

LIFELONG LEARNER CULTIVATION: A PROCEDURAL MODEL FOR THAI MEDICINE WISDOM TEACHERS

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Abstract

The encouragement of continuous learning in Thailand has been emphasized for over decades. However, its focus has been only placed on formal education. Although it has been argued that non-formal and informal education could better respond to Thais' lifelong learning approach, the study in this context is still neglected. Therefore, this qualitative research aims to propose a procedural model of lifelong learner cultivation based on a case study of Thai medicine wisdom teachers. The population of this study was 47 selected and honored Thai medicine wisdom teachers under the Office of the Education Council during 2001 and 2019, totaling nine batches. There were, however, 29 participants involved in the study. The data was collected through in-depth interviews and group discussions between 2018 and 2020, and it was analyzed using content analysis. The findings revealed that the procedural model for cultivating lifelong learners in this context consisted of four elements. The first element: operational concepts mainly focus on the potential, passion and ability of individuals in self-directed learning as well as the concept of transformative learning. The second element: the operational process contained three phases which were Phase 1: the period of cultivating attributes, Phase 2: the period of changing a set of ideas/beliefs and behaviors, and Phase 3: the period of behavioral expression. The third element: the operational support mechanism consisted of four main parties including family, educational institution, responsible agency, and community. The last element: operational factors and conditions were associated with personal and environmental factors.

Keywords: lifelong learner cultivation, lifelong learning, procedural model, Thai medicine wisdom teachers.

INTRODUCTION

These days, the structures of society, economy and politics are changing rapidly. With such a change, people are forced to learn new things and develop their skills and knowledge to, for example, maintain their job position or social status. Thus, it has become essential for people in the modern world to keep learning to be able to adapt and cope with the endlessly environmental changes (Office of the

Education Council, 2013). According to UNESCO (1968), learning is crucial for human beings and, thus, everyone has the right to education. Having an education enables people to access other human rights. In the current days, people in most parts of the world generally receive compulsory primary education from an early age which is known as formal education. However, when people finish school and start their jobs, self-education or

self-learning is also important as people still need to learn and attain new skills for career progression or self-improvement. Lifelong learning is defined as “development after formal education: the continuing development of knowledge and skills that people experience after formal education and throughout their lives” (Encarta, 2008, as cited in London, 2011). Hence, continuous or lifelong learning is not mandatory but rather fundamental to long-term success (Buntat et al., 2013).

In Thailand, there is a newly issued National Strategy (2018-2037) which is the country’s first national long-term strategy that aims to guarantee all Thai people’s happiness and well-being. It was mentioned in the National Strategy (2018-2037) that human resources are the engine that drives the country towards becoming a developed country with security, prosperity and sustainability in the next 20 years by using wisdom and innovation (National Strategy Secretariat Office, 2018). Thailand has been emphasizing the necessity of continuous learning, so a greater proportion of Thai people become efficient human resources to drive the country forward (Office of the Education Council, 2014).

Continuous learning or lifelong education in Thailand, however, centers on formal education. Non-formal and informal education that could better respond to Thais’ lifelong learning approach is neglected and less emphasized compared to the formal schooling system (Office of the Education Council, 2014). In addition, it was stated by the Thai government in 1999 that the former development of the country’s education system had not been truly consistent with the way of life and culture of Thai citizens. In fact, education should be arranged to conform to the characteristics of each local area and it is important that learners get involved in and related, rather than educational management that they have never had experiences before (Putkhiao, Ratana-Ubol and Leesuwat, 2020). Moreover, Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2007) proposed that social development should pay attention to the local wisdom and knowledge of the community. In the context of Thailand,

local philosophers, together with people in the community, could utilize Thai wisdom to solve issues in the community and also develop the community towards sustainability. So-called “wisdom teachers” or “local philosophers” are knowledgeable locals who usually engage in various learning processes, including training, experimenting, observing and learning from intellectuals and educational institutions, to obtain the knowledge and wisdom and, then, put it into practice in real situations in the community. Wisdom can be passed from one generation to another and the knowledge of these wisdom teachers can be applied to all three forms of education, which are formal education, non-formal education and informal education. Thereby, Thai wisdom teachers have the lifelong learning process that could be utilized as a good role model for cultivating individuals in the society towards being lifelong learners (Office of the National Education Commission, 2008).

However, most of the existing studies about Thai wisdom focus on the knowledge transfer process of Thai wisdom teachers and the application of local wisdom in teaching. There is a lack of research on the lifelong learning process and none of them attempted to propose a procedural model for cultivating lifelong learners in this specific context. The lifelong learning process of Thai medicine wisdom teachers could be beneficially adopted as a role model for lifelong learner cultivation as it is believed to efficiently promote the development of human’s potential and quality. Therefore, this research is interested in applying the concept of Transformative Learning of Mezirow (1991) as a framework to analyze and synthesize the path and learning process towards being the honored Thai medicine wisdom teachers under the Office of the Education Council. Subsequently, the discovery concerning the learning process will be used to develop a procedural model for cultivating lifelong learners which could be practically useful for Thailand’s human resource development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lifelong learning means continuing development of knowledge and skills throughout a person's life in which each individual has a different set of learning processes and goals, e.g., learning to attain new skills, knowledge, or profession or to understand the surrounding environment and society (Watanawong, 2008). In addition, a lifelong learner refers to an individual who has motivation and love of learning as well as being enthusiastic and creative in learning, interested in seeking knowledge and committed to improving their learning efficiency (Candy, Crebert and O'leary, 1994). With these definitions, a learning society is inhabited by individuals who are inquisitive by nature and learn to develop a sustainable society. UNESCO has defined the characteristics of learners that are universal and suitable for lifelong learning into 5 aspects including 1) learning to know, 2) learning to do, 3) learning to live together, 4) learning to be, and 5) learning to transform oneself and society (Medel-Añonuevo, Ohsako and Mauch, 2001). Therefore, this research summed up the attributes of lifelong learners into four aspects: behaviour, attitude, skills, and knowledge. There were three kinds of skills (Chaiya, Siribanpitak and Sumettikoon, 2015; Crockett, 2016) needed in lifelong learning. The first one is thinking skills which include analysis, synthesis, critical thinking, initiative, creativity, numeracy and problem-solving thinking skills. The second one is the skills in learning which are information literacy, self-directed learning, teamwork and people skills, and research skills. The third kind of skill relates to competency in information technology and communication.

When examining lifelong learner cultivation, there are two significant concepts that needed to consider, which are self-directed learning and transformative learning. According to Guglielmino (1977), self-directed learning is one of the most essential concepts in lifelong learning since it relates to the natural way of learning. Self-directed learning boosts the natural development of self-confidence, initiative, perseverance and life satisfaction. Being a self-directed learner indicates that a

person is able to understand their learning needs, adopt various learning strategies and techniques, arrange learning processes, manage their schedule effectively, assess outcomes of their learning as well as fix their flaws in learning. The study by Ucharattana et al. (2012) proposed the eight traits of self-directed learners which consisted of (1) openness to learning opportunities, (2) self-concept as an effective learner, (3) initiative and independence in learning, (4) informed acceptance of responsibility for one's own learning, (5) love of learning, (6) creativity, (7) positive orientation to the future, and (8) ability to use basic study skills and problem-solving skills. These traits are, indeed, consistent with many studies in the field (e.g., Candy, Crebert and O'leary, 1994).

The theory of transformative learning is regarded as an appropriate learning framework for lifelong learners. The theory was introduced by Jack Mezirow as being "constructivist, an orientation which holds that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is, central to making meaning and hence learning." It is the expansion of consciousness in which a person ponders about their feelings, beliefs, assumptions, and perspective on their purpose. This theory suggests that a learner who has gone through a transformative process would entirely 'transform' their beliefs, assumptions, and experiences into 'brand new expressive perspectives' which cause that learner to be more self-motivated, self-governing, rational, collaborative, and empathetic. The process of perspective transformation has three dimensions: psychological dimension which is changes in understanding of the self, convictional dimension which is revision of belief systems, and behavioral dimension which is changes in lifestyle (Mezirow, 1991). Besides, Cranton and Taylor (2011) and Mezirow and Taylor (2009) mentioned that individual experience, critical reflection, role of dialogue, authentic and supportive relationships, a holistic orientation, and the awareness of context are the six key elements of the transformative approach. Therefore, this study applied the theory of transformative learning as the

framework of research in order to analyze and synthesize the learning process and develop a procedural model of lifelong learner cultivation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative methodology. The research population was 47 selected and honored Thai medicine wisdom teachers under the Office of the Education Council during 2001 and 2019, totaling 9 batches. This study was able to engage 29 of them to involve in the research. The data was collected between 2018 and 2020. There were three stages in the process of this research. The first stage was to analyze and synthesize the data on the learning process of 29 Thai medicine wisdom teachers which was obtained by using in-depth interviews. The interviews were divided into three parts: 1) general information of participants, 2) learning process to become Thai medicine wisdom teachers, and 3) additional comments or recommendations.

The second stage was to synthesize the pattern of the transitional process towards being lifelong learners. This stage was conducted by using the findings from the first stage to synthesize and develop it into a draft of the pattern of the transitional process which was presented in an essay's style. The draft consisted of three components: 1) key concepts of transformative learning towards being lifelong learners, 2) transitional process, and 3) factors and conditions related to the transitional process. Then, this draft was represented in the group discussion which was participated by seven key informants, including four Thai medicine wisdom teachers and three experts in the lifelong learning field. During the group discussion, these key informants gave their opinions and recommendations for the draft improvement and contribution to the final version.

The third stage was to propose a procedural model of lifelong learner cultivation based on this case study which was the objective of this paper. At this stage, the findings from the second stage were analyzed and synthesized,

and then developed into a draft of the procedural model of lifelong learner cultivation. The draft comprised of four elements: 1) operational concepts, 2) operational process, 3) operational support mechanism, and 4) operational factors and conditions. Subsequently, the draft of the procedural model was represented in the second group discussion which was engaged by 13 individuals who were Thai medicine wisdom teachers, experts in the lifelong learning area, and developing and training officers. During the second group discussion, these professionals gave feedback and suggestions for the draft improvement towards the final version of the procedural model of lifelong learner cultivation.

These two group discussions were organized as an independent forum to exchange ideas. Besides, issue note forms were used to record recommendations on the drafts received during each group discussion session. The issue note forms consisted of three different parts: 1) accuracy of the draft's content, 2) consistency/feasibility of application in Thai social context, and 3) additional comments.

The data was analyzed by using content analysis, following the approach of Chantavanich (2009), and the lessons learned techniques, in accordance with Daungkaew (2010), to categorize, interpret and find relationships of the data, and then presented in an essay's style.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Learning process to become Thai medicine wisdom teachers.

Prior to the study's process of analyzing and synthesizing the learning process of the participants, it needs to explore first the paths to becoming Thai medicine wisdom teachers. The results showed that the paths to becoming Thai medicine wisdom teachers usually contained (1) events which affect the interest in Thai medicine wisdom and (2) events which affect the decision to become a Thai medicine wisdom teacher in which both types of events

occur due to personal factors and environmental factors. Personal factors, such as awareness of the importance of Thai medicine wisdom or first-hand experience in using Thai medicine wisdom, can lead to the first type of events. The environmental factors that provoke their interests include having a family member who is a Thai traditional medicine healer or has ever used Thai medicine wisdom etc. Regarding the latter type of events, the personal factors might be the realization of the importance of inheriting the body of knowledge whereas the environmental factors, like social responsibility and status, can influence an individual's decision to become a Thai medicine wisdom teacher.

The findings indicated that the learning process to become Thai medicine wisdom teachers consisted of seven steps. The first step was defining key concepts of learning. One of these key concepts is, for example, conservation and inheritance of Thai medicine wisdom to be alternative healthcare for people in the community. The second step was seeking knowledge by self-directed learning and learning by doing. There are various approaches to seek knowledge, e.g., reading textbooks, observational learning, and hands-on experience. The third step was thinking and solving problems and obstacles in learning. Those issues might relate to communication, gender inequality or acceptance of Thai traditional medicine in which these teachers overcome by thinking and solving problems. The fourth step was rechecking knowledge. There are a number of ways to recheck knowledge including knowledge sharing, verifying knowledge from multiple sources, or rechecking knowledge with textbooks etc. The fifth step was creating knowledge. This step is to integrate the body of knowledge with daily living in order to maximize its benefits with respect to the current environment and situation. The sixth step was disseminating knowledge. Each teacher's techniques and methods for disseminating knowledge are different and heavily depend on their aptitude and experience. The last step was building a learning community network. This network allows these teachers to share their existing

knowledge with others and also to quickly and widely disseminate the knowledge to the public.

Pattern of the transitional process towards being lifelong learners.

The results from the second stage of this study revealed that there were three components attached to the pattern of the transitional process towards being lifelong learners. The first component was the concepts of transformative learning towards being lifelong learners. These are regarded as self-development concepts for the common good. The second component was the transitional process. This process contained three phases. Phase 1 was changing in existing beliefs. This change is due to experiences that contradict one's existing beliefs. This phase consisted of events that relate to thinking and events that relate to the state of mind. Phase 2 was changing in attitude. This is a period of expressing the need to seek information in order to verify its contradiction to the existing beliefs. This phase had four steps, called (1) assessing of existing knowledge, (2) searching for methods, (3) seeking knowledge, and (4) evaluating. Phase 3 was behavioral expression. This is a period of researching, taking action and repeating the first two phases in order to reach the goal of the transitional process. The final component was factors and conditions related to the transitional process. These factors and conditions can be grouped into three dimensions, namely setting goals and success in life, creativity and inspiration in learning, and getting supports from others.

A procedural model of lifelong learner cultivation.

The final study's stage provided a procedural model of lifelong learner cultivation based on a case study of Thai medicine wisdom teachers. The findings from this stage indicated that the procedural model comprised of four elements which were 1) operational concepts, 2) operational process, 3) operational support mechanism, and 4) operational factors and conditions. In the first element, the operational concepts included (1) people have the potential

to learn, the passion for knowledge, and the desire for self-development, (2) people can use their experiences/ways of life as the principles in developing their learning, (3) people can use the problems/surrounding environment as a driving force for development and learning, (4) family, community and society will be a good source of building their resilience and also be a foundation for the development of learning, and (5) having a role model in learning encourages family members to have the characteristics of lifelong learners.

The second element rested on a number of concepts including (1) the principles of transformative learning which is the learning process that induces behavioral changes in which environmental factors stimulate changes in perspectives, ideas and behaviors, (2) the attributes of lifelong learners which can be viewed in four aspects which are behavior, attitude, skills, and knowledge, (3) the principles of respecting individuality in which learners recognize their value and believe that they have the potential to learn, (4) the principles of life-based learning in which learners use their experience and ways of life to develop their learning, (5) the principles of building resilience in which learners develop themselves to be physically and mentally ready for learning, and (6) the concept of self-directed learning in which the eight traits of self-directed learners include openness to learning opportunities, self-concept as an effective learner, initiative and independence in learning, informed acceptance of responsibility for one's own learning, love of learning, creativity, positive orientation to the future, and ability to use basic study skills and problem-solving skills.

In cultivating lifelong learners, the operational process was split into three phases: Phase 1 was the period of cultivating attributes, Phase 2 was the period of changing a set of ideas/beliefs and behaviors, and Phase 3 was the period of behavioral expression. The mutual practices in supporting lifelong learner cultivation are (1) building learning-friendly environment, (2) having a mutual agreement and good relationships with each other, (3) encouraging continuous learning at all times, (4) inspiring

and fostering a desire for self-learning, (5) learning from surrounding environment, and (6) organizing activities that promote continuous learning.

The third element, the operational support mechanism, consisted of four main parties including family, educational institution, responsible agency and community. Nonetheless, these parties play their own roles in supporting lifelong learner cultivation. Since the operational process of lifelong learner cultivation was divided into three phases, their roles are slightly changed comparing between each phase. Thereby, the roles of each party in each phase should be described separately as follows. In Phase 1: the period of cultivating attributes, the main roles of family are behaving as a role model, cultivating thought and promoting learning opportunities. At the same time, educational institution should encourage students to think critically and organize activities that promote self-directed learning, knowledge and a positive attitude towards learning. In addition, the responsible agency needs to take action in organizing activities that promote learning and learning networks where people can participate in as well as creating media that is easy to understand and access. The community could provide their support by building learning-friendly environment in the community and organizing activities that encourage community members to share knowledge and information and adapt to their current lifestyles. In Phase 2: the period of changing a set of ideas/beliefs and behaviors, the roles of family are encouraging learners to change themselves to a better role or way of life and to find appropriate learning methods that lead themselves to their learning goals. The educational institution may get involved by encouraging students to build self-confidence and motivation in learning as well as inspiring them to set goals, make plans and select an approach in learning. At the same time, the responsible agency must organize activities that advocate the integration of existing knowledge with new ones and also enhance the ability to recheck and verify the accuracy of knowledge and information from multiple sources. Besides, the community

should create spaces or networks for learning or learning communities to foster a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing. In Phase 3: the period of behavioral expression, the roles of family are encouraging learners' behavioral expressions in continuous learning, helping learners to make plans and select approaches to problem-solving as well as planning in knowledge management and systematic thinking which could be applied to everyday life. Moreover, the educational institution can support by organizing activities where learners can analyze and apply knowledge widely and also promoting understanding of learning materials and the correct use of such information. Importantly, the responsible agency must have policies, as well as activities, that promote continuous learning and effective use of learning-related media. Also, they should use communication channels to enable the public to access and obtain

accurate information thoroughly. At the same time, the community needs to run activities where learners can create or join learning networks and have interactions with others the society. Furthermore, the community could establish a learning network and engage experts from various fields to educate members of the community.

The operational factors and conditions, which is the last element of the procedural model, could occur both internally and externally. The internal operational factors and conditions included (1) learners are aware of their interests in learning and can decide to learn by themselves, (2) learners make their decision on learning based on their interests or needs and believe that they have the potential to learn, and (3) learners are ready to learn and realize the importance of or need for learning. The external operational factors and conditions consisted of (1) stakeholders provide support or instill behaviors that affect continuous learning, (2) responsible persons build learning-friendly environment and prepare to support and facilitate learners, and (3) responsible persons set up activities, both at policy and operational levels, that align with the goals and objectives of lifelong learning.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The four elements of the procedural model align with the guidelines for informal education to promote lifelong learning proposed by Chankajon (2008) and, in addition, all four elements are linked to each other. In other words, the operational process, the operational support mechanism and the operational factors and conditions are all related and derived from the operational concepts which entail the mutual practices and guidelines for organizing those activities in the operational process. For example, the activities are organized and run by the support mechanism and such activities need to be in line with the objectives of each phase of the lifelong learner cultivation process. The fact that the operational process is basically built upon the operational concepts implicitly means that each phase of the lifelong learner cultivation process certainly shares the characteristics, approaches or concepts of the lifelong learning-related theories and models, e.g., the concept of Transformative Learning of Mezirow (1991) and Guglielmino's Self-Directed Learning (1977). The principles that were adopted as a core of the operational process, which propose that learners engage in behavioral changes as a result of changing in perspectives, ideas and behaviors and become lifelong learners, are indeed consistent with and ride on Mezirow's theory of transformative learning and also proved by many other studies in the context of Thailand including Nuntanant (2008). In addition to this theory, another significant concept applied in the operational process was Guglielmino's self-directed learning which was introduced in 1977. Guglielmino (1977) proposed eight traits of self-directed learners in which these traits later proved by a number of international research (e.g., Candy, Crebert and O'leary, 1994) as well as research conducted in Thailand's environmental settings (e.g., Vatigtinnakorn, 2009) as the key characteristics of lifelong learners. Moreover, other principles that research participants applied in the cultivation process include the principles of respecting individuality, the principles of life-based learning, and the principles of building

resilience. These principles are supported by many studies in the lifelong learning field (e.g., Chantima, 2012).

To cultivate lifelong learners, the entire cultivating process needs to be divided into three phases, Phase 1: the period of cultivating attributes, Phase 2: the period of changing a set of ideas/beliefs and behaviors, and Phase 3: the period of behavioral expression. These phases can cultivate learners to be aware of their thoughts and change their ways of thinking and behavior to become lifelong learners. The three phases are in line with the transformative learning theory of Mezirow (1991) and the stages of lifelong learning process proposed by Vatigtinnakorn (2009).

Those activities which support learners are, of course, performed by associated individuals or groups of individuals who are regarded as the support mechanism. This mechanism consisted of family, educational institution, government and private agency and community who play an important role in cultivating attributes, changing a set of ideas/beliefs and behaviors, and promoting behavioral expression. Despite the distinct roles of each party in the mechanism, they all work towards the common goals and share the same direction when planning and organizing activities. They focus on encouraging continuous learning and inspiring and fostering a desire for self-directed learning as well as building learning-friendly environment. Thus, this is a mechanism that helps learners to prepare themselves to be ready for learning and be able to apply the knowledge and experience to their daily living. These parties could engage in the transitional process by, for example, facilitating or providing activities or acting as a role model that would encourage lifelong learning, as indicated by many scholars (e.g., Chantima, 2012). All of these would induce love of learning and passion for knowledge which are the key traits of self-directed learners (Guglielmino, 1977) that are associated with achievement of continuous learning and self-development throughout a person's life (Vatigtinnakorn, 2009). As a consequence, learners can bring out their potential and confidence to become self-directed learners.

The internal and external factors that have an impact on cultivating lifelong learners are backed up by the findings from the study of Mezirow and Taylor (2009) which suggested that learners are influenced by various personal and environmental factors. They similarly recommended the key practices in encouraging learners to engage in transformative learning that learners should be surrounded by an environment that is inductive to learning. Furthermore, learners should be encouraged to think critically and also provided with student-centered instruction and activities that promote self-directed learning.

Conclusion

The study on lifelong learner cultivation based on a case study of Thai medicine wisdom teachers adopted in-depth interviews and group discussions as research instruments to attain the findings and ultimately be able to propose the procedural model. This research discovered that there were four elements attached to the procedural model for cultivating lifelong learners which comprised of operational concepts, operational process, operational support mechanism, and operational factors and conditions. The operational concepts mainly rested on the potential, passion and ability of individuals in self-directed learning as well as those concepts about transformative learning and external factors, e.g., family, community and society, which influence lifelong learner cultivation. The operational process contained three phases which were Phase 1: the period of cultivating attributes, Phase 2: the period of changing a set of ideas/beliefs and behaviors, and Phase 3: the period of behavioral expression. However, the operation of cultivating lifelong learners depends on many factors and also needs a support mechanism to achieve the goals. The mechanism, the third element, involved four main parties which are family, educational institution, responsible agency and community. These four parties have their own parts to play and each of them essentially contributes to the operational process. In each phase of cultivation, the roles of these parties are slightly changed to conform to the purposes of each phase. The last element, operational factors and conditions, could occur

both internally and externally. Learners are affected by internal or personal factors. In addition, surrounding people and environment, such as learning-friendly environment, also have an impact on cultivating lifelong learners and these are considered as external factors. The research suggests that all elements of the procedural model must be in place to ensure an achievement of the goals of lifelong learner cultivation

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