect the elderly's participation in voluntary service. Scholars at home and abroad have carried out research on it. International scholars often use the theory of capital to illustrate its impact, generally including human capital, social capital, and cultural capital. Domestic scholars conduct research on it based on social characteristics such as education level, health status, and income. Through analysis, induction and generalization, the main factors affecting the participation of the elderly in volunteer services are the education level, health status, economic status, social capital and so on. Internal motivation and external factors intersect and influence each other.

Figure 2 Internal and external influencing factors of the elderly participating in volunteer service

3. The optimal path for elderly education to empower senior volunteering based on service learning theory

There are many similarities between service learning and senior volunteer behavior. Combining service-learning theory to examine the role of China's senior education in promoting senior volunteering and to implement the localization practice of service-learning theory, it is of great guiding significance for the optimization and improvement of senior volunteer service.

This paper conducts research from three salient features of service learning:

The first is Reciprocity in the process. The concept of volunteer service is to form a unified entirety based on dedication, driven by fraternity, through mutual assistance, and with progress as the ultimate goal, rather than just staying at the level of "dedication". There is a lack of interaction between the server and the served, which is often difficult to arouse the positive feelings of the server, let alone achieve the purpose of "reciprocity". Volunteer service activities in this mode are difficult to resonate with the elderly, and it is difficult to internalize volunteer actions into long-term behaviors, which greatly reduces the initiative and enthusiasm of the elderly to participate, and affects volunteer services. The elderly education can start from

the perspective of bare education, combine teaching and practice, let the elderly learn in the process of service, and gain in the learning process, such as arranging dramas, dances and other voluntary performances in the community, and playing the music learnt for other elderly living alone in the community etc., fully reflecting the reciprocity of the service-learning process.

The second is reflection in the process. In order to achieve good learning results, reflection is an essential step. Only by combining the practice of reflection, can we make ourselves comprehend learning in activities. The essence of service learning is a kind of experiential education, which guides people to reflect on what they have observed and experienced in activities, and hope to learn new concepts from them. In the process of advancing education for the elderly, through teaching, such as repeated recitations and repeated tuning exercises, the ability to reflect on the elderly can be improved, and on this basis, a kind of integrated thinking can be cultivated, and then a profound understanding of problems can be formed. Understand and develop the ability to be good at problem-solving. Volunteering for the elderly requires the participation of the elderly, and it is even more necessary to allow the elderly to participate and speak out, fully express their opinions and suggestions in the process of volunteering, and allow reflections from the learning to improve the pertinence and practicality of volunteer services.

The third is guidance in the process. Service-learning emphasizes structured instruction combined with the curriculum. In the whole process, professional teachers play a guiding role, which can help students to make overall planning of learning goals and service methods, and evaluate the effectiveness of later services, so as to help service providers learn and grow during the service process, and help the service recipients solve the problem during the service process. Elderly education provides corresponding adjustment and guidance for teachers who can transform school education, allowing them to give full play to their strong professional background advantages and explore teaching methods and rules, which can prompt the elderly to take the initiative to change their ideas, actively participate in social services, and deal with the relationship between volunteers and people who get the assistance. Through corresponding guidance on the concept of running a school for the elderly, curriculum construction requirements, and teaching implementation process, it is possible to improve the willingness of the elderly to provide social services.

4. The Path of elderly education to empower senior volunteering

4.1 Precise supply and infiltrate the idea of service learning

Elderly education needs to accurately meet learning needs, and infiltrate the concept of service learning into the education and teaching process. We should attempt to establish an expression mechanism of public demand for elderly education, timely collect, select, absorb and express the public service demand information corresponding to elderly volunteer services, so that they can "order dishes" when providing public services, and improve the supply and demand of public services for elderly education in a timely manner. Also, we should establish a team of teachers through senior education to build an expert reserve for professional guidance of senior volunteer services, and accelerate the cultivation of a team of volunteer service guidance and training talents with a reasonable structure, sufficient quantity, and good quality, combined with part-time jobs. Besides, it is also needed to establish a post access mechanism for volunteer service training, so that teachers of senior education can fully participate in volunteer services, and at the same time, senior volunteers who are serving on the job can also participate in the link of senior education, so as to realize the integrated development of the two. Moreover, it is ideal to establish a senior volunteer service training center to coordinate the training of the team, promote the professional development of senior volunteers, use professionalism to guide the development of service learning, and enhance the self-improvement ability of senior volunteer services.

4.2 Public service and practice the concept of service learning

The promotion of elderly education and the promotion of volunteer services for the elderly need policy guarantees, and service learning should be practiced by building a complete public service system for elderly education. We should clarify the main responsibility of the government, and use public power to promote the construction of elderly education organizations and the implementation of policy guarantees, so that elderly education can become a platform for the practice

of elderly volunteer services. Establish a policy guarantee system for elderly education in the new era centered on safeguarding the rights and interests of the elderly, we also need to create a favorable public environment, and promote consultations, dialogues and positive interactions among policy stakeholders. It is necessary to raise the participation of the elderly in voluntary service to the height of social development, provide a healthy and favorable policy environment, implement the voluntary norms of voluntary service through the education of the elderly, and urge the community to further improve the organization, training and security mechanism of voluntary groups for the elderly.

4.3 Applying digital intelligence in the process to improve service-learning efficiency

Empower the whole process of volunteer service for the elderly with the results of the digital reform of elderly education and improve the overall efficiency of service learning. Build a multi-terminal digital service matrix, establish a working mechanism for tracking, monitoring and evaluating the needs of volunteer services for the elderly with big data, and build a number of smart service scenarios. Strengthen the use of digital collection and popularize it while forecast new technologies in the needs of the elderly, we should also establish demand absorption mechanisms such as collection, feedback, and evaluation, and form a single-point, appointment, and personalized customization. Relying on the lifelong learning service platform, we can explore the collection, sharing and use of elderly volunteer identity data, user data and other application scenarios, and accelerate the realization of the certification mechanism for elderly volunteer services. The third is to promote the construction of time banks, optimize the management of volunteer service archives for the elderly, establish service accounts for elderly learners, keep records of services, store service results, and issue honorary certificates according to corresponding standards.

References

[1] Li YH, From Older Adult Education to Social Service: The Transformation of Elderly Education Organizations[J]. 2021, 47(5): 714-723.

[2] María del Pilar Díaz-López, José Manuel Aguilar-Parra, Remedios López-Liria, et al. Skills for Successful Ageing in the Elderly. Education, well-being and health[J]. 2017, 237:986-991.

[3] Fan ZH, Research on the Implication of Elderly Education From the Perspective of Active Aging[J]. 2021, 17(3):63-69.

[4] Sánchez García, Julia, Gil Lacruz, Ana Isabel, Gil Lacruz, Marta, et al. The Influence of Gender Equality on Volunteering Among European Senior Citizens[J]. 2022, :1-13.

[5] Tobias Mettenberger, Patrick Küpper, Potential and Impediments to Senior Citizens' Volunteering to Maintain Basic Services in Shrinking Regions[J]. 2019, 59(4): 739-762.

[6] Volunteering Among Low-Income Older Individuals: Does Senior Housing Matter [J]. 2016, 56(3): 344-345.

[7] Wang MX, Guo MX, Service-Learning Research Frontier: A Literature Review[J]. 2021, 2(9): 311-313.

[8] Liu JKK. Khiatani PV, Fung HY, et al. Transforming college students through international service-learning: A case study of three programmes from the City-Youth Empowerment Project (CYEP)[J]. 2019, 14(2):177-195.

[9] Salam M, Dayang Nurfatimah Awang Iskandar, Dayang Hanani Abang Ibrahim, et al. Technology integration in service-learning pedagogy: A holistic framework[J]. 2019, 38:257-273.

[Author] Fang Zheng（1992- ）, male, Ningbo Open University, Ningbo Zhejiang China, Assistant researcher with a master degree.