

Development of Holistic Creative Learning Skills for Elderly People in Rural Area of Thailand: Career Dimension

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Abstract – Thailand is an aging society because the elderly population is increasing rapidly and the elderly, especially those living in rural areas, still have insufficient income and learning skills for their careers. They need care and learning skills in today's rapidly changing society. This article presents the results of the study on the situation of the elderly people's learning in rural Thailand concerning their careers, which are an aspect of the study of the elderly on the aspects of physical health, mental health, socio-culture, and career. As a result of this study, the researchers developed the SPACE OF Happiness Model for improving learning skills in elderly people living in rural areas.

Keywords: Career of Elderly People/ Creative Learning Skills/ Rural Area of Thailand

1. Introduction

Since the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001) until the 11th Plan (2012 – 2016), Thailand has focused on human resource development in all age groups, particularly the elderly. The public awareness of this group's importance was due to its increasing growth rate and the overall aging of the Thai society. In 2007, there were 6.8 million elderly people in Thailand, and will grow 20% by 2025. This is consistent with the data of the National Economic and Social Development Committee, indicating that the aging population in the world will increase by 81.9 million people; and the aging society will have an effect on development across the country (Office of National Economic and Social Development, 2011)

In Thailand, the results of previous studies showed that the preparation of the elderly would be in four main aspects: health, society and culture, conservation, and learning, which was the most needed among the elderly. Moreover, most of the elderly needed life-long education when they were 60-64 years old by learning from local wisdom in short-course training, and they wanted an organization to promote the management of their life-long learning. Previous studies also showed that the elderly were doing activities that generated small amounts of income in their free time, such as making and selling sweets (Archanya Ratanaubol, 2009; Department of Health, Activities for Health Promotion and Seniors Network, 2008). Additionally, the interview at the early stage of the study with three elderly in Nakhon Pathom province who had different careers and educational levels found that two of them had activities that generated income; but the other did not have such activities. The three elderly reported that they used learning from their own preferences from the various media such as internet, radio, television, newspaper and magazines, etc.

Besides, the 2nd National Development Plan for the Elderly (2002-2021) determined five major strategies: 1) the preparation of the population to ensure high quality of life among the elderly, 2) the promotion of the elderly, 3) the system of social protection for the elderly, 4) the management for work development and 5) the processing and cognitive development of the elderly. All these five strategies had their action plans that covered income guarantee, education and life-long learning of the elderly, raising awareness to realize the value and dignity of the elderly, promotion of health knowledge, prevention and self-care, promotion of work and earnings, supporting the potential elderly to enter services and networks, the management for elderly development, etc. (Seniors Coordinating Board of the Office of the Prime Minister, 2002). In addition to these factors, the context of a changing society is influenced by the fact that Thailand is a member of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and member countries set guidelines for the economic, social and political development in the ASEAN Community (Office of Policy and Planning, 2011; Office of the Education Council, 2011; Association of South East Asian Nations, 2012). These factors would also affect the elderly population in Thailand.

When the need for development of the elderly to meet changes in the present and near future society was taken into consideration, it showed the elderly, particularly in the remote areas, received less opportunity to exchange knowledge than those in urban society. One major problem of the elderly was insufficient income for their living.

They had to depend on public welfare and needed to find more income by having a career they could manage. Moreover, the elderly could do daily activities with a group of other elderly in the community. They would have good physical and mental health, a supportive community and could supplement their family's economy. Additionally, support for the elderly to learn useful skills did not only benefit their career, but also supported their creation of new products learning from experience and application of local wisdom in career and living. Thus, research on knowledge of the elderly was necessary in order to determine policy of the elderly development in the future and be able to support them to live happily in the changing society.

This research aimed to 1) study learning situations in careers of the elderly, 2) develop a model of creative learning skills for careers of the elderly in rural Thailand and 3) find guidelines for the development of holistic creative learning skills for careers of the elderly in rural Thailand.

2. Literature Review

This research draws upon the concepts of adult learning stated by Knowles (1980) that adults would learn anything that was life-centred, so the management of learning activities had to apply authentic situations as learning content. The concept of creative learning led to providing the learners various alternatives according to their interest in different environments (Piaget, 1972: 1-12). The concept of sustainability provided an integrated and balanced set of activities that met the needs of the community, encouraging awareness building, appreciation, community participation with concern for the environment, and a focus on self-reliance (Kua Wongboonsin, 1997; Community Development, 2002; Preecha Piampongsan, 2006). The concept of creative economy, which is based on knowledge, education, creativity, intellectual property linked to cultural capital, the society's accumulation of knowledge, technology and innovations, and key mechanisms in the distribution of income (Patpong Intarakamnerd, 2010: 11; Hawkins, 2001; Arkom Termpitayapaisit, 2010; Office of National Economic and Social Development, 2009). The intended outcomes of the study were influenced greatly by the concept of efficiency economy, which is based on the principles of moderation, reason, good preparedness based on knowledge and virtues (Sumet Tantiwechakul, 2006; Udomporn Amorntham, 2006; Office of National Economic and Social Development, 2007). The study also focused on the concept of community economy, with important characteristics of the family as a productive unit, contributions from all family members and their importance, clear definitions of production, the production and allocation of benefits according to the ability and expertise that were passed from generation to generation as the community's capital (Sukhothai Thammathirat, 2014; Sirina Jitjaras, 2012: 19). Finally, the concept of happiness used in the study was defined as: positive feelings, satisfaction, pride, self-appreciation, and the ability to exist well in society (Royal Academy, 1999; Diener, 2010b).

3. The Methodology

The research and development (R&D) approach was used in this study, which had the following steps:

Step 1 (R₁) was a review of related literature and summarisation of the knowledge about learning for career of the elderly in Thai rural areas. Information was collected by use of a field survey questionnaire. Additionally, a field study in two regions was conducted with interviews, questionnaires and group discussion.

Step 2 (D₁) was the development of a model of creative learning skills for careers of the elderly developed by the researchers, based on the findings from step 1. Then, the model was evaluated and approved by five experts. Next, the group discussion with the community was organised in order to check and improve the model.

Step 3 (R₂) was the implementation of the model of holistic creative learning for career with the elderly in the study area. From this, the researchers determined the career activities that were common needs of the community. The researchers worked with the community to plan and engage in learning and doing career activities together.

Step 4 (D₂) was an evaluation and development of the model of creative learning for career activities of the elderly through the use of a questionnaire. Guidelines for the model improvement were discussed with academics, community representatives and elderly people in community.

The study areas included all rural parts of Thailand. The samples of the study were 1) 380 members of the elderly in Thai rural communities (the sample size was determined by Krejcie and Morgan's table (1970: 607-610); 2) the elderly living in four communities joined in-depth studies conducted in (1) Ban Mae Rai in Mae Rai sub-district, Mae Chan district and Hua-Ngom sub-district in Parn district, Chiang Rai province, (2) Ban Kang Pla in Chaiyapruak sub-district, Muang district, Loei, (3) Ban Kao Hua Cheen in Huay Yang Toan sub-district, Park-Tor district, Ratchaburi province and, (4) Vichit sub-district in Muang district, Phuket province. The data was collected by field study, interview and documentary analysis. Then a model of creative learning skills for career activities of the elderly in Thai rural areas was developed and implemented. For the implementation group, sixty samples were selected from the elderly in two areas, thirty from each area, to use the model of the development of creative learning skills for career. The data was collected through focus group discussions, questionnaires and interviews. Representatives of the elderly, such as, chairs of the elderly clubs, community leaders, chief executives of the districts, presidents of community groups, directors of health promotion hospitals in sub-districts, representatives of the Office of Provincial Social Development and Human Security and two academics in each area (altogether twelve and fourteen people in the two areas) joined the focus group discussion at the final stage of the research. The period of data collection was during February - October 2014. The collected data was analyzed by frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, standard deviation and content analysis.

4. Results

The results of the study are as follows:

4.1 Learning situations of the elderly in the Thai rural areas showed that they participated in groups according to the group's interests and needs, increasing happiness with activities in handicrafts and agriculture. Happiness could be increased

agriculturally based on the ideas of sufficiency economy, namely, raising chickens for eggs, planting organic crops, producing adequate food and necessities for consumption and supplies in the households (e.g. processing medicinal herbs and desserts), producing supplies for household use (e.g. cloth weaving or basket weaving) production for entertainment (e.g. making coins for charity throwing). All these activities were created from local knowledge. For learning skills of the Thai rural elderly, the study showed that they learned from the local people, often in groups. In terms of learning methods, the elderly mostly learned from doing, observation, remembering and practice, whether learning from local experts or their own ancestors. Other channels of learning were from radio, television media and the internet.



Picture 1: Basket weaving in the North of Thailand



Picture 2: Agricultural activities of the elderly in the North of Thailand

4.2 Models of the development of creative learning skills for career of the elderly in Thai rural areas were developed. The SPACE of Happiness Model was created with eight factors: 1) (S)ustainability, 2) (P)articipation of community, 3) (A)ppropriate planning, 4) (C)reativity, 5) (E)conomy, 6) (O)ppportunity, 7) (F)riendship, and 8) (H)appiness. The factors of success were: 1) leaders with insight and wisdom, 2) self-reliance, 3) happiness adherence, 4) appreciation of the value and benefit of one's work. The steps of the holistic creative learning skills for career of the elderly were composed of 1) organising groups and setting goals, 2) planning activities and procedures, 3) learning and understanding, 4) practicing creative activities of the career, and 5) evaluation and making suggestions on guidelines for career development and building career networks. The results of the appropriateness of the SPACE OF Happiness Model and the picture of the model are shown in the table and figure below.

Table 1 The evaluation of the model of creative learning for career of the elderly in rural Thailand (SPACE OF Happiness Model) by the five experts.

No	Factors	\bar{X}	S.D.	Appropriateness Level
1.	Sustainability	4.40	0.31	high
2.	Participation of Community	4.40	0.52	high
3.	Appropriate Planning	4.45	0.34	high
4.	Creativity	4.45	0.34	high
5.	Economy	4.80	0.11	highest
6.	Opportunity	4.65	0.00	highest
7.	Friendship	4.30	0.25	high
8.	Happiness	4.50	0.39	highest
	Total	4.48	0.36	high

From Table 1, the evaluation of the model of creative learning for career of the elderly in rural Thailand “SPACE OF Happiness” by experts showed a high level of appropriateness of the model $\bar{X} = 4.48$. When the appropriateness was considered individually, the findings showed three factors at the high levels, namely Economy,

Opportunity, and Happiness) $\bar{X} = 4.80, 4.65, 4.50$ respectively). When the model was evaluated by related people in the rural areas where it was applied, the result was also agreed to be at a high level.

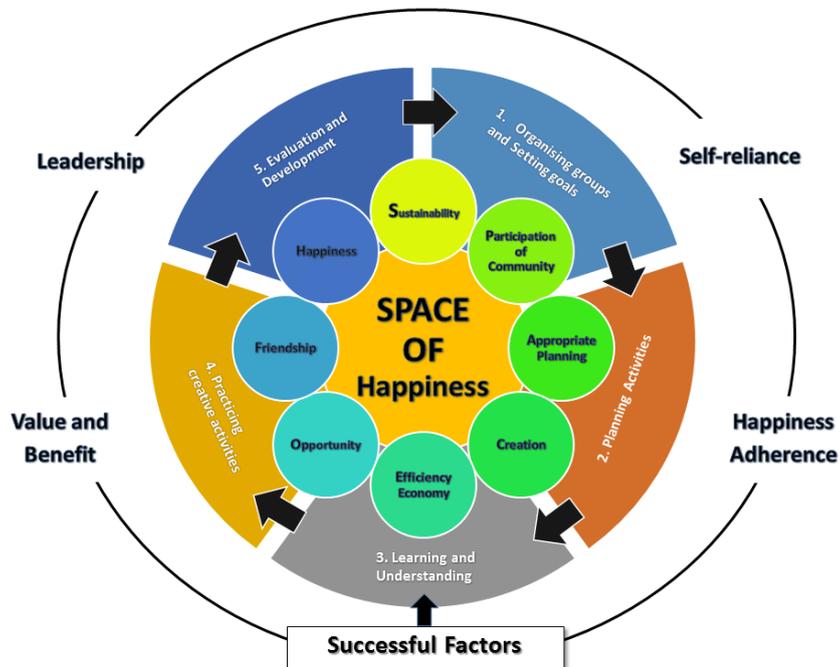


Figure 1: SPACE OF Happiness Model

4.3 Guidelines for the development of holistic creative learning skills for career of the elderly in Thai rural areas were: produce different products, add more value to the products through designing the products to meet the customers' needs, develop the products through local wisdom and develop more effective public relations and distribution channels.

5. Summary and Discussion

5.1 The results of the study of creative learning skills for career of the elderly in rural Thailand revealed that they joined groups of their interests and needs in a manner that was consistent with the concepts of adult learning. Their careers had to depend on the principle of giving opportunities and Knowles' concept of organising activities for adults (Knowles, 1980), in which he stated that activities for elderly people should meet their readiness and address their needs. Also, their joining in a career group of interest agreed with Knowles' concept of individual difference. Allowing group members to pick groups based on their interest led to greater group cohesion and performance. For example, the elderly in Ban Ang Hin, Sampraya sub-district, Chiam district, Petchburi province made a crispy snack in the dessert group and propagated herbal mango-lemon trees in the agricultural group. They also made products for making merits and for souvenirs, such as happy coins or distributing

coins. During the creative learning of the elderly at Ban Muang Kam in Muang Kam sub-district, Parn district, Chiang Rai province, they could choose to join an activity group of their interest and could exchange their learning within the group, which was both educational and fun for the group members. These examples were consistent with the principle of work and career stated by the Center for Preference Education Promotion (2014: 1-3) that a factor of career success was whether or not the learner has aptitude and interest in that career. Happiness was important to everyone and could cause sustainable development on the participation basis (Royal Academy, 1999; Diener, 2010b; Krairit Narukhatpichai, 2014; Sirindhon Sae Chua, 2010). The elderly had holistic learning development in both physical aspect, from movement during work, and mental aspect from talking with the group and doing entertaining activities. They could do the career using local wisdom that showed their culture and reduced expenses, thus increasing profitability.

The result of the study that showed the career of the elderly in the rural area of Thailand was created from their knowledge and the community. The works that they made were produced for their own use, and the rest would be sold to get income for themselves and their families. This result was consistent with the King's philosophy of sufficiency economy which was based on sufficiency, having enough, and the concept of living in a way that was sufficient in the context of family, society, and community (Diener, 2010a: 34-43; Somchai Sakdawekeyisorn, 2001; Krairit Narukhatpichai, 2014; Sirindhon Sae Chua, 2010: 21). These concepts could help the elderly live happily and have sustainable happiness.

The results also agreed with the concept of community economy, which Sirina Jitjaras (2012: 19) described as production based on the ability and expertise of the elderly transferred from their ancestors. There was an economic drive shared among the people in the community. This was seen most clearly in the cases of the knowledge for making desserts at Ban Ang Hin, and basketwork at Ban Muang Kam, etc. Traditional knowledge was transferred, learned, and used to develop some indigenous products to incorporate new ideas. This practice was consistent with the concept of creative economy, which was defined by the Office of National Economic and Social Development as an economy based on creative thinking that facilitates job and income creation which could be transferred from the old generation to the new ones (Patpong Intarakamnerd, 2010: 11; Hawkins, 2001; Arkom Termpitayapaisit, 2010; Office of National Economic and Social Development, 2009).

With regards to learning about career skills that the elderly in the rural areas of Thailand, it was clear that the sample learned from their local wisdom, joined with others to learn together from the local resources or joined with others to create career groups in their community. Example of this was included elderly groups making dessert, basketwork, and agricultural products. The method most of the elderly learned was based on previous experiences; secondly, they learned from their own observation, memorization and doing trial and error; thirdly, they learned from some experts and resource people, by learning together, discussion, and making decisions to choose the career of their choice, doing experimental work and then actual work. For example, when they produced products based on their available local wisdom, the elderly worked and found guidelines for the career together, discussed to exchange their opinions to develop and create new careers in their group, learned to do some

new careers together, exchanged what they learned and transferred it to their children. Their learning channels could be through radio, television, news broadcasts, and the Internet. The factors affecting their positive learning were the need of the elderly to reduce expenditure and make more income for the family, their need to have a group they could talk to, their need to have amusement, and the need to develop themselves in physical, mental, social, and cultural aspects, including career.

The positive factors for production included: having abundant and sufficient raw material for production, affordable costs of management, having groups for production in the community, setting groups supported by the elderly club of the sub-district authority organization, selling the products, and income earning.

The result of the career skills learning methods and channels of the career learning of the elderly agreed with the concept of the 21st century (Worapot Wongkitrungrueng & Atip Jittaruek, 2011; Surasak Pahe, 2013) that required learning environment where learners could learn from real practice in the context, with an appropriate learning system, as well as an opportunity to access technological media which agreed with the concept of 4 C's learning skills, namely critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity.

5.2 The model of creative learning skills in career of the elderly in the rural area of Thailand created by the authors was called the SPACE of Happiness Model, which was composed of eight factors, namely, 1) (S)ustainability, 2) (P)articipation of community, 3) (A)ppropriate planning, 4) (C)reativity, 5) (E)conomy, 6) (O)ppportunity, 7) (F)riendship, and 8) (H)appiness. The factors of success were: 1) leaders with insight and wisdom, 2) self-reliance, 3) happiness adherence, 4) appreciation of the value and benefit of one's work. The steps of the holistic creative learning skills for career of the elderly were composed of 1) organising groups and setting goals, 2) planning activities and procedures, 3) learning and understanding, 4) practicing creative activities of the career, and 5) evaluation and making suggestions on guidelines for career development and building career networks. The SPACE of Happiness model was consistent with the concepts of some key theories, namely adult learning (10), career work and happiness in work (Diener, 2010a: 34-43; Somchai Sakdawekeyisorn, 2001; Kraisit Narukhatpichai, 2014; Sirindhon Sae Chua, 2010: 21; Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education, 2008: 1-3). The work involved was based on local wisdom and the concept of sufficient economy, management and benefit allocation based on the community economy which required the participation of the people in the community in all the steps of the economic activities (Sirina Jitjaras, 2012: 19). Moreover, the acquisition of the model of creative learning skills in career was also consistent with the concept of a model development which showed the systematic relationship among the concepts (Keeves, 1988). If the elderly applied the model to develop their career learning skills, they could create jobs and income for themselves, their families, the community and society, and could transfer the skills to the next generation to encourage sustainable development. All of those factors were consistent with the principle of sustainable development and focused mainly on human value (Kua Wongboonsin, 1997; Preecha Piampongsan, 2006; Amornwich Nakonthap, 2008).

5.3 The major guidelines for creative and holistic learning skills in career development of the elderly in the rural areas of Thailand were more products from various careers, added value to creative production responding to the customers' and tourists' needs, expression of the local wisdom, more public relations and channels for selling the products, more supports from the public sector, and creating data bases of the careers of the elderly which could sustainably develop their creative and holistic learning skills. These findings agreed with the concept of creative economy based on creative thinking in careers that created jobs and income for the elderly, which could be transferred from one generation to another (Hawkins, 2001; Arkom Termpitayapaisit, 2010; Office of National Economic and Social Development, 2009).

The result of the guidelines for developing creative and holistic learning skills of the elderly indicated that the career groups of the elderly should be supported by the public sector and related people. This was agreed with the finding of the study that methods of the elderly mostly came from asking for participation from all related sectors in the area, but the level of participation in each project differed. Furthermore, the result was consistent with the point that the production of the career groups was focused on making a better life for the elderly concerning their physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects. It also agreed with the study of Nongnuch Sundhonchawakan (2009) that the guidelines and measurements motivating the elderly to have career opportunity were supporting them to do their previous jobs, and providing training to develop their working skills. The results also agreed with the study of Nipapan Ngarmwitayapong (2012) concerning the promotion of appropriate careers for the elderly that should be suitable for basic business factors and should find cooperation to develop their careers. The result found joining career groups of the elderly, learning together and doing activities together did not only create jobs, income, society, and promote good physical and mental health; it also promoted careers from the local wisdom, transferred their own wisdom and culture to their groups which was the development of holistic learning of the elderly. It was consistent with the study results of the Center of Academic Network for Observation and Research on Community Happiness (Center of Academic Networks for Observation and Research. (2008: 1-2) that found three prior factors that helped create happiness in work of the elderly, security, advance, and relation with colleagues.

Thus, the findings of this study, in particular the Space of Happiness Model for the elderly composed of eight elements, four conditions for success, and five steps of working could probably be an effective model of the development of creative learning skills for career. The elderly in the rural area of Thailand could apply to groups joining, learning a career, and developing creative learning skills. They could create products from new careers, have a method to transfer the career knowledge to the next generation, create jobs and income, and strengthen the community that caused sustainable development in economy, society, and culture.

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