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SENIOR LEARNING IN TAIWAN: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

ABSTRACT: This article traces some of the major achievements of a local Taiwanese initiative – the Active Ageing Learning movement, which provides seniors with greater opportunity to engage in learning in later life, whether for expressive or vocational reasons. Taiwan has faced considerable increases in the numbers of older people proportionately in the general population as it moves from an “aged society” to a “super-aged society”. This article’s purpose is to provide a historical account of developments and challenges in senior learning as an example of an East Asian nation’s efforts to move away from social welfare paternalism to older citizens as active educative agents in a mainly post-work environment. Data were derived from a combination of document analysis of policy documents and research located within professional practice. The pathway towards a more sustainable learning society in which seniors play an important role has been met with resistance and has faced several challenges. In addition to analysing achievements, this article investigates these challenges and provides suggestions for greater clarity and integration of learning opportunities for elders in Taiwan. The article concludes that both challenges and successes need acknowledgment. As a major recommendation, in order to meet the demands of a super-aged society, Taiwan can profit from planning and implementing regional centres as sites of learning located conceptually and physically between top-down government-driven directives and more democratic bottom-up community-based initiatives. To be successful, such centres will require substantive training and development and a collective push from the state, civil society members and private enterprise.

KEYWORDS: lifelong learning, active ageing, Active Ageing Learning Program, learning in later life, seniors’ learning, Taiwan’s senior learning movement.

Introduction

This article traces some of the major achievements of a local Taiwanese initiative to provide seniors with greater opportunity to engage in learning in later life, whether for expressive or vocational reasons. The authors review developments which reflect a more systematic societal attempt to move away from a traditional model for learning/education related to paternalism towards an educative stance where older people can become productive members in accord with an active ageing approach.

Since the Taiwanese government’s awareness of the need for older citizens to be active agents in retirement has grown, there has been significant progress made and

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achievements are analysed here. Yet, the path towards a more sustainable learning society in which seniors play an important role has been met with resistance and has faced several challenges. We outline these challenges and provide suggestions for greater clarity and integration of learning opportunities for seniors. We also posit a conclusion that the planning and implementation of regional centers, “half-way houses” between top-down governmental directives via policy, and more (older) citizen bottom-up initiatives can enhance the prospects for older learners to achieve their goals.

As for other East Asian countries, Taiwan has faced considerable increases in the numbers of older people proportionately in the general population as it moves from an “aged society” to a “super-aged society”. While Taiwan shares some characteristics with its close neighbors (*e.g.*, Confucian ideology), its patterns of conceptualising and implementing “Active Ageing Learning” (AAL) – later life learning related to tenets of active ageing – are distinctive.

The term “Active Ageing Learning” is an amalgam of active ageing and lifelong learning. Both ideas are fundamental to understanding what constitutes older adult learning/education in any society. We use the definition for “active ageing” used by the World Health Organization as “optimising individual function and opportunities to participate for all age groups, including older adults” (WHO, 2002: 12). The learning in later life concept relates directly to the concept of lifelong learning (LL). The concept of LL refers to all learning, whether informal or formal (as in institutional settings), that occurs throughout an individual’s life, in any context. At a societal level it entails learning for economic reasons, for personal development, for sustaining a civil society and for inclusion of marginalised groups (Findsen & Formosa eds., 2011). Hence, “Active Ageing Learning” refers to learning, mainly in later life, that encourages active ageing for either expressive or instrumental reasons. “Senior learning” refers to learning undertaken by older members of society (in Taiwan variously identified with ages of 50+ or 65+) linked to the achievement of their personal and social goals. It does not necessarily occur in a structured environment and may be self-directed.

A methodological note

The argumentation for this article is based on a combination of sources. In the first instance, a document analysis of policy at national and local government is a primary feature. Throughout the duration of the Active Ageing Learning Program (AALP) historical records have been maintained by the primary instigator (Hui-Chuan Wei) and regular research (on-going data collection and analysis) has been conducted under the auspices of the Research Center for ageing at the National Chung Cheng University, especially related to programme practices (*e.g.*, instructional methods;

participant feedback). Relevant literature on later life learning from within Taiwan and the international literature has been employed (enhanced by the external author who spent several months in Taiwan as a Visiting Scholar). A resultant co-edited book, *Taiwan's Senior Learning Movement* (Wei & Lin, 2022: 125-137), has been published by Springer in 2022.

The background of senior education developments in Taiwan

The notion of what it means to be “old” is very context specific and can also be interpreted in a framework of changing population dynamics (Phillipson, 1998). Taiwan has moved from a largely agrarian economy to one which has been modernised and industrialised and where the population structure has moved swiftly towards an ageing workforce and society. Yi-Yi Lin and Chin-Shan Huang (2016) report that Taiwan in the mid-twentieth century was a mainly rural and youthful nation with only about 2.5% of Taiwan's population over the age of 65.

Since 2008, people over 65 years old have reached 10% of the total population in Taiwan, and the government began to launch the Active Ageing Learning Program (AALP) across the country during this transition. The concept of “prospective learning”, using education to increase the populace's awareness of what ageing might entail, led Taiwan into a new Active Ageing era. 2018 was the tenth-year anniversary of the establishment of the AALP. at the same time, people over 65 years old had reached 14% of the total population in Taiwan. According to the norms of the World Health Organization (2002), Taiwan has officially entered the “aged society” (7% of the population being 65 years old and above). According to Taiwan's population statistics, it is estimated that by 2025, Taiwan will be a “super-aged society” with 20% of the population being 65 years old and above (National Development Council, 2020).

It took only 25 years from 2013 to 2018 for Taiwan to become an aged society. The Taiwanese government estimates that around 2025, Taiwan will become a super-aged society, meaning there are only a few years left to prepare. Although Taiwan is facing a rapid ageing situation, not many people appreciate the impact of the speed of the aged society on their personal lives. An aged society dramatically affects citizens' life decisions, for example, regarding retirement, financial planning and finding a suitable place to live.

The Taiwanese public generally feels pessimistic about the concept of old age. Negative perceptions of the implications of older age abound and these mostly erroneous assumptions about the impact of ageing on living affect the development of seniors' learning and seniors' service industries as well as personal career design. In addition, the Taiwan Government declared the aged society a “national security issue”

(Hou, 2019; Xie, 2011) based on the notion that the changing population structure, its imbalance in the workforce, threaten competitiveness. President Ma Ying-jeou called for this stance and convened an inter-ministerial meeting to develop counter measures.

The social definition of “old” tends to be equated with negative images such as “disability”, “sickness”, and “being taken care of” (Biggs, 2000). Although Taiwan is about to enter a super-aged society, age discrimination still affects the progress of lifelong learning. The three most frequently mentioned burdens related to old age in Taiwan, identified by both the government and the public, are inadequate support, the need for effective medical assistance and the state of the care system (Hou, 2019; Yang, 2022). The last-mentioned, long-term care has been considered by the government in alarmist language.

Seniors in Taiwan have a relatively traditional concept of retirement. They believe that “retirement” means being old, and they are ready to “leave” and “take a bow” from the workplace, prematurely by Western standards (Short & Harris, 2014). The proportion of Taiwanese who continue to work after the age of 65 is 9.2%, which is relatively low among Asian countries, compared to South Korea (36.3%), Singapore (32.9%), Japan (25.6%), and even compared to the US participation rate (18.9%) (MoL, 2021). Therefore, they have low motivation to participate in employment-related learning.

For Taiwan to face a growing population of seniors, first, it must change the old concept of the past and reinterpret what is old. Reflecting on the definition of “old” and redefining “old” is the first lesson to prepare for entering an aged society. This is also how, in 2008, Taiwan started the Active Ageing Learning Program (Findsen, Wei & Li eds., 2022).

The birth of a new type of senior learning programme

To enable the public to develop lifelong learning habits as soon as possible, the Ministry of Education in 2008 took the age of 55 (10 years before the official senior age of 65) as an appropriate seniors’ learning target. Since 2008, the MoE started setting up Active Ageing Learning Centers (AALC) every year across the country to expand lifelong learning opportunities for older people. By 2008, 104 AALCs had been set up; in 2021, 373 AALCs were established in 368 towns and cities in Taiwan, including 10 Model Learning Centers for Active Senior Citizens and 12 Excellent Centers for Active Senior Citizens (Wei & Li, 2022). The number of people participating in learning has grown from 590,000 to more than 2.36 million, and 3,175 Active Ageing Learning Bases have been developed in villages and communities around Taiwan to offer more than 200,000 hours of courses each year. The intent has been to devolve learning opportunities for elders to localized facilities for ease of access. The courses planned by the AALC are

extensive and diverse, ranging from personal development, locally unique culture, computer technology, intergenerational learning, social service contribution courses, *etc.* Essentially, this curriculum reflects a focus on expressive forms of learning.

To actively guide local governments and AALCs to promote the work of the AALP, the MoE invited the Department of Adult and Continuing Education and the ageing and Education Research Center of National Chung Cheng University to implement the “Head Guidance Group of Active Ageing Learning Program” project and appointed Hui-Chuan Wei as the principal investigator. For the past 13 years, the implementation of the AALP has been based on four concepts:

1. To understand ageing and what it means to be old;
2. To understand the concept and theory of active ageing;
3. To transform the theory of active ageing into action;
4. To design the Active Ageing Lifelong Learning plan.

The promotional strategy includes seven components: management consulting, education and training, curriculum development, the establishment of instructional models, effectiveness evaluation, international conferences, and cross-disciplinary promotion. The implementation includes developing the core programming structure of active ageing, cultivating active ageing volunteers and professionals (including directors, instructors, programme planners), formulating active ageing field visiting indicators, handling annual achievement seminars and constructing international conferences. This strategy and its implementation have been a major task.

In 2014, the MoE won the 6th Government Service Quality Award of the Executive Yuan for the AALP. The AALP won the award because it “creates fruitful results with meager expenses. The results are worthy of recognition, cost-effectiveness is priceless” (Wei & Li, 2014). This positive outcome echoes the underpinning philosophy: education is a necessary condition for Taiwan to best achieve successful outcomes in an aged society.

AALP implementation outcomes

The AALP has been implemented for 14 years. The Head Guidance Group of the AALP provides counseling and assistance to various AALCs and is witness to many touching stories about positive learning, life changes, and seniors’ empowerment. Older people embody active ageing through learning to make multiple products, such as food, handicrafts, paintings, publications, *etc.* The AALCs and Active Ageing Learning communities enacting active ageing are growing like spring blossoms. Next, we summarise five distinctive outcomes of Active Ageing Learning.

(i) *Changing the traditional concept of old age and replacing it with a new view of “active ageing”*

Taiwan has adopted the term “active ageing” (Le Ling) to supplant negative stereotypes of ageing incorporated in phrase such as “the elderly” (Wei & Li, 2022). The meaning of active ageing comes from the Analects of Confucius’s Shu Er chapter. The Master said, “He is simply a man, who in his eager pursuit of knowledge forgets his food, who in the joy of its attainment forgets his sorrows, and who does not perceive that old age is coming on”. This quote illustrates the point that a person has no worries about age due to their enthusiasm for learning. Accordingly, the MoE has officially used Active Ageing Learning from 2008 to replace the traditional Senior Education. This is the concrete realisation of the vision of active ageing with lifelong learning in later life (Wei, 2012).

In the first year of implementation of the AALP (2008) the internet displayed only single digits for the term “active ageing” (Wei, 2012). Then the AALP was implemented. However, in the second year, 1,417,209 hits of related information were found on Yahoo’s Search Engine; 537 videos were found on YouTube (Wei, 2012). This conveys an order of acceptance from the public. In addition, other government ministries plus many NGOs now use “active ageing” in daily parlance.

Over the years, there have been many commercialised products derived from the term “active ageing” such as: “active ageing village”, “active ageing socks”, “active ageing week”, “active ageing university”, “active ageing toys”, “active ageing apartments”, “active ageing clubs”, “active ageing care cooperative”, “active ageing service centres”, *etc.* In 2022, InnoLux (a technology company) established the Active Ageing Development Department. The AALP supported by the MoE has been underway for 14 years and has led Taiwan into a newer longevity society similar to that explained by Atsushi Makino (2022) with respect to neighboring Japan.

(ii) *The AALP as a model of successful cooperation between universities and the government*

The role of universities in helping to develop societies in conjunction with governments has a long history, sometimes acting with ambivalence (Field, Schmidt-Hertha & Waxenegger eds., 2016). In Taiwan, the AALP has created a model of successful cooperation between universities, government, and civil society. When the MoE first started AALP in 2008, it developed it as a “pilot programme” giving it three years. In Taiwan, it is common to implement new government plans using the “pilot or experimental” method. However, many such projects may get cut off at the end of the pilot period or be stopped due to a change in government officials.

It has been fortunate and impressive that the AALP can continue to be implemented under the rotation of political parties. On the one hand, it reinforces the belief that senior

education has become an issue that cannot be ignored, and any political party needs to include it as an essential government policy; on the other hand, this phenomenon also signifies that cooperation between the university and the MoE can create a successful model. While the MoE is responsible for policy planning, universities are responsible for practical strategies, and civil organizations receive guidance from universities on how to implement the AALP.

For 14 years, universities have played a vital role in promoting the AALP. The ageing and Education Research Center of National Chung Cheng University in Taiwan has continued to play the role of a think tank. The counseling team follows the concepts of lifelong learning and active ageing, plans the practice process and implementation steps, and applies a specific training model of adult education. Only by earnestly grasping the lifelong learning imperative and specific practical strategies of enacting “senior education” can universities carry out their social responsibility on behalf of society.

***(iii) The AALP provides a specific learning framework
for the second half of life***

Since 2008, the AALP has changed the traditional senior education concept from teaching what seniors “want” to what seniors “need”. The AALP focuses on active ageing and elders’ well-being through thorough needs assessments. This is why the AALP has been able to engage the public and convince legislators for 14 years.

The Active Ageing Core Course is the curriculum that seniors “need” to learn (Wei, 2015). The AALP course is based on the Needs Hierarchy Theory of Howard McClusky (1974), a father of American senior education. The content is based on the concept of Active Ageing in a lifelong learning context. The purpose of Active Ageing Learning is to expand life energy in older age – to expand seniors’ zest for living. The core programme has been designed to meet the educational needs of seniors. They learn topics aligned with active ageing. Active Aging Core Courses help to solve the challenge of what to learn in the second half of life and prepare citizens for retirement.

The second half of life refers to the years following paid work which may occupy several decades, good health depending. It aligns with western ideas of the third age espoused by Peter Laslett (1989) in which elders can enjoy many years of creativity and leisure. Though arguably a romanticised version of older age, it does better align with the positive aspects of active ageing.

The AALP is based on adult learning theory and is designed using a systematic approach, thus contributing to its longevity. In addition to determining the learning topics (curriculum) of the AALP, the Head Guidance Group of the AALP also establishes the developmental structure of the AALC in Taiwan. The Head Guidance Group publishes handbooks of learning resources and educational training tools, documents

and implements a website, as well as organises annual achievement surveys and research. It is also responsible for professional training, developing evaluation indicators and implementing systematic plans to maximise implementation quality.

(iv) Developing a successful training programme

The successful execution of a plan is related to the effectiveness of executive professionals. The Head Guidance Group has been handling AALP instructor training since 2014. A total of 100 training courses have been held and a total of 2206 instructors have participated in training.

From 2014 to 2022, a total of 1063 Instructors have completed the training, an essential part of the AALP. The MoE began formulating AALP training guidance for AALP professionals in 2017. The Head Guidance Group also participated in developing AALP training guidance and recommended the philosophy and structure of the standard introductory and professional development courses, including practical courses for AALP instructors. In total, the training package consists of 14 courses for AALP instructors with a total of 61 hours of training (MoE, 2020). The AALP instructors' training courses map is shown in Figure 1 below:



Figure 1. The AALP Professional Training Course Map

There are three types of AALP professionals: project managers, instructors (including general instructors and core curriculum instructors), and self-directed learning group leaders. The project manager defers to the leader or administrative management team in charge of the AALC, the general instructor defers to the instructor who teaches interest/hobby courses, and the core course instructor defers to the instructor who teaches active ageing courses. The primary purpose of a self-directed learning group leader is to nurture leaders who can then go to places where there is no AALC to lead active ageing learning activities, requiring 93 hours of training (Wei & Lin, 2022).

The training courses of project management and instructor are divided into two categories. The first category is an *essential subject*, requiring a total of 15 hours and five classes. The second category is a *professional subject* which includes introductory and advanced courses. General instructors are required to undertake a total of 27 hours of essential subjects and introductory courses. In addition to the 27-hour course of essential subjects and introductory courses, the core course instructor must take 34 hours of training in the advanced courses. The general instructor training hours amount to 27 and the core course instructor training to 61. In addition to the essential subject, project managers must also take five professional subjects (18 hours).

(v) Developing a distinctive AALP instructional model

In 2014, the Head Guidance Group of the AALP established the 1-2-3 Instructional Model (Wei, 2016) based on Malcolm Knowles' Adult Learning Theory (Knowles et al., 1984). The 1-2-3 Instructional Model means designing "1" learning objective in each learning unit – designing one key point. The instructors divide each teaching unit into smaller learning key points suitable for participants to learn. This is a micro-learning style of instructional design, which is more in line with the requirements of mobile learning.

"2" presents two different teaching activities according to the key points; instructors can design at least two teaching activities related to content. One of them is an "experience" activity, such as an ice breaker, video, storytelling, disassembly, game, *etc.* The instructors participate in the activities to create a good learning atmosphere consistent with co-operative learning (Knowles et al., 1984; Brookfield, 2006), and the instructors apply stimulating methods to help participants learn the critical point.

In addition to designing experiential activities and stimulating elders' learning motivation, AALP instructors must also provide solid content and design learning to increase the knowledge and/or skills of participants. While it is important that the teachers create a stimulating experience, it is even more important that learners feel that they have really "learned" new knowledge, skills, or fresh attitudes, which can continue to motivate them subsequently (Wei, Chen & Chen, 2017).

The 1-2-3 Instructional Model's "3" represents designing three after-class practical activities or three applications. The three after-class practical activities echo what Knowles promoted: namely, that (older) adult students require that what they have learned can be applied immediately in their daily life and also can solve life problems (Knowles et al., 1984). The "3" of the 1-2-3 Instructional Model is focused on the application of learning to life.

In 2018, the Head Guidance Group of the AALP researched the effectiveness of AALP instructors' applying the 1-2-3 Instructional Model (Wei & Li, 2018). The research supported the claim that the application of teaching strategies from AALP instructors is directly related to learning effectiveness of the participants. The research found that the teaching strategies applied by AALP instructors (including clear and practical teaching content, clear oral expression, appropriate design activities) helped the participants to learn effectively. Criteria for the effectiveness of AALP included the participant wanting to continue to learn; the participant wanting to continue with the same instructor/s class; the content of the instruction being practical; the alignment of instruction to real-life examples in the course (Wei & Li, 2018). Consequently, the 1-2-3 Instructional Model has become a significant feature of training for Taiwan's Active Ageing Learning professionals.

Challenges of senior education in Taiwan

Since 2008, the AALP has continued to provide sustainable adult (55+) lifelong learning and Active Ageing Learning resources, a platform for seniors who want to continue to work, to contribute to society, and to extend themselves personally (Findsen & Formosa eds., 2011). The Head Guidance Group of AALP has applied a theory of adult learning/education, using systematic programme development (Langenbach, 1988), and applying organisational learning strategies to create a platform for the community to respond to lifelong learning in Taiwan's aged society.

Taiwan will become a super-aged society in 2025, with the consequence that 20% of the total population in Taiwan will be over the age of 65. In the past five years, in addition to the MoE, more government departments have begun to provide different learning programmes for the upcoming super-aged society, such as The Ministry of Health and Welfare, Hakka Affairs Council, the Council of Agriculture, the Council of Indigenous People, and others. There are various programmes, such as: the "Cultural Health Station" of the Council of Indigenous People (2015), the Ministry of Health and Welfare's Community Care Base Program (2016), the "Bag-Kung Care Station" Program of the Hakka Affairs Council (2017), and the "Green Care Project for Communities" (2020) of the Executive Yuan Agriculture Committee. Each ministry or council uses

different programme names; however, the implementation is very similar to the Ministry of Education's AALP. The AALP is a pioneer programme, which has developed a complete structure and cultivated a team of AALP instructors and volunteers with a lot of experience and knowledge in Active Ageing Learning. However, these policies that were introduced later were not sufficiently differentiated from that of the AALP, nor was there co-operation with one other; hence, they competed with one other. Hence, confusion among older adults was to be expected.

The government has a variety of community "care" programmes. These programmes are implemented mainly in the community, and most of them are also run by the community's non-profit organisations (NPOs). An organisation may have to run two or three different government projects simultaneously, and the annual budget that it needs could be over one million new Taiwan dollars. However, the rules of different ministries and councils are divergent, such as the hourly fee for instructors. For example, the instructor fee stipulated by the MoE is NT\$400-800 per hour, but for the Ministry of Health and Welfare and others the instructor fee is counted per time, and each time the instructor gets paid between NT\$1000-2000. The instructor's requirements in each project are also inconsistent, affecting the instructors' willingness to engage and ultimately has an impact on the quality of teaching. The multi-competitive situation of various senior learning programmes is not only a challenge faced by the AALP, but also a challenge more generally for Taiwan's senior education.

The first challenge: integrating policies

The Head Guidance Group of the AALP has the belief that education is the most sustainable, effective, and least expensive path to "successful" ageing. However, under considerable bureaucracy as outlined above, different government departments have their own agendas, and it becomes very difficult to integrate them. The project implementation of each ministry and council is mainly based on "activities" developed by a case officer who functions as the plan leader. However, most case officers did not undertake training in senior education design or in teaching methodologies. Civil servants are inherently conservative. Under the bureaucracy, they tend to avoid "innovation" to keep away from unnecessary trouble.

Since 2000, the career uncertainty of civil servants in Taiwan has been higher due to the rotation of political parties. Most civil servants don't want to do more without the instructions of their superiors, so they are reluctant to engage in reform or innovate. This severe and fundamental challenge of conservatism is what Taiwan is facing now in achieving an aged society.

The second challenge: implementing programmes that currently lack systematisation and institutionalisation

In response to an ageing society, the policy proposed by various ministries and councils do not directly state that they are based on “education” or learning theory. The AALP of the MoE has established a thorough structure, developed a systematic curriculum, and designed a teaching model that can be readily applied. Other ministries and councils doing senior-related programmes could modify or replicate the “AALP model” of the MoE, making it easier to implement programmes and be more resource efficient. The budget of the MoE is the lowest among all ministries. Yet, the AALP of the MoE has achieved the most significant effect with the least sufficient funding; it has also shaped suitable curricula, training models, and publications. If Active Ageing Learning was more systematic and institutionalised, for example, through greater standardisation of the implementation of conditions, qualifications, professional development and KPIs, then Active Ageing Learning policies would likely have more of an impact.

Given the retirement era of baby boomers, these retirees tend to have higher quality requirements for their learning, and there are higher expectations for the design of activities, teaching quality and professionalism of the service staff. Without systematic and institutionalised policy design, it is difficult to plan and implement sustainable learning programmes for seniors; and it is impossible to expand resource efficiency and keep the service quality high.

The third challenge: controlling the quality of programmes without a thorough management and evaluation system

Taiwan’s various senior learning programmes are incorporated under a single government irrespective of particular ministries or councils. The problem with the government plan is that it could easily become unsustainable due to changes in the political situation such as in a change of political parties or supervisors. Most government plans are implemented through the community, arguably an admirable sentiment. However, non-profit organisations take government funding, but there is an absence of a strict evaluation and accountability system (for instance, in using KPIs).

In response to the super-aged society, the government in Taiwan has paid more attention to the issue of seniors in an aged by providing many opportunities and subsidies for seniors. Government plans are sometimes operational as “pilot” programmes which provide encouragement to various not-for-profits to engage in the scheme. Nevertheless, poor performers do not readily leave, thus affecting the quality of programme implementation. While the project design relies on the assistance of the NPO, there is often

no systematic plan, no cognisance of (older) adult education, and a paucity of lifelong learning professional training and evaluation. These factors affect the efficiency and quality of the programme implementation and ultimately the rights and interests of seniors for their learning.

The fourth challenge: enhancing the AALP to meet the needs of an increasingly older population

The continuing advance of the Taiwanese nation towards a super-aged society, while not unique among East-Asian countries, is nevertheless important to manage. The AALP has a methodology and practicality that is commonly accepted among citizens; the issue of access has come to the fore in recent developments in urban and rural areas but needs to be sustained in an on-going fashion. One of the strengths of this programmes has been its localised character, inspired by both top-down and bottom-up approaches.

The thorough conceptualisation and implementation of the AALP necessitates the need for professional development of actors in all parts of the system. The quest for high quality provision of instructional and advisory services for the everyday older citizen is at the heart of successful ageing.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, while it is important to meet the challenges ahead for Taiwan in providing on-going access of learning to seniors, it is necessary to acknowledge real achievements in the journey so far. Indeed, the challenges of having a properly integrated policy platform, of greater systematisation of practices throughout the system, of better-quality control (*e.g.*, planning, instructional methods, evaluation) in providing on-going services, of continuing to heighten ready access of learning to seniors, are indeed significant. Yet they should not blind us to successes which may be transferable to other cultural contexts.

Successes of the approach adopted in Taiwan to heighten learning in later life include a social movement towards negating ageism (albeit age discrimination persists), a promising model of collaboration between a government and universities (primarily via the National Chung Cheng University as part of its social responsibility), the implementation of a more needs-based approach to curriculum development, the recognition of the relevance and practice of an effective training programme at multiple levels, and the innovation of the distinctive “1,2,3” instructional model.

In terms of recommendations, if Taiwan’s senior learning programme cannot be integrated, it won’t be easy to continue to innovate and expand its influence. We suggest

that the government can start with small-scale integration experiments, such as setting up regional learning centers for seniors. The functions of these regional centers would be as follows: to establish a regional network connecting various types of AALPs; to assemble active ageing high-quality courses; to collect and analyse a unified collection of Active Ageing Learning and senior activity data; to exhibit Active Ageing Learning achievements and disseminate good practice; to maintain a high quality of active ageing teaching in the region; to provide trained AALP instructors opportunities to discuss issues; to modify/replicate high-quality practices and learning programmes; and to strengthen the high-quality active ageing education service model. Regional center experiments can make the concept of integration across government programmes more concrete and actionable.

The regional centers concept is that of a hub that can link suitable programmes and training to the local context of senior learning. Taking the essential “professional personnel” as an example, through the experiment of a regional center, it is possible to develop an integrated plan for the training and employment of Active Ageing Learning educational talents. The hub could set up training courses to cultivate AALP leaders with executive teams and establish systematic mechanisms, including human resource management procedures such as recruitment, selection, training, appointment, evaluation and so on. It can effectively employ trained people with expertise to cultivate professionals for senior learning and importantly, to meet the Ministry of Labor’s law on employment for middle-aged and senior citizens enacted in 2020. This special decree encourages middle-aged and senior citizens to continue to work or begin a new employment trajectory. The AALP has trained more than 3,000 people and it needs to develop a fairer and more sustainable employment system.

In response to the rapid arrival of the aged society, many retired seniors want more diversified learning programmes; there is an expectation for innovation and a higher quality of learning programmes. Senior education cannot rely entirely on government funding to meet the needs of diverse senior citizens; the requirements for innovation and quality are broader and higher. Accordingly, the investment of “enterprise” resources of the private sector will be needed in the future. When co-writing this article, Hui-Chuan Wei had accepted invitations from two companies (one from a traditional industry and another for a technology company) to provide courses on “Preparation for Active Ageing” for their employees. The technology company has recently established the first Active Ageing Development Department in Taiwan. It hopes to help retired employees understand active ageing and the new concept of older age. The company cares about its employees, not just in regard to their professional skills, but also in how to help them better prepare for the “active ageing” stage post retirement.

Last year, the Taiwan Toy and Children's Article Manufacturers Association asked Hui-Chuan Wei to help them to understand the AALP, in the hope to further transform children's toys, as appropriate, into senior learning aids. This year is the second year of this co-operation with the association. More manufacturers are interested in providing their products for seniors to try. Industry representatives hope older adult educators can help them cultivate Active Ageing Learning professionals and promote the demand for private enterprise, in conjunction with the AALP, to benefit Taiwan's move towards an aged society. Educators must continue to encourage and embed the active ageing learning concept, to challenge everyone's views on what constitutes old age, and to awaken people's awareness of future learning and encore careers (Short & Harris eds., 2014). The AALP connecting to new enterprises, together with governmental support and volunteerism from members of the civil society, can better enhance the achievement of a sustainable super-aged society.

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