

# The Scenario of the University of the Third Age Models for Lifelong Learning of the Thai Aging Groups

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## ABSTRACT

This research is a qualitative research study, using future study technique. The purposes were to (1) analyze and synthesize the principles and concepts of the lifelong learning organization for the aging groups both in Thailand and foreign countries; (2) study various perspectives of the experts in the fields about the feasible scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups and strategic forming for the practical implementation; and (3) propose the scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups, as well as presenting the implementation strategies of the developed models. The analysis and synthesis' results about concepts and implementation of the University of the Third Ages showed there were two main principles in organizing lifelong learning for the aging groups: formal University-based Model and flexible Self-Help Model involving the collaboration and participation from learning networks.

The scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups comprised of four implementation models: short course programs, schools for seniors, informal learning activities, and visual classrooms (or vU3A). The University of the Third Age aims to provide learning activities for enhancing senior citizens in different lives' dimensions. There were four implementation strategies, 1) to promote the lifelong learning activities for senior citizens in terms of university short course programs; 2) to promote the lifelong learning activities for senior citizens in terms of schools for seniors; 3) to promote the lifelong learning activities for senior citizens in terms of informal learning; and 4) to promote the lifelong learning activities for senior citizens in terms of visual classrooms or online-learning programs. Finally, the scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups was appropriate, effective, possible for the implementation; relevant to the contexts, useful and sustainable.

**Keywords:** the university of the third age, lifelong learning, Thai aging

## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพนี้ ประยุกต์แนวคิดอนาคตศึกษาด้วยเทคนิคการวิจัยอนาคต มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ (1) วิเคราะห์และสังเคราะห์หลักการ แนวคิดเกี่ยวกับ

การจัดการศึกษาตลอดชีวิตสำหรับผู้สูงอายุในลักษณะมหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สามทั้งในและต่างประเทศ (2) ศึกษาความคิดเห็นของผู้เชี่ยวชาญเกี่ยวกับอนาคตภาพรูปแบบมหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สามเพื่อการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุไทย และการกำหนดยุทธศาสตร์การ

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นำรูปแบบมหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สามเพื่อการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุไทยไปสู่การปฏิบัติ และ(3) นำเสนออนาคตภาพรูปแบบมหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สามเพื่อการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุไทยและนำเสนอยุทธศาสตร์การนำรูปแบบมหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สามเพื่อการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุไทยไปสู่การปฏิบัติ

ผลการวิจัย พบว่า ผลการวิเคราะห์และสังเคราะห์หลักการ แนวคิดเกี่ยวกับการจัดการศึกษาตลอดชีวิตสำหรับผู้สูงอายุในลักษณะมหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สามทั้งในและต่างประเทศ พบ 2 แนวทางหลักได้แก่ กิจกรรมที่เป็นทางการในรูปแบบมหาวิทยาลัยอย่างเต็มรูปแบบและการดำเนินกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ที่มีความเป็นอิสระ มีการสนับสนุนให้ภาคีเครือข่ายเข้ามามีส่วนร่วม และแบ่งเบาภาระในการจัดกิจกรรมการศึกษาสำหรับผู้สูงอายุ

ผลการศึกษาความคิดเห็นของผู้เชี่ยวชาญเกี่ยวกับอนาคตภาพรูปแบบมหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สามเพื่อการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุไทย มีรูปแบบการดำเนินการ 4 รูปแบบ คือ รูปแบบการจัดสอนในมหาวิทยาลัยในลักษณะการเรียนเสริมระยะสั้น รูปแบบโรงเรียนผู้สูงอายุ รูปแบบการแลกเปลี่ยนเรียนรู้ตามอสังขัย และรูปแบบมหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สามเสมือนจริง (vU3A) มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อให้ผู้สูงอายุปรับตัวให้เหมาะสมกับวัย รู้สึกว่าตนเองมีคุณค่า และมีความสุข ยุทธศาสตร์การนำรูปแบบที่ได้ไปปฏิบัติ 4 ยุทธศาสตร์ ได้แก่ 1) การส่งเสริมการจัดกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตสำหรับผู้สูงอายุในรูปแบบมหาวิทยาลัยให้การสนับสนุน 2) การส่งเสริมการจัดกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตสำหรับผู้สูงอายุในรูปแบบโรงเรียนผู้สูงอายุ 3) การส่งเสริมการจัดกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตสำหรับผู้สูงอายุในรูปแบบการแลกเปลี่ยนเรียนรู้ตามอสังขัย และ 4) ยุทธศาสตร์การส่งเสริมการจัดกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตสำหรับผู้สูงอายุในรูปแบบมหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สามเสมือนจริง ผลการนำเสนออนาคตภาพรูปแบบมหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สามเพื่อการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตของ

ผู้สูงอายุไทย และยุทธศาสตร์การนำรูปแบบมหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สามเพื่อการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตของผู้สูงอายุไทยไปสู่การปฏิบัติพบว่า มีความถูกต้องเหมาะสม มีประสิทธิภาพ เป็นไปได้ในทางปฏิบัติ มีความสัมพันธ์สอดคล้องกับบริบท มีคุณค่าและประโยชน์ และมีความยั่งยืน ในภาพรวมอยู่ในระดับดีมาก

**คำสำคัญ:** มหาวิทยาลัยวัยที่สาม การเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิต ผู้สูงอายุไทย

## INTRODUCTION

As the Thai society has completely entered the era of “the aging society”, the government, society, and families are obliged to establish measures ensuring the life security for the aging groups. The security covers various areas, including income, health care, housing as well as education. The transformation into the aging society inevitably results in social changes in different dimensions, e.g., international migration, mental health, human resources development and etc. (Prasatkul & Waphatanapong, 2011).

The importance of the human resources development for the aging groups should not be ruled out. The human resources development needs to be focused alongside the development of teachers, the amelioration of inequality of education quality between urban and rural societies, and the application of the lifelong learning concept for development of human resources regardless of genders and ages (Prasatkul & Waphatanapong, 2011).

The United Nation proposed that countries focus on development of their human resources, especially among the aging groups, through positive processes. All social members should be aware of the aging process, starting from childhood to the aging stage. Senior citizens should be encouraged to socialize with both other senior companions and younger fellows. Furthermore, all social members

should understand and respect senior citizens. As a method for long-term development starting from the childhood to the aging stage, lifelong learning leads to development in terms of physical, mental, social, and health aspects. Finally, lifelong learning also helps produce quality senior members of the society (World Health Organization [WHO], 2002).

Successful lifelong learning management for the aging groups in England, Finland, France, Australia, New Zealand, U.S.A, Japan, and South Korea is normally conducted in a form of non-formal education established by state or private organizations, centers, religious agencies, universities or community colleges (Prachonpannanuek, 2007). This form of non-formal education managed under the University of the Third Age (U3As) proves very successful among the aging groups as senior citizens are encouraged to participate in the activities of their interests during their final years. There are two typical models for the University of the Third Age, the French and the English models. The French model, an original model, is different from the English model that focuses mainly on self-help concepts and minor support from external organizations. Different countries choose different models of University of the Third Age models, in accordance with contexts of their countries (U.S. Bureau of Consensus and the National Center for Health Statistic in Health and Aging Data Warehouse, 2008; Japan National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2012; Seniorpolis, 2012; Lasell Village, 2008).

According to the University of the Third Age models in foreign countries over the past decades, i.e., 1992 – 2012 (Groombridge, 1982; Martin, Heimovite, & Ota, 2008; National and Community Service, 2009) the University of the Third Age is a proven success for lifelong learning activities for the aging groups. The University of the Third Age models feature characteristics particularly designed for development of life quality among senior citizens during their final years.

Taking account of the benefits and success

of lifelong learning for the aging groups through the University of the Third Age models, the researchers study the scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging society, in terms of management, policies, and practical implementation. The research is also aimed at studying the appropriate University of the Third Age model for the Thai society in the next ten years (2022). Furthermore, the research also focuses on the analysis used for prioritizing necessary strategies to implement the University of the Third Age model in accordance with the Thai social contexts. Finally, the studied University of the Third Age model can be used as a mechanism establishing “the Thai aging society with high potential” in order to be well prepared for the development of overall senior citizens in Thailand in the future.

### Objectives

1. To analyze and synthesize the principles and concepts of the lifelong learning organization for the aging groups both in Thailand and foreign countries
2. To study various perspectives of the experts in the fields about the feasible scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups and strategic forming for the practical implementation
3. To propose the scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups, as well as presenting the implementation strategies of the developed models

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Step 1: Analyze and synthesize the principles and concepts of the lifelong learning I

The researchers began the first step by studying academic documents, journals, books, and researchers relevant to the University of the Third Age models in foreign countries in ten years (2002–2012). In this stage, an analysis form was used as a

research instrument. Key issues from the study were summarized in the analysis form. Such information was then systematically compiled. The compiled information was subsequently concluded, analyzed, and synthesized before a draft scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups and draft implementation strategies appropriate with the Thai society were proposed.

**Step 2: Study various perspectives of the experts in the fields about the feasible scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups and strategic forming for the practical implementation**

Focus group discussion among were conducted. 17 participants included experts in the operation level. The discussion focused on the feasible scenario for the duration of ten years (2012–2022). The research instruments used in this stage were focus group discussion and questionnaires. The data were collected and the draft scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging and draft implementation strategies proposed in the first stage were revised, based on the perspectives of the experts.

**Step 3: Propose the scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups, as well as presenting the implementation strategies of the developed models**

The proposed scenario and implementation strategies were evaluated by the experts in the policy levels. The research instrument used in this step was the evaluation form with rating scales. The analysis was conducted through the data analysis, the analysis of mean and standard deviation and the interpretation of the experts' rating scales. Finally, the scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups and the implementation strategies of the developed models were presented in forms of

descriptive essays, illustrations, and explanations. The proposed scenario and strategies should be implemented, based on the contexts of each community, ahead of the emergence of the aging society in Thailand.

## RESULTS

**Results of the analysis and synthesis of the principles and concepts of the lifelong learning organization for the aging groups both in Thailand and foreign countries**

**Implementation of University of the Third Age in foreign countries:** Different countries demonstrate different approaches of the University of the Third Age, according to the contexts and learning nature of the aging groups in the countries. There are two models of the University of the Third Age. The first one is French model, which is a formal University-based Model. The French model shows formal networking characteristic. Another model is English model, a flexible Self-Help Model. The English model is managed on a voluntary basis. No matter which model is chosen, the success of education management requires careful studies of contexts, problems, needs, strength, and weakness of particular areas of implementation.

**Factors affecting the success of the University of the Third Age:** Several factors determine the success of the University of the Third Age, including budget and external factors triggering changes, e.g., monetary policies and support from local universities. Addressing the importance of lifelong learning and informal education, a number of domestic universities in some countries offer continued learning services directly to senior citizens. In some other countries, including France, and Belgium, education is managed for learners from different ages. These learners are allowed to learn together in the leisure universities.

**Instructors:** Instructors include individuals from different groups. Some are lecturers in

universities, volunteers, religious representatives or even senior citizens themselves. Learning activities are mostly organized at community halls, public libraries, residents of some senior citizen members. All countries provide similar learning activities for senior citizens. Such activities include formal events, such as full courses with requirement for participating hours in Summer School, Online Learning, Study Day, Subject Networks, and etc. Meetings are also a form of a formal learning event. In addition to formal learning programs, informal learning activities are also organized. Examples of informal learning activities include informal meetings for sharing ideas of interests, exercising, dancing, singing, producing artistic works, producing printing matters, participating in recreational activities. These programs can be conducted through learning support groups, SOURCE, and etc.

**Activities at the University of the Third Age:** The activities can be dividend into two approaches. The first one is for formal learning activities, which are seen largely in European countries. In some countries the formal learning activities are organized based on a complete university model, while in some other countries the learning is conducted by charitable organizations. The education standard is high. The universities accepting learners regardless of ages allow senior citizens aged above sixty to participate in the programs. Both academic and research studies are available. Certain participating requirements for certain programs are set and strictly followed. Online courses and summer schools are examples of formal learning are. Another model is an independent model allowing senior citizens to freely organize learning activities. Senior citizens are given opportunities to form groups and hold activities to develop themselves. This independent learning model is seen in the U.S.A where integrated adult learning activities are organized in churches, community learning centers, senior citizens' clubs. In addition, some community services in various areas are also provided. For instance, there are

consultancy services for senior citizens encountering family problems and there are some legal assistant services. Moreover, elderly care services are also provided daily and other forms or informal learning is conducted, e.g., distributions of leaflets about sanitary knowledge as well as interesting information for senior citizens.

**Models of learning activities for senior citizens in the foreign countries:** There are two models as follows:

The model aimed at encouraging senior citizens to become self-reliant: Based on this model, pre-retirement and post-retirement citizens are provided with knowledge in various areas, which are appropriate to the needs of senior citizens, e.g., the information about mental states, health and economy.

A model focusing on partnership networks: This model allows partners to participate in learning activities for senior citizens. The model is apparently applied in the U.S.A, Singapore and South Korea where senior citizens are taken care by partnerships between the government and relevant parties.

**Problems obstructing operation of the University of the Third Age:** Budget is the most common problem encountered by operators of the University of the Third Age. Mostly the problem is about the budget allocation for non-formal education programs where learners are required to pay for tuition fees at rather low rates. Some Universities of Third Age receive donated funding, budget allocation from local administration organizations or local universities or state funding. Furthermore, external instructors also willingly give lectures. Some activities are organized by non-profit organizations or local administration organizations. The number of activities held by senior citizen members or the Universities of Third Age themselves is rather small. As most activities are initiated by different organizations, it is quite difficult that the activities be continued on a regular basis. As for the case of lifelong learning for senior

citizens in Thailand, no University of Third Age has been established thus far; however, there are other learning activities available. For example, there are learning activities and information sharing programs where useful information for living, working, self-developing is provided. Moreover, there are social activities and community networks where senior citizens can participate.

**Evaluation:** The evaluation is based on the actual conditions. Emphasis is particularly given to long-term monitoring. Senior citizens are deemed as a focus for learning and development. Senior citizens should be provided with knowledge, understanding and essential learning skills. Data are collected by qualitative methods, such as observation forms for group discussions, consideration from the presentations made by each group and the consideration of the responses to questionnaires.

**Directions for development of the Universities of Third Age:** In the future the organization of the Universities of Third Age will link more to regional partnership networks. There will be more varieties of groups, not limiting only within particular areas. The groups include The International Association of U3As (AIUTA), UNESCO, The Council of Europe, The North American ILRs' Network, and state agencies of different countries that are interested in senior citizen development. The activities will not be limited to certain areas but the partnership networks will expand worldwide through activities and knowledge-sharing stages, such as U3A Newsletters-SOURCE, and Online Learning. The learning activities also include knowledge-sharing both in formal and informal forms, e.g., the Shared Learning Projects, and the International Meetings and Conferences. The development of the University of Third Age models will focus mainly on enhancing the life quality among senior citizens in all essential areas, i.e., physical, mental, spiritual, and social aspects, so that they can live together with other people in harmony. The learning

activities will be seen in various forms, such as a simple knowledge sharing or learning from exchanged experiences. The learning activities also involve interactions among members and uses of modern technologies, such computers, the Internet, satellites, Social Media Online courses and etc.

**Results of the study of various perspectives of the experts in the fields about the feasible scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups and strategic forming for the practical implementation**

**Strategy 1: Promote lifelong learning for senior citizens based on universities' supported programs:** The Ministry of Education in corporation with education institutes/ local universities, community colleges and non-formal and informal education centers should organize learning activities for senior citizens. These agencies should act as heads or hosts allowing senior citizens to learn together with other younger students both in the normal and weekend courses. There should be some short-courses on the subjects essential for senior citizens' lives. Furthermore, the aforementioned organizations should act as centers stimulating local administration organizations and senior citizens themselves to play key roles and participate in lifelong learning activities for senior citizens.

**Strategy 2: Promote lifelong learning for senior citizens based on schools for seniors:** Seniors clubs, together with local administration organizations, should complete strategies and policies to be implemented in their communities, focusing in lifelong learning in various areas for the senior citizens. The proposed strategies and policies should be supported by relevant organizations in the communities. There should be some study trips for learners to learn from reality. The knowledge exchange and learning management for senior citizens should be done based on a multiple-age basis, both on formal and informal ways. This strategy also focuses on development of learning

networks among senior citizens and creating favorable learning atmosphere for senior citizens.

**Strategy 3: Promote lifelong learning for senior citizens based on the informal learning activities:** This strategy highlights the importance of leading organizations in the localities, with close relations with targeted senior citizens. Such organizations include local administration organizations, non-formal education centers, and community learning centers. There are over 7,424 organizations and centers nationwide, with major roles about managing education for the target groups. There are resources and experienced personnel (teachers at non-formal education centers and community learning centers.) These organizations should coordinate with the existing seniors clubs nationwide.

**Strategy 4: Promote lifelong learning for senior citizens based on the visual classrooms:** In the future the information technology will expand nationwide. Hence, there should be distance learning for senior citizens through various channels including community radio stations. This form of learning should be seen in a form of area-based community.

Each suggested strategy should be evaluated both in the long and short terms as to follow up the results. The strategies should be linked to the strategies and budget from the Thai Health Promotion Foundation who has direct policies to promote health of senior citizens.

**The results of proposal of the scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups, as well as presenting the implementation strategies of the developed models**

The experts viewed that the proposed scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups and the presented implementation strategies of the developed models were appropriate and possible for the implementation. The experts also opined that the

proposed scenario and the presented strategies were relevant to contexts and, useful and sustainable.

## DISCUSSION

The proposed scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups is in line with the concept about continued learning for senior citizens proposed by Prachonpannanuek (2007). Prachonpannanuek (2007) proposed that to providing training and educating people on physical and mental changes is a way to prepare people's mind and society ahead of the retirement. Post retirement non-formal education, e.g., short courses on subjects on interests provided by education institutes, can help senior citizens develop themselves. Self-learning is also an example of the non-formal education. Hence, learning activities in the Universities of the Third Age should focus on education management for senior citizens. This is a process to develop senior citizens so that they become quality individuals with high potential who are quality human resources for the society. The society should set goals for future senior citizens. Before people become senior citizens they should be educated and provided with learning activities in order to be prepared for the aging period. Once in the aging period, they should also continue to be educated so that they are able to adjust themselves in accordance with the changing stages of life. Learning should be conducted throughout the life, based on the basic needs of the aging groups.

It is suggested that the procedures of the University of the Third Age for all four models be based on the learning approach for senior citizens in Japan whose society and population have the similar characteristics as in Thailand. In Japan the seniors learning is seen in a form of community learning center (Kominkan). Learning opportunities in the rural areas are extended and developed to a form of universities for seniors. The learning procedure is rather dependant, which is called Izumi Kenro

Daigaru (Izumi Kenro University). The subjects include problems about senior citizens, politics, philosophy, religion, human rights, social welfares, and arts. Learners are required to take compulsory courses and freely choose optional courses as stated by the universities. Available in Tokyo, Kobe, Kyoto, and nearby cities, the universities for senior citizens in Japan are similar to the University of the Third Age in New Zealand model that, similar to the English model, focuses on a self- help concept. The learning groups are also supported by families as well as communities. Each group is engaged in the learning, based on the needs of the locality. In each group basic learning is available and members' residents are used as learning venues. The learning of the University of the Third Age in New Zealand is seen in casual styles, with flexible curriculums and small sizes of classes at around 15-20 participants. The content includes both academic topics and leisure. The works for senior citizens in New Zealand are similar to those in Australia. Most learning activities relate to self-development in various areas, e.g., health, technologies, updated information, entertainment, recreation, access to learning resources for self-development.

## RECOMMENDATION

### Recommendations from the research results:

Office of the Education Council should collaborate with other organizations whose mission is linked to education management, the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Office of the Higher Education Commission, Office of the Vocational Education Commission, universities and organizations with missions about senior citizens, the National Economic and Social Development Board, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Ministry of Culture, organizations and foundations relating to senior citizens, the Elderly Council of Thailand, Thai Health Promotion Foundation, the Foundation for Research and Development of Thai Elderly and

Promotion of the University of the Third Age. There are four models: (1) Short course programs, (2) schools for seniors, (3) Informal learning activities, and (4) Visual classrooms. The models indentify practical directions to promote and support learning activity management and development of senior citizens. Related organizations should be assigned to plan and proceed with necessary actions in accordance with characteristics of certain organizations and areas. The measures to push knowledge on lifelong learning for senior citizens under the University of the Third Age model should also be set up. Finally, related organizations should be supported to proceed with developed models from the research.

### Recommendations for further studies:

The research study on the scenario of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning of the Thai aging groups leads to a significant conceptual framework for development of the University of the Third Age models for lifelong learning among Thai senior citizens. The developed model should be implemented in four practical steps, i.e., planning, procedure, follow-up, and evaluation, respectively. Co-operations among network partnerships from all state, private and public sectors are needed to bring systematic and integrated results, which can be appropriately applied to different dimensions.

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