

A Study on the Reconstruction of Elderly Education Curriculum From the Perspective of Flow Theory: Taking Quzhou Open University for the Elderly as an Example

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Abstract

In the context of an aging society, elderly education, as an essential part of the lifelong education system, has become increasingly prominent. However, traditional elderly education curricula often struggle to fully stimulate the learning interest and motivation of older adults, resulting in suboptimal learning outcomes. This paper, based on the perspective of Flow Theory, conducts an in-depth study on the reconstruction of elderly education curricula, aiming to enhance the sense of immersion and satisfaction of older adults during the learning process through optimized curriculum design. Guided by Flow Theory, this paper proposes strategies and suggestions for the reconstruction of elderly education curricula through literature reviews, surveys, and case studies. The significance of this study lies in providing a new theoretical perspective and practical path for the optimization of elderly education curricula, which is valuable for improving the quality of elderly education and achieving active aging. Furthermore, this study enriches the application of Flow Theory in the field of education, offering useful references for researchers in related fields.

Key words: Flow theory; Elderly education; Curriculum reconstruction

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1. INTRODUCTION

With the deepening of China's aging process, elderly education has received increasing attention. Elderly education, an integral part of the lifelong education system, is significant for promoting the physical and mental health of older adults and enhancing their quality of life. However, current elderly education curricula suffer from issues in content and teaching methods, failing to meet the diverse needs of elderly learners. Flow Theory, a theoretical framework describing individuals' positive experiences in a state of high concentration, provides a new perspective for the reconstruction of elderly education curricula.

2. EXPLANATION OF RELEVANT CONCEPTS

2.1 Elderly Education

Elderly education is a specialized form of education tailored to the physiological and psychological characteristics of older adults. It differs from general and vocational education, emphasizing the actual needs and learning interests of older adults. Elderly education encompasses individuals of all levels, regardless of their prior formal education. As society places greater emphasis on elderly education, its significance has become increasingly prominent. Elderly education enables continued socialization, facilitating the smooth transition into retirement and new social roles; enhances cultural knowledge, providing learning opportunities for those without formal education and updating knowledge for the educated; imparts new technologies and skills, enabling older adults with re-employment aspirations to acquire the necessary abilities and conditions; enriches leisure time, making later life more fulfilling and meaningful; and contributes to building a learning society, raising

the cultural quality of the entire nation, strengthening human capital accumulation, and driving socioeconomic growth. Elderly education covers a wide range of content, including nutrition and health, music and dance, crafts and gardening, cultural knowledge, and vocational training. Its forms are diverse, such as lectures, classes, elderly schools, elderly colleges, and elderly universities. Among these, elderly universities represent a prevalent and crucial form of elderly education.

2.2 Overview of Flow Theory

Flow, also known as Flow Theory or Immersion Theory, is a psychological concept proposed by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the 1970s. It describes a state of complete immersion and pleasure experienced by individuals engaged in activities that are both challenging and with a skill level matched to the task difficulty. This state enhances individuals' learning motivation, satisfaction, and happiness. Flow Theory has a profound impact on individuals' learning motivation, satisfaction, and happiness. By creating conditions for Flow experiences in daily life and work, individuals' enthusiasm and sense of accomplishment can be significantly boosted.

2.3 Relationship between Elderly Education and Flow Theory

Recently, Flow Theory has been gradually applied in education, particularly in enhancing student learning experiences, with notable successes. For elderly education, Flow Theory is equally significant. By designing challenging, interesting, and skill-level-appropriate curricula, we can stimulate older learners' interests and motivation, enhancing their learning experiences and satisfaction.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION AND REASONS OF QUZHOU OPEN UNIVERSITY FOR THE ELDERLY

3.1 Introduction to Quzhou Open University for the Elderly

Quzhou Open University for the Elderly (also known as Quzhou Open University and Quzhou Community University) is a higher education institution dedicated to serving lifelong learning education for all citizens. Established in November 2016, the university adheres to the concept of lifelong learning and aims to provide a platform for the elderly to continue their studies, exchange ideas, and improve themselves. By offering a variety of courses and activities, it fulfills the elderly's needs in knowledge updating, interest cultivation, health preservation, and artistic accomplishment, thereby enabling them to learn, enjoy, and contribute in their twilight years.

3.2 Current Situation and Reason Analysis of Quzhou Open University for the Elderly

Quzhou Open University for the Elderly has achieved remarkable results in elderly education, providing abundant learning opportunities and platforms for the elderly. However, like any educational institution, it encounters several challenges and shortcomings during its development process.

3.2.1 Relatively Monotonous Course Offerings

Quzhou Open University for the Elderly mainly offers courses in health preservation and cultural arts for the elderly. Artistic courses include vocal music, dance (such as Chinese dance, international standard dance, and square dance), instrumental music (such as erhu and electric piano), calligraphy, and painting. These courses not only help the elderly cultivate artistic accomplishment but also enrich their spiritual lives. Courses related to health preservation include fitness ball, Tai Chi, mobile phone photography (for documenting healthy life), and short video production, focusing on their physical and mental well-being to maintain vitality.

Although these courses are well-received by the elderly, they lack diversity and innovation, failing to meet their diverse learning needs. With technological advancements and social progress, the elderly also have a demand for knowledge and skills in emerging fields, such as mobile phone photography and short video production, which are offered relatively fewer at the university.

3.2.2 Insufficient Faculty Resources

The university emphasizes improving course quality and faculty resources. It strives to cultivate outstanding teachers in elderly education, attracts more elderly students through quality courses, and organizes teacher training and seminars to enhance their teaching abilities. Elderly education necessitates teachers with professional knowledge and teaching experience. However, the university's faculty resources are relatively weak, with many teachers lacking relevant training and experience, resulting in inadequate teaching quality. Additionally, the university's limited funding results in low teacher salaries, which to some extent affects their teaching motivation and quality.

3.2.3 Facilities and Environment Requiring Improvement

From Quzhou's overall planning and layout of elderly education, the government is actively promoting the expansion and coverage of elderly educational resources, including establishing more teaching sites. Nonetheless, the university's facilities and environment fail to keep pace with the times, with issues such as insufficient classroom capacity and outdated teaching equipment. Inadequate funding prevents timely updates and improvements.

3.2.4 Mismatch between Enrollment Scale and Demand

Despite the heated enrollment of elderly universities in recent years, even leading to the phenomenon of "hard

to secure a seat,” the enrollment scale of Quzhou Open University for the Elderly remains limited compared to the vast elderly population, unable to meet all their learning needs. This enrollment restriction results in overcrowded popular courses and under-enrolled less popular ones, leading to underutilized educational resources.

4. CURRICULUM RECONSTRUCTION STRATEGIES OF QUZHOU OPEN UNIVERSITY FOR THE ELDERLY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF FLOW THEORY

4.1 Characteristics of Flow Theory

The state of flow encompasses several salient features that collectively constitute the core elements of a flow experience: **Clear Goals:** Individuals possess a precise and explicit objective when engaging in an activity, knowing exactly what they need to achieve. **Immediate Feedback:** The activity provides prompt and accurate feedback, enabling individuals to understand their performance and adjust their actions accordingly. **Challenge-Skill Balance:** The difficulty of the task is commensurate with the individual’s skill level, neither too easy to be boring nor too difficult to induce frustration. **Complete Concentration:** The individual is fully absorbed in the activity, with their attention highly focused, almost to the point of forgetting their surroundings. **Sense of Control:** The individual feels they can direct the progress and outcome of the activity, experiencing a potential sense of mastery. **Loss of Self-Consciousness:** In a state of flow, individuals often forget their own existence, as if merging with the activity. **Distortion of Time:** Individuals lose track of time’s passage during the activity, often feeling as if time flies by quickly. **Intrinsic Motivation:** The activity becomes the purpose in itself, with participants engaged not for external rewards or goals but for the sheer enjoyment it brings.

4.2 Reconstruction Methods Suited for the Elderly Based on Flow Theory

4.2.1 Applicability of Flow Theory to the Elderly

Flow theory emphasizes the complete immersion and joy experienced by individuals engaged in challenging activities where their skills match the task’s difficulty. This state is equally appealing to the elderly. As they age, seniors may encounter declining physical abilities and shrinking social circles, leading to feelings of loneliness and boredom. Consequently, flow experiences can offer them pleasure and fulfillment in specific activities, enhancing their quality of life.

4.2.2 The Elderly’s Demand for Flow Experiences

Elders also aspire to flow experiences during learning. They yearn for pleasure and achievement in a state of high

concentration, which not only stimulates their learning motivation but also strengthens their self-confidence and sense of self-worth. By reconstructing courses based on flow theory, we can design more challenging and entertaining programs that meet their learning needs and facilitate flow experiences during their studies.

4.2.3 Benefits of Flow Theory Reconstruction Methods for the Elderly

Boosting Learning Motivation: Designing challenging courses ignites the learning interest and drive of the elderly, encouraging them to participate more actively in the learning process.

Enhancing Self-Confidence: When completing challenging tasks, seniors gain a sense of achievement and self-confidence, contributing to an elevated sense of self-worth.

Promoting Social Interaction: Flow experiences often involve interaction and collaboration with others. Through group activities or practical projects, elders can increase their social opportunities and broaden their social circles.

Improving Physical and Mental Health: Flow experiences aid in reducing stress levels and enhancing mental well-being. Additionally, participating in challenging activities promotes physical health among the elderly.

4.3 Curriculum Reconstruction Strategies of Quzhou Open University for the Elderly

Through questionnaires and interviews, it has been discovered that the needs of elderly students towards courses exhibit diverse characteristics. They not only value the practicality and interest of the course content but also hope to receive more interaction and personalized guidance during the teaching process. Additionally, elderly students generally seek the experience of flow during their learning, aspiring to obtain a sense of pleasure and accomplishment in a state of high concentration.

4.3.1 Establishing Clear Course Objectives and Challenges

Each course should set clear and meaningful objectives that align with the learning needs and interests of the elderly. For instance, in dance courses, the objective could be to master basic dance steps and improve physical coordination and flexibility.

Cultural Courses: By studying cultural courses such as history, literature, and poetry appreciation, elderly students can enhance their cultural literacy, deepen their understanding and identification with traditional culture, and satisfy their thirst for knowledge. For example, the “Appreciation of Chinese Classical Poetry” course aims to let elderly students experience the profoundness of Chinese culture through the explanation and appreciation of classical poetry, cultivate their sentiments, and improve their aesthetic abilities.

Fitness Courses: Through fitness courses like tai chi and yoga, elderly students can strengthen their physique, improve flexibility and balance, prevent and improve chronic diseases, and promote physical and mental health. For instance, the “24-form Yang-style Tai Chi” course not only teaches the basic movements and routines of tai chi but also emphasizes breath coordination and mental guidance to achieve both internal and external cultivation and robust health.

Craft Courses: Craft courses such as paper cutting, knitting, and calligraphy cultivate the hands-on ability and creativity of elderly students while providing a means to relax and enjoy the pleasure of creation. For example, the “Soft-tip Calligraphy” course not only teaches the basic strokes and structures of calligraphy but also guides students to appreciate the beauty of calligraphy, experience the charm of traditional culture, and exercise hand-eye coordination and patience.

Computer Courses: Computer courses, including smartphone applications and basic computer operations, help elderly students master the usage of modern technological tools, bridge the digital divide, and facilitate their daily lives. For instance, the “Mobile Photography” course teaches elderly students how to use smartphones to capture photos and videos, record beautiful moments in life, and enhance photo quality through post-processing, thereby satisfying their pursuit of photographic art.

The difficulty of courses should be slightly higher than the existing skill level of elderly students to stimulate their learning motivation and desire for challenge. By setting tasks with progressively increasing difficulty in stages, elderly students can gain a sense of accomplishment through continuously overcoming obstacles.

4.3.2 Offering Diversified and Personalized Courses

Based on the interests and needs of the elderly, a variety of courses are added. In addition to traditional courses such as music, dance, and calligraphy, practical courses like health preservation, psychological nursing, legal knowledge, and anti-fraud skills can be included. These courses not only meet the learning needs of the elderly but also help improve their quality of life and self-protection abilities. Personalized course customization services are provided according to the diverse learning backgrounds and interests of the elderly. Through questionnaires, interviews, and other methods, their learning needs are understood, and appropriate courses and learning paths are recommended to them.

4.3.3 Implementing Timely Feedback and Reward Mechanisms

During the teaching process, teachers should promptly provide feedback to the elderly, allowing them to understand their learning progress and achievements. This feedback can be either positive encouragement or constructive suggestions, which helps the elderly adjust their learning strategies and improve learning outcomes. A

reward mechanism is established to recognize outstanding performance among the elderly. Rewards can be material (e.g., learning supplies, small gifts) or spiritual (e.g., certificates of honor, commendation assemblies). These rewards stimulate the learning enthusiasm and sense of honor among the elderly.

4.3.4 Creating an Immersive Learning Environment

The hardware facilities of the classrooms are improved, such as updating desks, chairs, and blackboards, to ensure a clean and safe learning environment. Additionally, learning corners or lounges can be set up for autonomous learning or discussion among the elderly. A vibrant learning atmosphere is fostered through organizing diverse extracurricular activities and study groups. These activities facilitate the formation of learning communities among the elderly, where they can motivate and support each other in pursuit of their learning goals.

4.4 Enhancing Course Quality and Faculty Strength

Emphasis should be placed on improving the quality of courses and strengthening the faculty. On the one hand, efforts should be made to tap into outstanding educational resources for the elderly and focus on cultivating high-quality teachers to attract more elderly students. On the other hand, continuous optimization of course offerings should be undertaken to gauge students’ preferences and ensure that elderly learners enjoy and are satisfied with their courses. Furthermore, regular teacher training and seminars should be organized to enhance teachers’ teaching abilities and course quality.

4.4.1 Course Implementation and Management

Quzhou Open University for the Elderly must also exert significant effort in course implementation and management. Adhering to the principles of open, enlightened, and accessible education, the university should implement a gradual, course-specific, audience-oriented, and flexible academic system at appropriate times. Simultaneously, attention should be given to class management and student services, with the formulation of relevant rules and regulations and the provision of necessary support measures to ensure the smooth implementation of courses and student satisfaction.

Continuously expand and innovate course content and formats. For example, by adding distinctive courses such as Wuju Opera, tea art, makeup styling, joyful fitness dance, social dance, and Latin dance, the university can cater to the diverse learning needs of the elderly. Combining the interests and requirements of elderly learners, diversified courses such as digital skills, health preservation, and psychological counseling can be introduced. Courses should be designed at various levels based on the skill levels and learning needs of elderly students, ensuring that everyone can find suitable content. Additionally, local characteristics should be incorporated

by tapping into the cultural heritage and unique resources of Quzhou to design courses with regional appeal, thereby enhancing their attractiveness and practicality. Furthermore, online education models should be actively explored to provide more convenient learning pathways for the elderly.

4.4.2 Innovating Teaching Methods

Interactive teaching methods such as group discussions and role-playing should be employed to stimulate the participation enthusiasm and critical thinking abilities of elderly learners. Tailored learning guidance and advice should be provided based on their individual needs and characteristics, assisting them in better grasping knowledge and skills. Modern technology tools, including online learning platforms and smart devices, should be leveraged to support teaching, enhancing teaching efficiency and students' learning experiences. By increasing practical sessions, such as field trips and project creation, elderly learners can apply their knowledge to real-life situations, thereby enhancing their learning motivation and sense of achievement. Moreover, these practical sessions can contribute to the improvement of their social skills and teamwork abilities.

4.4.3 Strengthening Faculty Development

Teachers with rich teaching experience and professional knowledge should be recruited, particularly those passionate about elderly education and possess good

ideological and political qualities. Retired teachers, doctors, and working professionals can be attracted as part-time instructors, as they not only possess expertise but can also share life experiences and insights. Attention should be paid to the age structure of the faculty, combining younger, middle-aged, and senior teachers to complement each other's strengths and meet the diverse needs of different courses and student interests. Where possible, a certain number of full-time teachers should be cultivated to enhance the stability of the faculty and continuity of teaching work. By establishing a reserve faculty, timely adjustments and supplements can be made to continuously improve the knowledge structure and age distribution of the faculty, aligning them with the development needs of elderly education.

5. CONCLUSION

Reconstructing the courses of Quzhou Open University for the Elderly from the perspective of flow theory contributes to enhancing the learning experience and satisfaction of elderly learners. It stimulates their learning interest and motivation, meets their learning needs, and helps them attain flow experiences during the learning process, thereby improving their quality of life and learning dynamics. Together, these elements form the unique curriculum system and educational characteristics of Quzhou Open University for the Elderly .