

Development Status and Optimization Strategies of Yibin City's Senior University under the Background of Active Aging

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of deepening population aging and the advancement of active aging strategies, the senior university, as the core carrier of elderly education, serves as an important platform for improving the public service system, meeting the spiritual and cultural needs of the elderly, and promoting social participation among the aging population. This study takes the Senior University of Yibin City as the research object, employing literature review, field research, and interviews to examine its current development status from four dimensions: curriculum system, teaching models, faculty strength, and information management. It analyzes practical problems in the operation process, such as curriculum homogenization, unstable teaching staff, and prominent supply-demand contradictions. Based on local development realities, targeted optimization strategies are proposed from the aspects of teaching system construction, full-chain teacher management, and lifelong learning network building, aiming to promote the high-quality development of elderly education in Yibin City and facilitate the equalization of basic public services.

Keywords: elderly education; senior university; active aging; equalization of public services

0. Introduction

As China's population aging process continues to accelerate, active aging and the construction of a lifelong education system have become important elements of social governance and public service quality improvement in the new era. Elderly education, as an interdisciplinary field between aging affairs and education, is not only a livelihood project to enrich the spiritual and cultural life of the elderly and improve their quality of life but also a key lever for revitalizing elderly human resources, alleviating the pressures of an aging society, and promoting the equalization of basic public services. Sichuan Province is one of the regions with a higher degree of aging in China, and Yibin City is among the prefecture-level cities with a significant aging population. Compared with developed regions in China, elderly education in Yibin started relatively late. After large-scale popularization, shortcomings in curriculum construction, teacher development, governance models, and digital services have gradually emerged, making it difficult to fully meet the differentiated learning needs of the local elderly population. Based on this, this paper, grounded in the local development realities of Yibin City, investigates the operation of the Yibin Senior University, identifies existing development shortcomings, and proposes targeted optimization paths suitable for regional development, providing practical references for the high-quality and sustainable development of local elderly education.

1. Analysis of the Current Development Status of Yibin Senior University

1.1 Overview of Yibin Senior University

The Yibin Senior University and the Yibin University for Retired Cadres operate under a "two names, one team" model, under the supervision of the Municipal Bureau of Retired Cadres. Their functions have distinct emphases: the Yibin Senior University is open to all elderly people in society, with the core function of developing elderly education and meeting the learning needs of the general elderly population; the Yibin University for Retired Cadres focuses on serving retired party and government officials. In recent years, the university has focused on three major directions—smart facilities, smart teaching, and smart platforms—to promote information construction and accelerate the modernization of elderly education. In 2024, the university

collaborated with a third-party organization to develop a dedicated information management system, enabling fully online operations for registration, venue booking, and course scheduling. In 2025, community-based teaching sites across the city began offering regular courses, including popular subjects such as musical instruments, vocal music, and physical conditioning. The number of elderly students has grown steadily, creating a positive atmosphere of "weekly activities, monthly performances, and universal participation" in elderly education across the city. More than 2,000 cultural and sports activities for the elderly are held annually, involving nearly 10,000 participants, with the coverage and influence of elderly education continuing to rise.

1.2 Current Construction Status of Yibin Senior University

1.2.1 Curriculum System

Yibin Senior University is based on the principle of demand-orientation, and through online surveys and in-person visits, it has gathered students' learning requirements to inform the Design of the curriculum. Based on the data from 2021 to 2025, the university has gradually integrated and improved its programme categories, and at present, there are five main departments: Vocal Music, Dance and Physical Education, Fine Arts, Instrumental Music and Language. Generally speaking, the curriculum is divided into traditional regular courses and characteristic innovative courses. The old courses are traditional subjects such as calligraphy, painting, vocal music, dance and Tai Chi for health preservation, which are still the main courses of the school. At the same time, new classes such as electronic piano, African drum, flower arrangement, tea culture and practical English have been introduced and are popular with more than 2,400 people. In addition to regular classes, the university also regularly organises public lectures on winter health preservation, fraud prevention and emergency rescue, nutritional health, etc., to add more forms of public courses and address deficiencies in the general knowledge of older people.

The enrollment data from 2021 to 2025 show that, after an initial drop, there has been a recovery: In 2021, 2,145 students were enrolled (the highest in the past five years); due to various reasons, enrollment fell to 920 in 2023 (the lowest point), and then rose again to 1,030 in 2024 and 1,080 in 2025, suggesting that the willingness of older people to participate in education is gradually improving.

1.2.2 Teaching Models

Yibin Senior University is in line with the mission of "building the school through political education" and has created a diverse teaching model that integrates online and offline courses, connects classroom instruction with off-campus activities, etc., to provide all-round ideological and political education. On the one hand, ideological and political education is incorporated into all parts of the daily teaching, and new forms have been introduced, such as "First Lesson of the Semester", "Five-Minute Micro-Party Class Before Class", scenario-based party classes, and red-themed film screenings. Every semester, experts from the Municipal Party School are invited to give special lectures at the beginning of the term. Daily theoretical study will be organised in classes under the guidance of class leaders, group recitation, thematic choir and discussion seminars to transmit red culture and strengthen ideological education. At the same time, offline teaching is also personalised and differentiated. The school often organises teachers' meetings and classes for students to discuss how well the teachers are teaching, and based on this feedback, the teachers need to form regular teaching plans for older people.

1.2.3 Faculty Configuration

Yibin Senior University currently has more than 20 full-time teachers in the fields of music, dance, calligraphy and painting, instrumental music, etc., and is building a younger, more professional team in accordance with this principle. To increase the strength of faculty reserves, various cooperation channels have been established by the university with local universities such as Yibin University and Yibin Vocational and Technical College, industry associations

and social training institutions to attract high-quality talents. University professors are invited to organise special courses for the construction of a "silver-age learning community", and a regular communication channel has been set up to organise teacher symposiums to collect their opinions and suggestions on student enrolment, curriculum optimisation, classroom management, teaching support, etc., and promptly address practical problems that arise in teaching. Most of the teachers are part-time staff or external contractors, and their work to teach each day is organised in cooperation with outside groups.

2. Existing Problems in the Development of Yibin Senior University

2.1 Homogenized Curriculum and Insufficient Targeted Supply

First, the curriculum is monotonous, with severe homogenization. Current courses still center on leisure and entertainment, with traditional subjects like vocal music, dance, and calligraphy and painting accounting for a very high proportion. Courses are highly repetitive across academic years, lacking innovation. The educational orientation leans toward leisure education, overly emphasizing enriching the cultural and recreational lives of the elderly, while failing to adequately offer practical courses such as smart living skills, health management, legal rights protection, and elderly human resource development. The school administration, concerned about low enrollment in high-threshold or emerging courses due to perceived lack of acceptance among students, has adopted a conservative approach to curriculum iteration, resulting in lagging development of new course categories.

Second, supply-demand matching is low, and teaching models are rigid. Elderly students participate in senior universities for three main purposes: social interaction, life adaptation, and self-fulfillment. However, the existing curriculum system does not precisely address these diverse needs. Some courses rely only on single-channel feedback from students for content adjustment, lacking systematic demand surveys, course evaluations, and dynamic iteration mechanisms. A common phenomenon is "teaching based on teacher availability," where most teachers rely on personal experience rather than designing teaching plans that consider the cognitive patterns and learning characteristics of the elderly.

2.2 Unstable Teaching Staff and Prominent Structural Imbalance

First, there is high teacher turnover and poor team stability. Yibin Senior University has no full-time faculty on permanent staff; all instructors are part-time external hires from partner universities, social training institutions, and arts groups. Part-time teachers come to campus only during teaching hours, with limited interaction with administrators and students. Moreover, part-time positions lack job security, offer low pay, and provide no career development pathways. Most teachers treat senior university teaching as a side job, with their willingness to participate heavily influenced by personal interest, leading to frequent talent loss and difficulty in forming a stable core teaching team.

Second, the professional structure is imbalanced, and overall competency varies. In terms of age structure, teachers aged 50 and above account for 50%, with insufficient young teachers, resulting in an aging team. Regarding professional backgrounds, most teachers possess skills in arts and sports-related fields but lack knowledge of pedagogy and geriatric psychology, making them inadequate in understanding the physiological and psychological characteristics of the elderly. In terms of subject distribution, there is an abundance of arts and sports teachers, but a significant gap in emerging fields such as health management, psychological counseling, and digital technology instruction, which cannot support the offering of diversified courses.

2.3 Supply-Demand Mismatch and Insufficient Resource Allocation

On one hand, there is a shortage of enrollment slots, highlighting the problem of "one seat hard to get." As aging intensifies, the demand for cultural and learning activities among the elderly

continues to grow. The university's stable enrollment per semester is only about 1,000 students, far from meeting the learning needs of the elderly population in the region. Popular courses such as vocal music, dance, and calligraphy face fierce competition for enrollment. Insufficient venues, classrooms, and class numbers have become core bottlenecks limiting the expansion of the school.

On the other hand, online education lags behind, and digital service capacity is weak. The elderly are a digitally disadvantaged group; most elderly people lack proficiency in using smartphones and the internet, raising the participation threshold for online courses. Furthermore, the university's online cloud classes mainly repost general national courses, with no locally produced, customized online courses. Online and offline courses cannot complement each other, making it difficult to use online channels to divert offline students and relieve venue pressure. In addition, inadequate network hardware and recording equipment in some older classrooms further hinder the promotion and application of digital teaching.

3. Optimization Strategies for the Development of Yibin Senior University

3.1 Building an Integrated, Hierarchical, Demand-Oriented Teaching System

First, set the "three-in-one" curriculum goal of "health, participation and security", and instead of focusing solely on "leisure and entertainment", build a diverse curriculum system according to the strategy of active aging. Health courses should focus on the physical and mental health of older people, covering areas such as health preservation, exercise rehabilitation, emotional counselling and chronic disease management, etc., to provide a good life for older people. Participation courses aimed at improving social adaptation should offer practical content for older people, such as how to use a mobile phone, smart travel services, online shopping, etc., so that they can live more comfortably in the digital age. In conjunction with the judicial and community service departments, special lectures on legal awareness, fraud prevention and rights protection should be organised in the security school to protect the legitimate rights and interests of older people. These three modules of the curriculum should work together to meet various needs for entertainment, practicality and self-improvement.

Second, construct a three-tier hierarchical curriculum system of "basic, expansion and empowerment". The basic tier should include traditional culture and recreation courses, such as vocal music, dance, calligraphy, etc., to reduce the entry barrier, meet the basic needs of older people for leisure and socialisation, and achieve broad coverage. The expansion tier will cultivate the sense of social participation by holding community service activities, study tours, cultural and sports performances, etc., to integrate classroom learning with social practice and enrich the retirement life of older people. The empowerment tier is to develop elderly human resources, offer courses in traditional skills inheritance, volunteer service skills, local culture interpretation, etc., tap into the experience and life wisdom of older people, have them participate in cultural heritage and community governance, etc., to achieve "productive aging".

At the same time, build a regular demand survey system to continuously collect the needs of students through questionnaires, symposiums, one-on-one interviews, etc., and take advantage of this for curriculum adjustment.

3.2 Construction of the full-chain Teacher Management System for "Selection, Training, Use and Retention".

Expand Recruitment Channels and Optimise the Faculty Structure. To enlarge the teaching staff, cooperation will be strengthened with local universities, arts groups and industry associations to attract more professional teachers for the long run, and at the same time, retired teachers, inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, skilled individuals and outstanding older students will be engaged as part-time instructors to promote a "senior teaches junior" model. Improve the age

and professional structure of the team, add teachers to shortage areas such as digital technology, health care and psychological counseling, gradually build a faculty team with a reasonable mix of older, middle-aged and younger members, and cover all major categories of arts, skills and services.

At the same time, strengthen the training system to improve the general teaching ability. Set up a regular and organised teacher training system with specific goals, content and times. Training content should include professional skills, gerontological education, psychology of older adults and communication methods, etc., to help teachers understand the learning traits and communication needs of older adults. Employ all sorts of training methods, such as special lectures, teaching and research exchanges, field visits and classroom observations, etc., and regularly organise cross-campus, cross-regional teaching and research activities to facilitate the sharing of teaching experience.

3.3 Construction of a Lifelong Learning Service Network

First, increase the number of resources at the grassroots level. Improve the four-tier school operation network of city, county, subdistrict and community. Motivate suitable communities, residential areas and villages to add elderly learning bases and promote the construction of "15-minute elderly learning circles" so that older people can learn at their local schools. Use the idle school buildings, community activity rooms and other places to reduce the lack of space and enrollment slots for the main urban senior university.

Second, boost social participation and invigorate the vitality of the older people. Have the older students in high school form "silver-haired volunteer service teams" and "cultural service teams" by organising them to take part in community governance, civilisation propaganda, public welfare performances, intergenerational exchanges, etc., guiding the elderly to be "service providers" rather than "learners" and thus boosting their sense of belonging and self-esteem.

Thirdly, establish all-season, all-weather, and no-season "study-health-tourism" activities. Utilize the local cultural and tourism resources of Lizhuang Ancient Town and Guanying Ancient Street in Yibin to design elderly study tour routes and cultural experience activities, integrate classroom learning, leisure health preservation and cultural tourism, expand the forms of elderly life, promote the transformation of elderly education from a single-classroom model to diversified experiential learning, and provide all-round support for the realization of active ageing.

4. Conclusion

In the context of population aging, the senior university is an important vehicle for implementing active aging strategies, promoting equalization of public services, and building a lifelong learning system. After years of development, Yibin Senior University has formed a preliminary school-running system with distinctive characteristics. However, problems such as curriculum homogenization, unstable teaching staff, lagging governance mechanisms, and supply-demand imbalances remain the main bottlenecks restricting its high-quality development. Based on local realities in Yibin, reconstructing a demand-oriented curriculum system, creating a full-chain teacher management model, and building a comprehensive lifelong learning network can effectively solve current development difficulties. In the future, Yibin Senior University must continue to uphold its public welfare orientation, take the real needs of the elderly as the core, continuously innovate school-running models, integrate social resources, deepen digital transformation, and continuously improve the quality of elderly education services, truly achieving "learning, enjoyment, and contribution in old age," and providing strong support for Yibin City's active response to population aging and the improvement of the elderly care service system.

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