

Research on the Establishment Standards for Elderly Education Institutions at the County, Township, and Village Levels in Dalian

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Abstract: In the “Reply to the Proposal on Further Strengthening the Construction of Elderly Universities in Our City (No. 0243)” from the First Session of the 14th Municipal Political Consultative Conference issued by the Dalian Municipal Education Bureau in 2022, it was stated that there are a total of 2 municipal-level elderly universities, 16 county-level elderly universities, 128 township-level community schools, and 1,267 village-level community education learning centers across the city. As China’s population ages, elderly education has become an important part of retired life for the elderly. Dalian has established clear requirements for the minimum building area, staffing of full-time personnel, and curriculum construction for the three-tier institutions (municipal, county, and township), providing favorable conditions for research on the standards for establishing elderly education institutions at the county, township, and village levels. This study analyzes the standards for establishing elderly education institutions at the county, township, and village levels in Dalian against the backdrop of an aging population, explores the issues with these standards, and proposes a three-tier coordinated model of county-level regional radiation, township-level inclusive coverage, and village-level flexible supplementation to empower the path analysis of setting standards for elderly education institutions. This lays a theoretical foundation for the development of standards for establishing elderly education institutions at the county, township, and village levels in Dalian, Liaoning Province, and provides practical references for improving the standards for establishing elderly education institutions across China.

Keywords: Elderly education; Educational institutions; Establishment standards; Standardized construction; Dalian City

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1. Current situation of establishing elderly education institutions at the county, township, and village levels in Dalian

1.1. Policy and institutional arrangements for three-tier coordination

The “Guiding Opinions on the Construction of Elderly Education Institutions in Dalian” issued in 2024

clearly outlines the institutional arrangements for three-tier coordination in Dalian^[1]. Municipal and county-level public elderly education institutions are to handle institutional establishment matters through the offices of the institutional establishment committees at their respective levels. Township and village-level elderly education institutions must obtain approval from the county education administrative departments before completing registration in accordance with relevant laws and regulations. County-level elderly universities should have a building area of no less than 2,000 square meters, with more than 1,000 enrolled students and at least 8 full-time staff members. Township-level elderly schools should have a building area of no less than 300 square meters, with more than 300 enrolled students and at least 3 full-time or part-time administrative staff members, based on the number of elderly people in the township. Village-level elderly learning centers should have a service area of no less than 100 square meters, with more than 100 participants in learning activities each year, and staff members serving concurrently by village committee members. The five departments of education, institutional establishment, civil affairs, finance, and human resources and social security should collaborate and advance their responsibilities to form a management pattern of overall coordination by the Party and government, and collaboration among departments.

1.2. Characteristics of learning needs among the elderly population

Elderly individuals studying at county-level elderly universities generally have commuting conditions and engage in systematic learning at fixed venues using fixed schedules, with higher demands for teacher allocation and diverse, systematic curricula. Elderly individuals studying at township-level elderly schools are more concerned with learning content related to health and wellness, practical skills, and daily life, with higher demands for practical and inclusive courses. Elderly individuals participating in village-level elderly learning centers primarily engage in organized learning activities and receive learning services.

1.3. Dependability of existing public service facilities

Dalian has accumulated a rich foundation of public service facility resources. As of 2021, there are 16 county-level elderly universities, 128 township-level community schools, and 1,267 village-level community education learning centers across the city. Party-mass service centers cover urban and rural grassroots areas, and community education learning centers adopt a three-tier educational network system. Public cultural facilities such as libraries and cultural centers have favorable venue conditions and foundations suitable for the elderly. Open spaces such as parks, squares, and community cultural squares are suitable for activity-based teaching.

2. Issues with the standards for establishing elderly education institutions at the county, township, and village level in Dalian

2.1. Insufficient support from county-level business guidance resources

In the existing three-tier educational network system, county-level elderly education institutions serve as a bridge connecting municipal-level policies and resources above and providing business guidance and resource support to township and village-level institutions below. However, county-level elderly education institutions in Dalian have a limited number of full-time administrative staff members, and most of their academic backgrounds do not match the needs of elderly education. They lack professional capabilities in curriculum design, teaching evaluation, and teacher training, making it difficult to provide professional

business guidance to lower-level elderly education institutions. At the county level, there is a lack of unified and standardized guidance criteria, and the special funds for elderly education are insufficient to support regular business training and teaching seminars activities ^[2].

2.2. Lack of substantive content in township-level educational activities

Elderly education institutions in townships in Dalian generally face the issue of having venues but no activities, or having activities but no substantive content. Many townships have established elderly education schools, but their activities are often formalistic. Courses such as those on preventing common diseases among the elderly, basic practical functions of mobile phones, and chess, which are needed by elderly individuals in townships, have low enrollment rates. Some townships only hold a few centralized lectures or seminars per semester, resulting in insufficient sustained stability in teaching supply. The existing activities are highly homogeneous, mostly consisting of lectures, lacking systematic courses on health and wellness, smart living, cultural and recreational leisure, and ideological literacy, making it difficult to meet the real-life learning needs of the elderly ^[3].

2.3. Difficulties in providing a stable supply of teachers at the village level

Village-level elderly education institutions in Dalian suffer from a shortage of teachers, relying mostly on part-time personnel such as retired teachers, village cadres, and volunteers. There is a lack of professional teachers with relevant backgrounds and long-term stability, and some remote villages struggle to find individuals with basic teaching conditions. The professional qualities of existing teachers vary greatly, and most village-level teachers have not undergone systematic training in elderly education teaching theories and methods, resulting in low interactivity in teaching organization and classroom design and low participation among the elderly. Due to the harsh working environment and low salaries at the village level, teachers for village-level elderly education have low enthusiasm, and personnel turnover is frequent, making it difficult to form a stable teaching team ^[4].

3. Optimization paths for the standards for establishing elderly education institutions at the county, township, and village levels in Dalian

3.1. increasing substantive resource coordination rights at the county level

County-level elderly education institutions should incorporate special funds for elderly education into their fiscal budget management systems at the same level, specifically for facility maintenance, the implementation of age-appropriate courses, and daily educational operations at township and village-level institutions. They should clarify the county-level institutions' rights to allocate, adjust, and supervise the funds. At the county level, qualification review criteria, unified training standards, and teaching evaluation criteria should be established for three types of teaching personnel: full-time teachers, part-time teachers, and volunteers in elderly education. Based on the educational needs of different townships and villages, county-level institutions should have the right to flexibly deploy teacher resources according to actual conditions to alleviate the shortage of teachers in remote areas ^[5]. County-level institutions should enjoy the right to coordinate and use various elderly education-related facilities and equipment within their jurisdictions. Public resources such as county-level cultural centers, libraries, community colleges, and party-mass service centers should be uniformly coordinated and scheduled for use by county-level elderly education institutions to avoid

redundant construction and resource idleness.

3.2. Establishing substantive educational requirements with categorized standards at the township level

Differentiated educational standards should be formulated based on township types. Suburban integrated townships should focus on curriculum diversity, the modernization level of teaching facilities, and the frequency of connections with urban elderly education resources. Agriculture-dominated townships should pay attention to the coverage of teaching points and the effectiveness of course arrangements during agricultural off-seasons. Population-outflow townships should focus on ensuring the basic learning needs of left-behind elderly individuals, appropriately lowering facility scale requirements but guaranteeing a minimum number of educational activities per month. Substantive teaching functions of township educational institutions should be clarified, with standards stipulating that township educational institutions should offer at least three regular courses per semester, with each course having a teaching cycle of no less than eight times ^[6]. They should organize at least two centralized training sessions for village-level educational backbones per year and conduct no less than one teaching guidance and quality inspection for village-level teaching points within their jurisdictions each month. These substantive educational requirements should serve as mandatory indicators for the annual assessment of elderly education institutions. In addition, minimum resource guarantee standards should be established for township educational institutions. For economically weak townships, special transfer payments should be set up by the municipal and county-level finances to ensure they meet basic educational conditions. The standards should clarify the minimum number of full-time administrative staff members, the lower limit of fixed teaching area, and a list of basic teaching equipment that township educational institutions must have.

3.3. Enhancing multi-layered teaching teams at the village level

Village-level elderly education institutions are closest to rural elderly individuals, so a position for a full-time instructor for elderly education should be established at the village level. It is recommended to set up a position for a full-time instructor for elderly education in each administrative village, which can be served concurrently by members of the village party and government committees, college student village officials, or full-time social workers purchased by the government. However, it must be clearly stated in the establishment standards that the weight of their work responsibilities in elderly education should be no less than 50%. The full-time instructor is responsible for the daily management of the village's elderly teaching point, student organization, record-keeping, and liaison and coordination with township educational institutions. This position should be included in the county-level elderly education teacher pool for unified management, and the instructor should receive no less than 30 hours of professional training per year.

A part-time supply mechanism combining township itinerant teaching and village-level auxiliary teaching should be established. Organized by the county level and implemented by townships, several itinerant teaching teams for elderly education in townships should be formed to regularly deliver teaching to village teaching points. The establishment standards should stipulate that each township should form at least two itinerant teaching teams, with each team consisting of no less than three teachers, and conduct at least one teaching activity in each village within its jurisdiction every quarter. At the same time, each village should tap into local talent resources such as retired teachers, retired cadres, folk artists, and village doctors to establish a roster of part-time teachers at the village level, with each person undertaking at least two

teaching or lecture tasks per semester. The county level should provide appropriate transportation subsidies and honorary incentives to outstanding part-time teachers at the village level.

A volunteer team for village-level elderly education should be cultivated. Low-age healthy elderly individuals, returning college students, and members of village work teams should be encouraged to participate in volunteer services for elderly education. The establishment standards should clarify the goal of forming a volunteer team in each village: each village should develop at least five relatively stable volunteers for elderly education to assist in classroom organization, learning guidance, health monitoring, and other auxiliary tasks. County-level and township educational institutions should establish training and incentive mechanisms for volunteers, organizing at least one special training session for volunteers each year, and conducting evaluations and commendations of outstanding volunteers.

For some remote village-level teaching points facing difficulties in having teachers present regularly, the establishment standards should require county-level institutions to build or connect to a distance teaching platform for elderly education and equip each village with basic intelligent teaching equipment. Through live classes, recorded classes, and dual-teacher classrooms, high-quality teaching resources can be directly delivered to village-level points.

4. Summary and prospects of the establishment standards for elderly education institutions at the county, township, and village levels in Dalian

4.1. Standardized construction path for the three-level education system

A systematic study of the establishment standards for elderly education institutions at the county, township, and village levels in Dalian can clarify the standardized construction path for its three-level education system. County-level elderly universities, serving as regional centers, should undertake comprehensive functions such as curriculum development, teacher training, and the establishment of remote education platforms, with their standards focusing on independent school premises, specialized classroom configurations, and the provision of full-time administrative staff. Township-level elderly schools emphasize their role as regional hubs, while village-level elderly teaching points prioritize convenience and accessibility, with standards focusing on fixed activity venues, remote viewing equipment, and local volunteer instructor teams. Standardized norms for the three-level education system contribute to the establishment of unified standards for elderly education institutions.

4.2. Innovative application of flexible framework in elderly education standards

In response to the diversity of elderly education participants, the variety of learning needs, and the uneven distribution of community resources in urban and rural areas, this standard system adopts a flexible framework that combines foundational indicators with developmental indicators, balancing equal access to basic public services with local actual development capabilities. Developmental indicators empower regions to make autonomous choices and incremental allocations based on their economic development levels, elderly population densities, and existing educational resources. Taking township schools as an example, on the premise of meeting foundational indicators, they can add characteristic course modules such as health and wellness, intelligent technology applications, and intergenerational co-learning according to actual needs to enhance educational quality and regional adaptability. The flexible design not only ensures the baseline fairness of elderly education public services but also stimulates local innovation in standard implementation, providing necessary institutional space for the sustainable promotion of standards.

4.3. Deep integration and development of elderly education and community education

Elderly education and community education share high similarities in terms of service targets, educational philosophies, and resource dependencies, making their integrated development an inevitable direction for deepening elderly education standards at the grassroots level. Dalian leverages its existing four-tier network of community universities, community colleges, community schools, and community teaching points to integrate elderly education functions. It incorporates courses on elderly health, leisure and entertainment, and civic literacy into the public service list of community education, while encouraging elderly individuals to participate in community governance and local cultural heritage, fostering mutual empowerment between educational learning and social participation. Efforts are made to cultivate “dual-qualified” talents who possess both community education guidance capabilities and the ability to undertake elderly education teaching tasks, improve policy mechanisms for integrated development, formally include elderly education in the community education supervision and evaluation system, and provide clear standard guarantees in terms of funding, staffing, and facility allocation, thereby truly achieving the organic unity of lifelong learning for the elderly and community co-construction.

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