

Active Ageing Learning Market: Enabling People as the Sustainable Resources for the Society

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Abstract:

There are a total of 12 districts in Taipei City, Taiwan. Senior Active Learning Centers are established for the respective districts, and 6 of which are organized by Taipei Public Library.

Among these establishments, the Senior Active Learning Demonstration Center of Daan has been promoting the Active Ageing Learning Market with reference to the spirit of the SDGs since 2022. With the civic participation via i-Voting and the philosophy of self-directed learning combined, it put the participants back in the driving seat for learning.

The program was inspired by the idea of crowdfunding platform. First, the active senior readers propose their thoughts and wishes for courses. After discussions and voting, the courses that pass the threshold of second will then have resources matched by the Center for course opening. Also, participants are empowered as lecturers or teaching assistants to further give back to the society.

The program not just promotes older workforce reutilization, drawing retired individuals to serve as lecturers or teaching assistants, but also keeps tabs on the post-curriculum development of participants and invites them to be the brand ambassadors to the Center following the concept of brand management, so as to attract more people to the community of lifelong learning.

Keywords: Senior Active Learning Centers, i-Voting, reutilization, lifelong learning, brand management

1. Preface

There are 1 Main Library as well as 54 branches and neighbourhood reading rooms of Taipei Public Library (TPL) at present, located across the districts of Taipei City to serve the citizenry at large. In response to the change in time and the evolution of information technology, we set up intelligent libraries and automatic book lending stations at traffic hubs

such as train stations and MRT stations to offer more convenient services. There are currently 8 intelligent libraries, 9 automatic book lending stations, and 5 circulation workstations.

Recently, various remote services have also been made available to allow readers to access the online resources procured by TPL, expand service networks, and improve resource utilization. Even for readers outside of Taipei City and without a library card, through the online library card application service, they can access the databases and e-books procured by TPL as well, which set a new landmark for the epoch of services.

With respect to service innovation, TPL was the first to offer book borrowing/returning service via convenience stores in order to meet the needs of readers in book borrowing/returning via convenience stores that open 24/7. Also, the app functions are improved on an ongoing basis. The RFID chip installation is projected to complete by this year. Individuals shall be able to borrow books using their mobile phones directly at the library facilities without going to the circulation counter for service.

In addition, Read Well, Think Well, the first reading podcast of the public library in Taiwan, was launched in 2021. The program of each season is presented in the concept of digital curating. With a readership of over 30,000 to date, it has become a quality podcast top of the class on sharing platforms.

With its ample library resources and convenient services, TPL provides a quality and comfortable reading environment for citizens, serving its readership across children, adolescents, adults, and senior citizens.

In particular, in response to the advent of an aging society, the senior population has gradually become a focus for services at TPL.

According to our Annual published in 2022, the senior population aged 55 and over contributed to 21.93% of the total books borrowed of the year, only preceded by the mature adults aged between 35 and 54. In line with the medical advancement, the senior population shall be on the rise. It was the very purpose for the Ministry of Education to establish the Senior Active Learning Centers.

2. Status of Senior Active Learning Centers

Active learning for the elderly is one of the crucial policies to realize lifelong learning. The purpose is to create a local learning environment that is safe, happy, and healthy. Starting from 2018, the Ministry of Education has been working with local governments. Together with local organizations and civil society organizations, Senior Active Learning Centers have been established across villages, townships, and municipalities, dedicated to the services of population aged 55 and over. These facilities have been in service for 15 years with the scale expanded continuously.

Taipei Public Library organizes and manages 6 Senior Active Learning Centers in Taipei City, including the Centers in the Daan District (Demonstration Center), Datung District, Songshan District, Shilin District, Wenshan District, and Neihu District. Upholding the mandate of social education promotion of public libraries, the Centers under TPL has been accumulating experiences of services and energy of promotional activities since their

establishment, endeavouring to create a learning environment that is friendly and convenient to the elderly in the city.

According to the statistics as of the end of 2022, there have been a total of 15,617 senior active participants at TPL, in which female accounted for the majority by approximately 80%.

The Senior Active Learning Centers regularly organize courses for two seasons each year, in spring (March to June) and autumn (September to December), respectively. During the summer vacation in July to August, lectures are organized from time to time as well. Also, in the 4th week of August each year, special activities for Grandparents Day will be organized. In recent years, the Human Library with the collection of life experiences of the senior active participants is available. Meanwhile, under the curatorial theme of Junior-Senior Co-learning, the Centers continue to deliver cross-generational experience exchange.

The contents of the senior active curriculum in each season cater to local characteristics and the features of respective Centers. The means of course delivery include thematic courses, touring lectures, self-directed learning groups, and so on.

To gain insight into the participants' needs and the curriculum effectiveness, aside from the survey via questionnaire at the end of curriculum each season by the respective Centers, TPL distributed a questionnaire in line with the gender equality policy of the city in 2021 to probe into the participant composition and activity engagement. With the quantitative analysis of statistics and the first-line observation on site combined, it aimed to render policy recommendations in conformity with the participants' needs.

The analysis results indicated that the males preferred self-directed learning group with a stable participant structure. Now that the self-directed groups were organizations established by, with the speakers invited by as well as the contents and directions for learning determined through the meeting of, the participants on a voluntary basis, the groups might be similar to the work environments of males prior to retirement, which made them more easily adaptable.

Nevertheless, courses accounted for a higher share in the learning formats opted by females. Such type of activities had a variable participant composition. New groups would be formed for each course. It might be attributable to the fact that females are more capable of handling transitory interpersonal relationship.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many courses went online. The male participants demonstrated an increased inclination for taking courses. The theory is that online courses can be taken at home by themselves, without the need for going out, which lowered the stress arising from interaction with strangers. Hence, it corresponds to the results.

In addition, most of the participants had had the idea about lifelong learning prior to enrolling in the Centers. They were also equipped with basic information inquiry capability. Their needs evolved as well from killing time or passive selection of course contents to the expectation to engage in curriculum design and the search for the goal for the next chapter of their life via learning.

The policy recommendation is rendered from the research results. To facilitate the participant engagement, the Senior Active Learning Centers are to move beyond a passive provider of course information and contents to an enabler for participants to see why they need to engage in active ageing activities and what they may gain from senior active learning and to transform the marketing, taking a more active role instead.

Meanwhile, the adjustment to the course format could also benefit the males in terms of the development of interpersonal relationship.

Numerous senior males cease to develop their interpersonal relationship after retirement. Their social connections are turned into spouse- or children-oriented, which result in negative impacts to family harmony.

The self-directed learning groups at the Senior Active Learning Centers can play an alternative social role, allowing senior males to reintegrate themselves into the society. The Senior Active Learning Centers may work to support the curriculum transformation. When the courses are deepened to a certain degree, the participants are encouraged to create self-directed learning groups and invite more of their friends and families to form one big family socially.

In a nutshell, the Senior Active Learning Centers are different from they used to be in terms of transformation for breakthroughs. We introduced the learner-centered approach. The senior active participants determine the contents for learning. Also, the participants are assisted in creating social values and redefining themselves, which is precisely the core idea of the Active Ageing Learning Market.

3. Execution Results of the Active Ageing Learning Market

(1) Overview

The Active Ageing Learning Market introduced the concept of knowledge exchange, and the learning content is determined with learners at the core. The project was formerly Active Ageing Wishing Well, in which participants could propose their ideas and needs via social media prior to the start of curriculum each season, and then the Center would match the appropriate lecturers.

However, the approach of the Wishing Well was merely to propose ideas, without the core concepts and targets of courses. Besides, there was insufficient participant engagement and a lack of incentive for encouragement.

The Senior Active Learning Center referred to the i-Voting policy participation mechanism.

The so-called i-Voting requires citizens, in proposing policy recommendations, to specify their core values and ideas, followed by passing the minimum threshold of votes via an open voting mechanism so as to enter the next phase of discussion.

The Active Ageing Learning Market adopts the same concept. Aside from providing course title and thematic direction, participants are required to express their thoughts via a proposition to win the support from other participants.

The approach is distinctive from the traditional curriculum, for which the Centers open courses for participants to passively select the ones to their liking or of their interest. Hence, participants with a clear learning motive and with notion of self-realization can have a stage to shine.

Meanwhile, participants can see how to write and market a teaching plan through proposal. Therefore, they have begun their learning right from this stage.

(2) Execution

The Active Ageing Learning Market went for the first trial in May 2022. The Senior Active Learning Centers created a group over the messaging app, LINE, to invite participants into the group. A total of 12 proposals were received in the end.

The participants who were willing to submit proposals were required to present their propositions and descriptions in a specified period before a uniform voting. The courses with the highest and the second highest votes had the priority to matchmaking for appropriate lecturers.

Nonetheless, such method allowed the participants to see the votes for individual proposals during the voting process. Therefore, the votes concentrated more on the few proposals with higher votes, which affected the impartiality and referentiality of the result.

To remedy the situation, the Senior Active Learning Centers established a dedicated website using Google Site for the second time. The participants sent their proposals to the official mailbox for review before uploading and update altogether.

In light of the insufficient clarity in the description of course content from the participants in the first proposal call, the Centers provided template files additionally for reference. The time of proposal call fell in September 2022. A total of 16 proposals were received in the end, with a growth of 33.33% compared to the first proposal call.

(3) Reference Template

1. Proposal Title: Elegant Outfits for Older Adults

Proposal Description:

After retirement, I have more free time. I want to learn constantly and do things I like to lead a fulfilling life in later years. An outfit speaks to one's personality. I hope that we have a professional to teach us how to dress and be an elegant old lady.

In the street of Japan, we can find ladies in older age but in an elegant outfit. I want to make a change through learning, transforming myself to be a person with more confidence.

2. Proposal Title: Hard Pen Calligraphy (Ballpoint Pen)

Proposal Description:

I have occasions for writing in daily life more or less, but often find my writing poor. I want to have a teacher to teach us to write better.

I began to work early on in my life. I had no chance to learn when I was young. Now that I have time to learn, I want to make up for some regrets. I often had to go some places to fill up the forms. Yet, due to the poor writing, I had no self-confidence and found it troublesome. I hope I can write better, so I will not feel embarrassed and have someone in my family to help with writing instead from time to time.

4. Conclusion

After interviews with the participants with successful proposals, we found these individuals had one thing in common, which is a high degree of course engagement with an active attitude. They were not merely hoping to take courses they like, but also would love to share their knowledge.

At the start of the project, we had a clear goal, which was not just to allow participants to engage in curriculum proposal but also to cultivate the participants with an interest in becoming teaching assistants to courses. Through the hands-on practice from the formulation to execution of courses, their competences in proposition writing and expression were cultivated.

The goal for the third phase is to empower these participants into lecturers. Through the approach of self-directed learning groups, we facilitate proactive connection and even invite them to serve as the core lecturers at the Senior Active Learning Centers. The second workplace is established via professional certification and trainings, so that retirement is merely an end of a phase, not the end of life.

Meanwhile, we regard these proposers as brand ambassadors to the Center. Their image of proactive engagement is employed as the highlight in promotion, so that learners can have a prospect and vision for the future even before enrolling into the Center. The mentoring measure is introduced via the seniority system, so that the newly-enrolled participants will not be at a loss.

As we are advancing toward an ageing society, enabling senior active learners to create social values makes the latest topic for the Senior Active Learning Center. Especially today, when the notion of lifelong learning has become quite popular, the Center needs to make a change to its role to be more active. Transforming from an information provider into a leader, the Center accompanies these learners into their second or even the third chapter of life, thereby turning self-fulfillment into a core value.

The Active Ageing Learning Market shall continue on this year. Moving forward, we aim for the existing senior active lecturers to gain insight into their course status via countersignatures to proposal. Also, we endeavour to normalize the operations of the Center through the idea of user charge, so as to lift the shackles on the course content due to the limit of subsidy.

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