

Exploration of the “Community +” Model for Elderly Education in the New Era

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Abstract. Up against the increasing aged population, the aging problem in China is worsening day by day, with the elderly education and development getting more attention from society. To begin with the current aging situation in China and the relevant policies for the development of elderly education, this paper deeply analyzes the basis for developing the “community +” model theoretically and practically in the new era of elderly education, so as to construct a unique “community +” model relying on the joint efforts of the community and universities, and improve the development of the elderly education in the new era. It also further explores its implementation path and positive social effects for each subject, aiming to help the elderly develop themselves, alleviate the social pressure of providing for the aged, and inspire a new direction for the development of elderly education.

Keywords: “Community +” Model; Elderly Education; “Community + University”; “Community + University for the Aged”.

1. Introduction

According to the data of the seventh national census, the population aged 60 and above in China has reached 264 million, accounting for 18.7% of the total population. This also indicates that the second peak of population birth since the founding of the Republic of China has begun to enter the third age period. In the future, the number of elderly people will rapidly expand into the main group of society, and we should pay more attention to the social pressure of providing for the aged. The Party and the state attach great importance to China’s aging population. In the Opinions on Strengthening the Work Related to Aging in the New Era, the community in the future old-age service system is highly emphasized into a vital strategic position. It is also clearly pointed out that the home-based community as an old-age service model should be innovated in practice and the majority of communities should be actively encouraged to adhere to this home-based old-age service model, so as to improve their capabilities of providing for the aged [1]. Taking the background of the times into consideration, the rapid economic development drives people’s pursuit of higher-quality life and happiness, with the desire for lifelong learning for the elderly becoming more urgent. On this basis, this paper explores the application of the “community +” model for elderly education in the new era, in order to meet the diversified service needs of caring for the elderly and provide constructive suggestions for the sustainable development of the elderly education industry in the future.

2. Theoretical Basis

The “community +” model is further evolved by community development in different research domains. Its specific connotation refers to the combination of the community and other subjects, mainly relying on the community with any subject, so as to find its application in various fields, carry out specific activities, and exert unique effects. In domestic research and practice, the “community +” model has been widely used. Xiong Liang and Chen Yuetang mentioned in Construction of the Community+ Differentiating Service Pattern for Only-Child-Loss Family that the “community +” model with differentiated service supply for families losing their children is based on the community service platform and integrates various resources such as government, social organizations, and markets [2]. Wu Dongmei pointed out in The Development Pattern of Kindergarten Based on “Community+” that such a model can achieve the effective integration of community and

kindergarten by widely applying diverse resources in the community and applying them to the whole process of kindergarten education when building a unique educational ecology [3]. The paper mentioned above fully shows the advantages of the “community +” model applied in society and its good social effects.

In elderly education, the application of the “community +” model also needs extensive social recognition. In the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Aging Undertakings and Pension Service System issued in 2021, the keyword of “community” was mentioned 57 times, which fully demonstrated the effectiveness of the community affirmed by the Party and the state in providing for the aged. Besides, how to play the role of the community requires further application of this model in elderly education, that is, to encourage the community to fully learn from and integrate the strength of other social subjects in improving the elderly community education. At present, the cooperation model that can be formed is the “community + university”. The community makes the best university resources and offers better support for its elderly education by using the existing system of educational knowledge and universities’ educational facilities. As for the model of “community + university for the aged”, it extends some functions of universities for the aged to support the elderly in the community, which alleviates the current shortage of resources for the elderly in society and provides a development path for the education-support combination of the elderly in the community.

3. Realistic Basis

3.1 Influence of Traditional Culture and Generational Feedback

Influenced by traditional culture and the model of generational feedback, the traditional family model of providing for the aged in China mostly takes the children or grandchildren as the main people in responsibility. Such an old-care model for family is undergoing unprecedented pressure, which needs to be transformed. Although the old-age care model was widely used in the past, it also exposed many problems, such as the separation between the elderly and their families, and the inability of the elderly to meet their emotional needs. However, the old-age care model featuring “community +”, which mainly relies on the community as the main body, will take advantage of its absolute geographical advantages compared with the traditional family and institutional models of old-age care. In this way, old-age care services will be provided, and old people’s needs for “supporting them without leaving home” can be satisfied, which relieves the pressure of the traditional model of family old-age care to a certain extent, realize the companionship for the elderly, and promote the development of elderly education.

3.2 Increasing Dependence of the Elderly on the Community

Up against the continuous urbanization development, the construction of infrastructure in the community is relatively complete. For the vast majority of elderly people who are about to enter the third age period, their basic living environment will be transferred from the workplace to the community. In the future, the community will bear the needs of the elderly in many aspects, such as life and entertainment, so their dependence on the community will increase and the community responsible for caring for the old has become an inevitable trend. As far as the current development is concerned, the overwhelming majority of communities in China have not yet had the ability to meet the basic needs of the community serving old-age care. Therefore, we should combine the resources of the community with social subjects with professional knowledge and a sound service system, such as institutions for higher education and universities for the elderly, so as to actively create a “community +” model for elderly education and care.

3.3 Experience Provided by the Development of Community Elderly Education at Home and Abroad

The development of community elderly education in foreign countries has a long history. The Canadian government encourages all social forces to participate in elderly education and supports

multiple subjects to jointly provide diversified demand for its development, among which the combination of “community + university” is very classic. The community college for the elderly is mainly based in the community and led by universities, that is, the community and universities cooperate to set up a college for the elderly to help them improve themselves and master more survival skills, such as courses about computer and Internet use that improve their perception of information technology, and courses pertinent to language skills aiming to help immigrant elderly [4]. In recent years, China has been exploring this new model. Since 2016, Chengdu, Sichuan Province has advocated that “all relevant departments in various localities should organically combine the elderly universities with community education, and integrate resources such as venues, facilities, teachers, teaching equipment, and staff to improve elderly education” [5]. Its practice concretely portrays the model of “community + university for the aged”. Chengdu has included the award funds for the project of the school’s sports facilities into the annual budget with an annual standard of not less than 3 million, so as to build an open and shared social platform to meet the needs of elderly education rooted in schools and further improve its quality.

4. Construction and Advantages of the “Community +” Model of Elderly Education

4.1 Construction of the “Community +” Model

In the field of elderly education, the community compared with other subjects has natural advantages. On the one hand, the community is the place where the elderly live daily and they are familiar with all aspects of the community. Thus, community education gives them more sense of belonging and reasonably reduces their adaptation period. On the other hand, community elderly education is key to practicing lifelong education. With the state giving more policy support to community education, its infrastructure construction has been paid more and more attention. Compared with other ways of education for the elderly, the community can provide more abundant resources for the elderly education. On this basis, relying on the community, institutions for higher education, universities for the elderly, and other subjects, two new models including “community + universities” and “community + universities for the aged” are constructed for the development of elderly education in the new era, inspiring to further develop elderly education in the new era.

1). Construction of the “Community + University” Model

As the main platform of higher education in China, colleges and universities have unique educational resources and advanced teaching concepts. For the elderly in the new era, the lack of community education resources is one problem, and the acceptance of new ideas in the new era is the other. In the past, elderly education and services in the community were mostly carried out by staffs from communities or social organizations. Compared with colleges and universities, the new ideas they owned and received were insufficient. Therefore, based on the community and the resources of colleges and universities, we can fully integrate advanced ideas with the elderly education, meet the needs of the elderly for new ideas, and help the elderly catch up with the times.

2). Construction of the “Community + University for the Aged” Model

Universities for the aged have been extensively developed since the 1980s in China. In order to promote the further development of universities for the aged, China formally established the national university for the aged in March 2023. However, with the increasing aging population in the new era, universities for the aged in China continue to be in short supply. Compared with community elderly education, universities for the aged have a more systematic and comprehensive knowledge system with richer educational resources. Supported by the community, cooperation with universities for the aged can inject more professional strength and fully promote the further development of the elderly education. Besides, the social resource shortage in universities for the aged will be fully alleviated, with richer ways providing for the elderly education.

4.2 Implementation Path of the “Community +” Model

As for the community, on the one hand, the application of the “community +” model requires to actively seeking help, cooperating with external resources, and getting in touch with universities for the aged, so as to build and enrich its support network. On the other hand, it is necessary for the community to keep open and innovative to meet the injection of external forces with great enthusiasm, instead of sticking to the old development model. Meanwhile, the community should not only fully consider its resources and capabilities, but also combine its characteristics to make rational use of the resources about elderly education from universities for the aged. Before the model implementation, the community needs to discuss with other subjects to form a unique education model suitable for the elderly in this community.

As for colleges and universities, the development of the “community +” model in elderly education can adopt many ways, such as the fixed match and settling in the community. Fixed match means that colleges and universities can provide various forms of assistance such as “one-to-one” and “one-to-many” with the community according to their own abilities and resources. Before the implementation, both parties can discuss and sign service contracts after reaching an agreement, so as to fix the service contents and objects, injecting new content and strength into the development of community elderly education. Settling in the community means that universities and communities are encouraged to form an interactive network and university staffs are assigned to settle in the community, which will deepen universities’ understanding of the development of community elderly education, propose better solutions to related problems, and promote the “community + university” model.

As for universities for the elderly, in the “community +” model, they need to extend their functions to the community, such as launching off-campus classes and encouraging the elderly in the community to sign up for related activities. Specifically, with a relatively sound knowledge system of elderly education, the courses in universities for the aged are professional. However, based on the shortage of places in the universities for the aged, extending them to the community and carrying out the second classroom in the community can fully alleviate social contradictions and meet the development needs of the elderly. In addition, universities for the aged regularly organize social activities with a professional structure and adequate security. In the “community +” model, such activities organized by universities for the aged cannot be limited to campus registration, but broaden the audience, which actively encourages the elderly in the community to register and provide them with better ways to participate in activities.

4.3 Positive Social Effects of the “Community +” Model

The application of the “community +” model in elderly education in the new era has positive social effects on the community, universities, universities for the aged, the elderly themselves, and society. Firstly, it improves the serviceability of communities and form a unique community culture. The development of community elderly education can enrich the content of community service, and the model application promotes the ability of the community in serving elderly education and shaping its unique culture. Secondly, it boosts the utilization of teaching resources in colleges and universities. The rich teaching facilities owned by colleges and universities, such as libraries, playgrounds, and gymnasiums, are open to the elderly, encouraging them to strengthen their physical exercise and development while learning advanced knowledge. Thirdly, it alleviates the social status quo of insufficient universities for the aged. As the main battlefield for the elderly to receive education and develop themselves, the university for the aged has been in a keen shortage in recent years. The “community +” model can extend some functions of universities for the aged to the community and mitigate the tight social demands. Fourthly, it satisfies the development aspirations of the elderly. The application of the “community +” model provides a new way for the elderly to develop themselves and enjoy more social resources, fully meeting their related needs. Fifthly, the pressure of social caring for the old is relieved, and stable social development is promoted. The increasing number of elderly people in the new era has become a major problem in current social development. The application of this model offers a new way of thinking for the development of elderly education

to a certain extent, which relieves social pressure, reduces social contradictions, and improves more stable social development.

5. Conclusion

In a modern society with rapid economic development, cultural diversity, and inclusive ideas, aiming to promote old-age services in the new era requires us to actively follow the national strategy of population aging, rationally design the planning system of old-age resources, and promote the high-quality and sustainable development of elderly undertakings and industries. Starting from the reality and immediate needs of the elderly with a positive attitude, the “community +” model put forward in the comparison of existing elderly education models combines the social development and national strategic requirements, sees the function of elderly education in perspective, and strives to make up for the lack of existing foundation, so as to meet the elderly needs, promote the development of elderly education, and improve the old-care models in the future.

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