

# A Model for Developing Excellent Quality of Life for the Aging of Elderly Schools in the Northeast

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## Abstract

This mixed-methods research aimed to create the model for developing excellent quality of life for the aging at elderly schools in the Northeast of Thailand. The study started with a search for key components of excellent life quality for the elderly, surveying the current and desirable conditions and needs priorities for development. The six key components of excellent life quality for the elderly were identified: 1) vital environment, 2) physical health, 3) economic well-being, 4) social well-being, 5) mental and emotional well-being, and 6) spiritual or intellectual well-being, respectively listed with priorities and affirmed for suitability by five experts. Nine experts assessed and affirmed the model as the most suitable, feasible, and useful. The results of the model's implementation in one selected elderly school for 3 months revealed that the quality of elderly students improved significantly. Assessment results before and after the experiment show a significant difference that meet the level of excellence as intended. All participating parties are very satisfied and happy. The study should be of great benefit for those who are interested in this rapid growing field.

**Keywords:** a model for development, excellent quality of life, the aging, the Elderly School

## 1. Introduction

In 2020, 1.016 billion of the world's population of 8 billion were 60 years old or older. The United Nations has stated that within the next 30 years, the elderly population will be over 2 billion (BBC New Thai, 2022). The population of Thailand is now 70 million, with 14 million elderly, which are expected to increase to 20 million in the next 10 years. In the next 20 years, Thailand will have become a super-aged society (Foundation of Research and Development of Thai Old Age People, 2017). This increase of the elderly population as a percentage of the total population is due not only to the trend of lower birth rates but also to medical progress, which has increased longevity. The challenges of an increasingly elderly population are significant.

Old-age societies are prevailing in most countries around the world and have great impact on social and economic conditions. As of 2014, Asia had the largest number of people over 60 in the world, 469 million, accounting for 56% of the world's elderly in 2014. Of this number, 230 million are Chinese, 100 million are Indian, and 35 million are Japanese, the last being the highest percentage of a nation's total population (125 million). Japan is the country where most people go to learn about gerontology. European countries have the highest proportion of the elderly population. This is obvious that 20 countries ranked among the highest, including Italy with 13 million out of 60 million and Germany with 12 million out of 83 million (BBC New Thai, 2022).

The United Nation Organization has stated that the number of people aged more than 100 years in 2021 has surpassed 621,000 and anticipates that the number will be over 1 million by the end of this decade. Longevity is making great leaps because of significant progress in medical science, nutrition, and improved living environments. It is evident that people in this world live longer and longer.

A survey conducted by the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked the countries with the longest average life expectancy as follows. Hong Kong, at number one, is currently the country with the longest life expectancy in the world, averaging 83.5 years. People in Hong Kong like to exercise, eat steamed food, and drink tea. The factors in longevity are consumption of good, easily digestible food, exercise, good living environment, fresh air, no pollution, an emphasis on disease prevention, and access to good medical care. Ranked second is Japan, with an average age of 83.1 years. The former elderly population champion during the past 3 consecutive years has fallen to

second place because of the current high suicide rate in Japan. However, diet is a major factor in the high average life expectancy of the Japanese population. Italy, ranked third, with an average age of 82.9 years, has relatively small gaps in quality of life between socioeconomic strata, and access to quality medical treatment is equal. In Singapore, ranked 8th, the average age is 82.1 years. Over the past 30 years, the average age of Singaporeans has been increasing annually, attributable to excellent preventive treatment for various diseases.

In Thailand, the population has an average age of 75.4 years. (Research Institute Population and Society, Mahidol University, 2017), with women living longer than men. In 2020, women's average age was 80.4 years, while men's average age was 73.2 years (Tharn Settakij, 2021) Thai society has realized and is aware of the population's aging situation, which has resulted in increased costs for the welfare of the elderly. Families must bear more burdens in caring for the elderly. The more they live longer, the more they face the problem of lack of income or insufficient income, and the greater the risk of various chronic diseases and disabilities (Department of Older Persons, 2017). Still, this issue has not received much attention in Thai society, which does not yet understand the problem sufficiently.

From now on, the structure of the Thai population will age very quickly. The generation born in the years 1963–1983, also known as the "Berth generation population, was 30–50 years old in 2013, will become a large population elderly people in the next 10–12 years, making Thailand "a completely aged society." In less than ten years, for the first time in history, Thailand will have more elderly people than children. The aging population will account for about one in five people in Thailand (Foundation of Thai Gerontology Research and Development Institute, Thai Gerontology Research and Development Institute, 2015).

Improving quality of life for the elderly is therefore a crucial issue in dealing with such problems. Enhancing quality of life for this population requires the participation of people, communities, and local government organizations. All parties must cooperate. The people and the elderly must reflect the problems and their needs so that the community or the local government organization can hear, understand, and help solve the problem by providing various operational services for the elderly that aim to enhance their quality of life. Economic, social, cultural, physical and mental factors also affect the life of the elderly and their well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, and ability to adapt positively (Saithip Suktiphon, 1991).

Elderly school is another form of education that requires the elderly to have knowledge and understanding of matters that are important to life, originating from a concept that recognizes the value, importance and power of the elderly by creating an area to promote learning and develop their potential through participation in the local community and affiliated networks. Elderly schools emerged in response to the 2nd National Plan on the Elderly (2002–2021), the 1st Revision (2009) and the Elderly Act policies in the forum of the National Assembly of the Elderly (2010, 2013), and several national education plans that prioritize lifelong education, continuous development of human potential through participation in social activities, and access to useful information (Department of Older Persons, 2017). Not only should the elderly have access to services and adequate care, but they must also be valued, treated with dignity and respect, and, in return, able to give back and contribute to the great good of the nation. This need for quality of life for elders captured the researcher's attention and led him to ask, "Why not make the quality of life of the elderly excellent for the great and common good of the nation and the world?" The researcher himself was an advisor of the Elderly School of Wanornniwas District during the last 8 years and since then has been interested in developing excellent quality of elderly life since then. Consequently, he decided to research the topic, "A Model for Developing Excellent Life Quality for the Aging of Elderly Schools in the Northeast."

The Elderly Schools in this study are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Elder Persons, Minister of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand. There are over 1100 Elderly Schools in Thailand. Of this number, 765 elderly schools are in the Northeast of Thailand under the purview of local administration organizations. Although they are neither private agencies nor organizations under the Minister of Public Health, they are connected and collaborate well with one another.

## 2. Objectives

- (1) To study the quality of life components leading to excellence for the elderly in the elderly schools in the region of the Northeast.
- (2) To study current conditions and desirable conditions and needs for developing a quality of life towards excellence for the elderly in elderly schools.
- (3) To create and develop a model for improving the quality of life towards excellence for the elderly in the elderly schools.

- (4) To study the results of the evaluation of the quality of life development model.
- (5) To study the results of the model’s implementation.

**3. Conceptual Framework**

| INPUT  | Process  | Output  |
|--|--|---|
| Six key components of excellent quality of life for the aging<br>1. Vital environment<br>2. Physical health<br>3. Economic well-being<br>4. Social well-being<br>5. Mental and emotional well-being<br>6. Spiritual well-being | - Development of the model and a manual<br>- Development process and evaluation of the experimentation | Excellent quality of life of the aging in the elderly schools |
| ⇒  |  | ⇒   |

The conceptual framework of research on the quality of life development model towards excellence of the elderly in the elderly school in the Northeast.

**4. Methodology**

This research follows a mixed methodology and was divided into five phases to correspond with the research questions and objectives as follows.

Phase 1: study of quality of life components towards excellence of the elderly in Elderly Schools in the Northeast. There were two groups: of informants:

- (1) Three (3) model school administrators for the elderly selected through purposive sampling who provided information through interviews about the components of quality of life.
- (2) A group of five experts who examined the suitability of the components of life quality through purposive sampling according to the qualification set by the researchers.

Phase 2: Study the current and the desirable conditions and the needs in developing a model for developing the quality of life towards excellence for the elderly in the elderly schools.

- (1) The informants were executives, chief advisors, and teacher, with the number of 3,060 in the elderly schools in the Northeast with a total number of 765 schools in 20 provinces (Department of Older Persons, 2021).
- (2) The other sample group, selected through purposive sampling, consisted of 60 executives, chief advisors, and teachers in the schools for the elderly in three provinces in the Northeast: Sakon Nakhon (7 schools), Nakhon Phanom (7 schools), and Mukdahan (6 schools).

Phase 3: Create and develop a model to develop quality of life towards the excellence for the elderly in elderly schools in the Northeast, divided into two groups at the creation and development stage:

- (1) A group of five experts who were responsible for examining research tools selected by purposive sampling according to the qualification specified by the research team.
- (2) A group of nine experts, selected by purposive sampling according to the qualification specified by the research team, who were responsible for reviewing, refining, and evaluating the model’s suitability, feasibility, and utility through focus group discussion.

Phase 4: Assess the quality of life development model towards excellence of the elderly in the elderly schools in the Northeastern region by a group comprising executives, chief advisors, and school teachers from 20 schools of best practice (model school) in 10 northeastern provinces (two schools from each province) for assessing the model’s suitability, feasibility and usefulness. This group was selected through purposive sampling.

Phase 5: Study the results of an experimental model for developing the quality of life towards excellence of elderly in the elderly schools in the Northeastern region. The sample groups were elderly school students who voluntarily participated in the program in the elderly school under experiment with the number of 30 students.

## 5. Research Tools

- (1) Interview form enquiring for quality of life components towards excellence for the elderly in the elderly schools.
- (2) An assessment form for assessing the appropriateness of the life quality excellence components of the elderly.
- (3) A questionnaire inquiring into the present and the desirable conditions of quality of life development toward excellence for the elderly in the elderly schools in the Northeast.
- (4) The draft of a model for developing the quality of life towards excellence for the elderly in the elderly schools in the region.
- (5) A group discussion recording tool.
- (6) Guidelines for developing the quality of life development model towards excellence for the elderly in the elderly schools.
- (7) Assessment forms for assessing the model's suitability, possibility, and usefulness (utility).
- (8) A quality of life assessment form for excellence of life for the elderly in elderly schools in the region.

## 6. Data Collection

The researcher collected the data as follows:

- (1) The researcher asked for a letter from the university to ask experts for help in testing (trying out) the tools, evaluating the validity of the instruments for evaluating current and desirable conditions, and assessing the suitability of the components through focus group discussion. The experts helped assess the model's suitability, feasibility, and usefulness.
- (2) The researcher sent questionnaires and various assessment forms by himself and by mail, collected the data, and checked their completeness. The statistics used were frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation and modified PNI.

## 7. The findings

- (1) Components of quality of life towards excellence for the elderly in elderly schools in the Northeastern region comprise 6 elements: 1) environmental, 2) physical, 3) economic, 4) social, 5) mental and emotional, and 6) spiritual aspects.
- (2) The current condition of the overall quality of life development was at a moderate level, while the desirable condition was at high level. The criteria for developing the quality of life of the elderly towards excellence are very high with the following priorities: environmental, physical, economic, social, mental and emotional, and spiritual aspects, respectively.
- (3) A model for developing the quality of life towards excellence for the elderly consists of 3 parts. Part 1, the introduction, consists of 1) principle, 2) purpose, 3) curriculum, and 4) utility. Part 2 provides operational guidelines for elderly schools, comprising 1) management, which consists of an operating committee, management strategy, teaching and learning management; and 2) activities that help develop six key components of excellent life quality for the elderly in an elderly school: environmental, physical, economic, social, mental and emotional and spiritual aspects. To develop quality of life, 25 activities were implemented: 1) workshops for sharpening skills in the use of ICT in daily life, 2) sharing of knowledge, 3) residential decoration, 4) building a collaboration network, 5) training to enhance knowledge, 6) activities of 5 s', 7) volunteering, 8) home visits, 9) setting up an elderly welfare fund, 10) a study tour, 11) exercise, 12) sports and games for the elderly, 13) building awareness, 14) scheduling daily routines, 15) self-knowledge acquisition, 16) cooking for health, 17) organizing a community market or an online trading market, 18) community product exhibition, 19) activities collaboratively arranged by home, school and temple, 20) vocational skills training, 21) setting up production groups for the health of the elderly, 22) self-esteem 23) traditional cultural and religious activities, 24) mental development, and 25) recreational activities. Part 3 involves finding conditions for success and then conducting measurement and evaluation.
- (4) The quality of life development model for excellence for the elderly in the Elderly Schools in the Northeast was found to be appropriate, feasible and useful at the highest level.
- (5) The results of the experiment were that the quality of the elderly life improved significantly, rising to the level intended, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Assessment results of the quality of life of the elderly in the school for the elderly of the Subdistrict Administrative Organization. Wanon Niwas, Sakon Nakhon Province before and after the experiment

| Quality of life components towards excellence | Quality of life before the trial |      |         | Quality of life after the trial |      |         |
|---|----------------------------------|------|---------|---------------------------------|------|---------|
|   | $\bar{x}$                        | S.D. | Results | $\bar{x}$                       | S.D. | Results |
| 1. Environmental                              | 2.21                             | 0.33 | Low     | 2.91                            | 0.24 | High    |
| 2. Physical                                   | 1.72                             | 0.24 | Low     | 2.99                            | 0.10 | High    |
| 3. Economic                                   | 1.84                             | 0.45 | Low     | 2.95                            | 0.09 | High    |
| 4. Social                                     | 1.90                             | 0.57 | Low     | 2.63                            | 0.22 | High    |
| 5. Mental and emotional aspects               | 1.93                             | 0.48 | Low     | 2.20                            | 0.19 | Medium  |
| 6. Intellectual/spiritual                     | 1.80                             | 0.35 | Low     | 2.13                            | 0.17 | Medium  |
| Total   | 1.89                             | 0.34 | Low     | 2.72                            | 0.12 | High    |

Table No.1 shows the results of the quality of life assessment towards excellence for the elderly in the elderly schools in Wanon Niwas Subdistrict Administrative Organization, Sakon Nakhon Province. The post-test mean ( $\bar{x}=2.72$ ) was moderately higher than the pre-test mean ( $\bar{x}=1.89$ ), which was low. When classified by aspect, it was found that the quality of life before the experiment was at a low level in all aspects. The average scores were, in descending order, as follows: environmental ( $\bar{x}=2.21$ ), mental and emotional ( $\bar{x}=1.93$ ), social ( $\bar{x}=1.90$ ), economic ( $\bar{x}=1.84$ ), intellectual/spiritual ( $\bar{x}=1.80$ ), and physical ( $\bar{x}=1.72$ ).

The quality of life after the experiment was at high level in four aspects, with the mean values in descending order as follows: the physical aspect ( $\bar{x}=2.99$ ), economic aspect ( $\bar{x}=2.95$ ), environmental aspect ( $\bar{x}=2.91$ ) and social ( $\bar{x}=2.63$ ). Mental and emotional aspects ( $\bar{x}=2.20$ ) and intellectual/spiritual ( $\bar{x}=2.13$ ) were both at a low level. In summary, the quality of life assessment for excellence for the aging in elderly schools, Wanon Niwas Subdistrict Administrative Organization, Sakon Nakhon Province, showed that for 30 older students, the overall quality of life of the elderly increased significantly.

## 8. Discussions

The researchers discussed the results according to the research objectives as follows:

(1) The results of the quality of life components analysis towards excellence for the elderly in the elderly schools in the region of the Northeast, showed that there were six aspects: 1) environmental aspects, 2) physical aspects, 3) economic aspects, 4) social aspects, 5) mental and emotional aspects, and 6) intellectual and spiritual aspects. These six aspects are essential and important to quality of life of the elderly because Thailand has important medical and public health goals that consist of 2 parts: longevity and good quality of life. It is clear if people pass through any stage of life without impairment or fatal sickness, those people will surely live longer or even to live up to 90 and over.

The researcher can assert that if the elderly in particular possess the six key components of excellent life quality, their life expectancy should be at least 90 years. This is consistent with the World Health Organization's definition of "health" as not merely the absence of disease but as having physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing. It is also in line with the WHO definition of quality of life: "Quality of life is the perception of satisfaction and wellbeing of a person living in society fulfilling their own goals and expectations within the context of culture, values, social norms, and other related conditions" (The WHOOL, 1994, cited in Wanna Kumanchan, 2000).

Regarding the needs priority for development of quality of life towards excellence for the elderly in the elderly schools in the Northeastern region, ranked with the highest frequencies is environmental aspect. This is because environment has an important influence on human adaptation. Living in good environments—natural, social, and spiritual—will be an important and impactful factor in promoting physical and mental health. Providing an environment suitable for daily life that does not cause dangerous incidents to the elderly but includes housing, public places, and community facilities helps the elderly perform their own daily activities more easily, (Ministry of Public Health, 2015). This can also help those who live alone reduce the chance of slipping and falling or prevent accidents from stumbling, a major cause of disability in the elderly, which is in congruence with the research of Provost Wirat Thammachot and his team (2019). The results of his study indicated that the health management guidelines regarding the environment for the elderly should enable them to use their knowledge and experience in life to be of service to

the community and society and use the elderly in the elderly school as a basis for the development of housing and a vital environment.

(2) Regarding the current and desirable conditions and needs for quality of life development towards excellence for the elderly in elderly schools In the Northeastern region, it was found that current conditions in improving quality of life, overall, are at a moderate level. This is because Thai society has not quite yet been awakened to the reality that they are an aging society. The aging society is just emerging in Thailand. The level of preparation for becoming an aging society is not yet fully realized despite the government's policy and enacted laws. Although agencies exist that are responsible for this area, there is still the problem of a budget to support these policies, including economic problems that are causing the inadequacy. Poor caregiving during illnesses, or lack of prevention of such illnesses, are consequences of this lack of support from various agencies and organizations. Moreover, the number of elderly people has increased to 14 million out of the total Thai population of 70 million (Geriatric Research and Development Institute Foundation Thailand, 2017). The elderly with health problems caused by the deterioration of the body (Phra Maha Amnaj Sawadee, 2017) that place the current conditions in the development of quality of life excellence for the elderly at a moderate level.

As for conditions that are desirable for improving the quality of life of the elderly, overall, they are at the highest level. This is due to the need to prepare themselves, their families, and their communities for entering an aging society. They must be fully aware of the situation and prepare themselves to enter a rapidly aging society so that they will be happy with a good quality of life. As the proportion of elderly increases, people of working age must work harder and bear more of the burden of taking care of them. Most of the time, this causes the elderly to starve for warmth; their abandonment leads to psychological problems. Without work, the elderly can feel lonely, not as proud as burdening with grandchildren. They may feel sad and depressed; therefore, they need more people to care for them.

Economically, physical health problems create a difficult life for the elderly if there is no plan to accumulate savings. To save for spending in old age, it is necessary to prepare to accumulate savings or to plan for investments to earn income and save for later life. (Department of Older Persons, 2021) Moreover, all sectors of society need to help create readiness for people to enter the aging society. That is why a desirable condition in the development of the quality of life of the elderly is at a very high level.

The priority of needs index (PNI) for developing the quality of life of the elderly towards excellence has priorities as follows: From the highest to the least needed aspects are environmental, physical, economic, social, mental and emotional and spiritual, respectively. The reason for this priority is that the elderly have a desire to create their own environment by having suitable and sound accommodation, being hygienic and very safe. For example, they should have separate zones in the house with bedrooms, living rooms, general living areas, and a bathroom. They should be provided a good physical environment suitable for their health, such as a health garden, flower planting, and an organized waste disposal system. In addition, they also require a security service, such as guards provided by agencies and communities, notification and alarm systems, and safety patrols. Therefore, there is a real need for development in the first place for a good environment: a vital environment must be arranged for the elderly.

The physical aspect follows: the elderly have a need for exercise on a regular basis. There must be places for exercise with knowledgeable health consultants. The elderly must be aware of their own health and fully understand that "prevention is better than cure."

(3) As for the results of creating and developing a model for developing quality of life towards excellence for the elderly, the model consists of 3 parts. Part 1, the introduction, consists of 1) principles and rationale, 2) objectives, 3) curriculum, and 4) usefulness Part 2 consists of operational guidelines, measurement and evaluation. Part 3 describes key success factors.

How the model was developed is consistent with the research of Pichet Phopakdee (2010), who indicated that the model comprised three components (parts). Part 1, principles and objectives of the model, consists of 1) the principle of the model and 2) objectives of the model. Part 2 described the structure and content of the model. Part 3 describes implementation and conditions for success. This is because the model has a systematic building process, a quality creation and development process. The researcher first drafted the model after extensive searching and collecting data and analyzed data obtained from both Thailand and abroad with more than 23 sources. The researcher also interviewed administrators of three model schools with best practices for the elderly together with taking into consideration the context of real-world practices and direct experience. The synthesis was deliberately and carefully done.

In addition, the researcher also studied the current and desirable conditions and needs for development of quality of life to obtain information from actual practices, including prioritizing development needs that will help develop what comes first, which will bring the most benefits and meet the real needs in actual implementation of the model.

The model and the draft of the model were deliberately examined and screened by highly qualified experts assessing the suitability, feasibility, and utility of the model. The developed model was completed.

(4) In the fourth step, model evaluation and affirmation, the model was found to be appropriate (suitable), feasible (possible), and useful (of utility). The result of model evaluation and assessment, in all, is at a high level. This is because the model for developing the quality of life towards excellence for the elderly in the elderly schools in the Northeast of Thailand has gone through an efficient creation process and the validity was also tested. The model has been deliberately created, thoroughly verified, and determined and affirmed by fully qualified experts.

With quality data obtained from real-life situations and direct experience of the right informants, the model should be regarded as very effective and sophisticated. It should be valuable and will have real impact on the elderly in the elderly schools. Moreover, the model was reviewed, refined and approved by experts who have specialized in the field. It is in line with the work of Poonsuk Hingkanon (1997), who also acknowledged that assessing this kind of soft skills and values needs real and right experts who have deep and profound knowledge in the matter, which this researcher also realized and by which he has abided. The model in this study is also in congruence with the study of Kevalin Jasatop et al. (2021). Its process of model creation and development is quite similar and leads to similar results with regard to suitability, feasibility, and utility.

(5) The results of model experimentation and implementation revealed that after implementing the model, the quality of life of the elderly is improved significantly. This significant improvement is due to the creation of the model that is based on the philosophy of lifelong, informal, and alternative education, which are very relevant and quite suitable for adults, especially older adults in particular. Six components integrating environmental, physical, economic, social, mental and emotional, and spiritual aspects together should be comprehensive, valid, and solid enough to help nurture and develop the elderly life of excellence if the model is efficiently and effectively implemented. The model can be implemented effectively in schools or institutions in other regions or nations if suitably applied. All activities designed and provided in the model are practical and easy to execute. Moreover, the manual, as a guideline for implementation, is provided and has been deliberately examined and affirmed by the experts specialized in the field. There is also a monitoring and continuing evaluation system that makes the model complete and subject to revision for better and further development, which is the essence of the term “excellence.”

In sum, with the passion and strong determination of the researcher and with the assistance of experts and all willing participants from beginning to end, the researcher is confident that the developed model can be of great benefit for those who really, really intend to improve and develop the quality of life of the elderly with excellence and then share together for better and best practice being from good too great to excellence, as Vince Lombardi asserted: "Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence." Or, as Pat Riley said, "Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better." Certainly, further and better studies on this issue should be conducted to maintain excellence and continually improve the quality of life for the elderly.

## 9. Recommendation

(1) The findings of this research can help those who make policies, strategic plans, and guidelines for developing the quality of life of the elderly in other organizations or agencies for the benefit of the public in general.

(2) There should be more research studying the quality of life of the “oldest of the old” in particular.

(3) There should be a study comparing the life of older men and older women in Thailand.

(4) The model can be applied in any other elderly schools or institutions, depending on each individual culture and context.

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