OKTOBER 2025

EDISI 15

BULETIN APB

LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong Learning for Malaysians through Geragogy

MOHD NUR FITRI MOHD SALIM, NIK MAHFUZAH NIK MAT, RODHIAH AMZAH, ASMAHANIM HAJI MOHAMAD YUSUF
UiTM CAWANGAN NEGERI SEMBILAN KAMPUS SEREMBAN
MOHAMAD SAFWAT ASHAHRI MOHD SALIM
UiTM CAWANGAN PERAK KAMPUS TAPAH

By 2030, approximately one in seven Malaysians will be aged 60 or older. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) indicated that in 2024, seniors will account for 11.6% of the population, and that percentage is expected to reach 17% in 2040 (DOSM, 2024a; The Star, 2024). This demographic trend confirms that the country is becoming an ageing society, one that must now address urgent implications beyond healthcare and pensions. The demand for adaptive lifelong education is at the forefront. While significant attention has been paid to preparing the younger workforce for Industry 4.0, it is equally important to equip the older workforce with ongoing learning opportunities that enlarge their capabilities.

Geragogy is a systematic, empirical approach to teaching seniors, and thus, it assumes strategic importance. Geragogy, a distinct subfield focused on older adults, is not merely an extension of andragogy; it recognises that older adults have unique learning styles, motivations, and impediments. For instance, adult literacy, rebudgeting for retiree income, and rebuilding social circles are new motivations for formal learning, not for open-ended career advancement (Noor & Ismail, 2020). Simultaneously, older adults face physical constraints, operate at slower cognitive speeds, and have a pronounced gap in technological experience (Ahmad, 2025). Grounded in rapid demographic evidence, geragogy proposes a pedagogy that is responsive to these circumstances, making learning environments equitable, relevant, and respectful of their life journeys.

However, several challenges remain. The digital divide continues to restrict these opportunities.

For example, an analysis shows that by 2020, over half (51.8%) of Malaysians without Internet access were 60 years old or older (Chen, 2023). Such exclusion hinders enrollment in e-learning and deprives individuals of vast online resources. Compounding this barrier is pervasive economic vulnerability. A UNDP (2024) survey indicates that 58% of Malaysians aged 54 or older hold pensions of less than RM100,000—a figure short of the RM240,000 needed to meet the minimum living standard after retirement. Chronic diseases, which often affect mobility and stamina, further restrict the ability to engage in course offerings, and prevailing cultural beliefs still regard formal study as primarily youthful work.

Despite these constraints, positive advances have been made. In rapidly ageing Penang, municipal authorities have launched integrated ageing-support schemes, and digital literacy workshops designed for the oldest generations proliferate (Teh et al., 2024). At the same time, the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) has launched increased financial education campaigns targeted at pre-retirement cohorts, while concurrently providing tools for savings and investment decision-making (UNDP, 2024). NGOs and community colleges are piloting a purpose-built

syllabus that encompasses not only information and communication technology mastery but also creative arts and health self-management (DOSM, 2024b). Although the programmes are unevenly scaled and falter under systemic fragmentation, they collectively reveal the emergent possibilities of geragogy to cultivate sustained, fruitful participation in later decades of life.

Going forward, Malaysia requires a clear joint strategy for teaching older adults. Community learning centres in libraries, mosques, temples, and town halls can be safe, familiar places where seniors can attend classes. Courses should use a larger font, offer flexible scheduling, and provide hybrid or offline options so everyone can join. Bringing together seniors and young people to trade digital know-how for life lessons will build an understanding on both sides of the age spectrum. Most importantly, ideas for teaching older adults need to be woven into national plans, such as the Malaysia Education Blueprint and the National Policy for Older Persons.

As Malaysia has a larger older population, the concept of lifelong learning must expand. It should mean not just getting a job but also maintaining dignity, health, and social connections. Teaching older adults shifts them from being receivers of care to active campus members. If the country steps up, seniors can count on not just a long life but also a quality one. The saying is clear: We do not outlive learning; we outlive living.

References

Ahmad, N. A. (2025). Intergenerational instructional strategies and learning among the elderly in Malaysia. *Journal of Aging Studies, 39*(2), 115–124. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11376998/

Chen, H. W. J. (2023). Social media needs and quality of life of older adults in Malaysia. *BMC Geriatrics, 23*(1), 512. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10218126/

Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2024a, July 31). Malaysia set to become ageing nation by 2030; Perak leads senior surge, DOSM report says. Malay Mail. *https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2024/07/31/malaysia-set-to-become-ageing-nation-by-2030-perak-leads-senior-surge-dosm-report-says/145577*

Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2024b, September 6). Elderly population to hit 17% by 2040, says Stats Dept. *The Star*. https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2024/09/06/elderly-population-to-hit-17-by-2040-says-stats-dept

Teh, P. L., Lim, Y. S., & Goh, C. C. (2024). Insights into the use of a digital healthy ageing coach among Malaysian seniors. *JMIR Formative Research, 8(*1), e54101. *https://formative.jmir.org/2024/1/e54101*

United Nations Development Programme. (2024, June 15). Navigating the future of care for older persons in Malaysia 2040: Community support & technological integration. UNDP Malaysia Accelerator Lab. *https://www.undp.org/malaysia/blog/navigating-future-care-older-persons-malaysia-2040-community-support-technological-integration*