

## Intergenerational Learning Program: A Bridge between Generations

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### Abstract

One of the goals of education can be considered the transfer of knowledge, skills, competencies, wisdom, norms and values between generations. Intergenerational learning program provide this goal and opportunities for lifelong learning and sharing knowledge and experience between generations. This review aimed to investigate the benefits of this program for the children and older adult and its application in health care systems.

An extensive literature search was conducted in some online databases such as Magiran, SID, Scopus, EMBASE, and Medline via PubMed until July 2016 and Persian and English language publications studied that met inclusion criteria. The review concluded that this program can be provided wonderful resources for the social and emotional growth of the children and older adults and can be used for caring, education and follow-up in health care systems especially by nurses. Also, this review highlighted the need for research about this form of learning in Iran.

**Key Words:** Aged, Child, Education, Intergenerational learning.

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## 1- INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important necessities for the human that without it, human is certainly would be incomplete. Having beneficial education is a fundamental right for all children (1-2). In all societies, schools are places to educate children in a similar age. Today, due to demographic changes, aging and consequently a longer life span for human, as well as changes in the family structure has been created the deficit in intergenerational harmony and cooperation. The covering this gap between generations and the important role of older people in children's education should not be forgotten (2-4).

The separation and limited contact between generations has disadvantages including less support for meaningful relationships and social and emotional growth, fewer opportunities for learning, understanding, acquisition of values, wisdom and skills for children and youth and lose the opportunity to vitality, love, support, and acquisition of the new technological skills for older people (5). Erik Erikson defined "generativity" as a criterion for successful aging and a fundamental and inherent need of human (adult) to expand their attention from self to others, transfer knowledge and wisdom and care for younger generations. This transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next generation may be done randomly or purposeful (3-4).

On the other hand, lifelong learning creates the opportunities for all generations to in-depth rethinking, education, learning and work (not necessarily jobs) that cause to enhance the quality of life. Systematic transfer and interactions of knowledge, skills, competencies, wisdom, norms and values between generations named intergenerational learning (5, 6). Intergenerational learning programs define by the International Consortium and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as "social vehicles that create purposeful and ongoing exchanges of resources and learning among older and younger generations" (7-9). Intergenerational learning opportunities recommended should be provided for all children. Societies need a re-creation and value to intergenerational relationships in order to creating purposeful life, sharing knowledge and experience between past and present and empathy and acceptance between generations. Also, the use of reciprocal learning and share knowledge and experience through intergenerational learning in sociocultural theory has benefits for culture and society. The theory of people like Dewey, Vygotsky and Erikson support of intergenerational learning and this learning program is a form of service based learning and its origins go back the Foster Grandparent Program in 1963 (5, 6, 9-12).

Intergenerational learning has been proved as an effective strategy for various groups; provides financial, emotional and social support to various generations and has a global application. Children and older persons can engage and reflect the meaningful and socially relevant learning opportunities together (2, 5, 6, 9). Opportunities for contact and communication between generations enable older adults to help other by listening, reflecting and offering advice and cause a sense of identity, and relieving loneliness, depression or anxiety, improved well-being, self-esteem and cognitive ability and an increased social contact for them (7, 10).

In this program, purposefully multi-generational participation and collaboration provide benefits for all and create the hope for mutual growth and personal connection between generations. In fact, in this program participant complement each other and the goal is that they have interaction, stimulation,

education, support, and provide caring for one another. This program has the possibility of holding in different places such as schools, community organizations, hospitals, kindergarten, nursing home and worship places (mosque) (6, 11-13). In this program, older people can be provide service for children and youth as tutor and mentor and children and young people can help in matters related to health and care, and teaching of new technologies such as computers or use of device to measuring sugar and blood pressure to older people (11). In many countries including Ohio and the United States runs the intergenerational school (TIS) as a model of intergenerational programs and older adults as a mentor teach the reading and mathematics to children (7). This program is compatible with empowerment theory and seeks to goals such as the mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation between generations (5). According to the importance, necessity and application of the intergenerational learning program for children, older adult and health care systems especially by nurses, this review aimed to explore the benefits of the this program for the children and older adult and its application in health care systems.

## 2- MATERIALS AND METHODS

An extensive literature search was conducted in some online databases such as Magiran, SID, Scopus, EMBASE, and Medline via PubMed, using the search terms: "intergenerational learning", "intergenerational programs", "older adults", "intergenerational relations", and "children". Searches were restricted to English and Persian language journals up July 1st, 2016. To ensure of search results, also was conducted a manual search of article references. Studies were included and eligible if the papers surveyed the effect of the intergenerational learning program for children and/or older adult and its application in health care systems,

were original or review articles, and access to the full text of the articles was available.

## 3- RESULTS

This program has immediate or long-term and complementary or shared benefits for both the older and younger learners. Among its advantages for both generations can be noted to the creation of a meaningful relationship and the feeling of being valued, accepted and respected and enhanced knowledge and skills (5). In our study, the search strategy identified 63 articles that after an initial screening of titles and abstracts, 20 articles were included in this review (**Figure.1**). The effect of the intergenerational learning program for children and/or older adult and its application in health care systems is presented in three themes labeled 'Benefits for older people,' 'Benefits for children' and the 'Application in health care system'.

### 3-1. Benefits for older people

The 7-year follow-up about long-term effects of an intergenerational program on functional capacity of older adults showed that the intellectual activity and active intergenerational lifestyles (interact with children) of the older adults that participated in group activities such as playing a hand game and reading picture books to children at kindergartens, elementary schools, and public childcare centers, were significantly maintained/improved than control group (4-5). Create a meaningful intergenerational relationship, serving as role models or mentors for student, a change in perspective about their own life and memoir development mentioned as a result of participation and positive experiences of intergenerational service-learning program for healthy older adults with college students (12, 14). Finding of a another study in Japan demonstrated senior that participated voluntarily in an

intergenerational health promotion program and engaged in reading picture books to children were more improved in self-rated to their health condition, social support for other, social networks (contact with grandchildren and others around the neighborhood) and physical performance (e.g., hand-grip strength) (10). Older adults that participate in teach of children in public elementary schools in USA showed the lower rates of disability in mobility, more effort to maintenance of independence, decrease in frailty, falls, and memory decline and increased social and psychological engagement in follow up 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, and 24 months later (15).

In another study that was done in London, young children and their grandparents participate in intergenerational learning program that ranging from storytelling to computer activities. The exchange of knowledge, enhances learning for both generations, children offering new knowledge as computer to the older generation, shared understandings and new forms of linguistic and cultural learning by using their different capabilities and mature relationship formed between grandchild/grandparent mentioned as results of this study (16, 17).

In Pennsylvania, older adults that provide internet-based tutoring for 5th-grade students, reported positive experience about their self-efficacy, comfort in using computers and awareness of the complexities that involved in using computers for instruction (18). Positive changes in mood and affection, enhanced quality of life and enjoyment from the interactions with the children was report as a results of an exploratory intergenerational program that where in participated the older adults with mild dementia and neurocognitive deficits and school aged children with language or reading concerns (19). The results of a study in day care center in Tokyo showed that the smiles, constructive behavior (the

elderly positively participated in the program), and intergenerational conversation were significantly higher in older adults that participated in the intergenerational programs with preschool children and these led to reinforce the interpersonal acceptance as a basic human need in older adults (10). Promotion productive aging with emphasis on physical and mental health and activity level of senior, having meaningful activities, improve self-esteem and memory function, a sense of responsibility and morale, higher social behavior and less solitary behavior, decrease of depressive symptoms and mortality rate, enhanced problem solving skills and physical mobility, change attitudes toward children, youth and toward self and life, increase quality of life for older adults, stimulate lifelong learning, emotional support, increase the life expectancy and life satisfaction, more willingness to perform daily activities, self-care and independence and prevent of feel the need for the use of long-term care institutions were listed as the some achievements of intergenerational learning program for older adults (11, 20-23).

### **3-2. Benefits for children**

The results of a study in USA showed that intergenerational learning program was effective in improving academic performance and behavior of children in public elementary schools. Improve in reading achievement and attention, motivation to learn, concentration, decreases in disruptive classroom behavior, improvements in school climate, reduced utilization of special services in school, self-respect, concern for others, propensity towards lifelong learning and importance for the adult health status, as well as future educational and occupational achievement were the outcomes of intergenerational learning program for these children (15). In a study in USA, students in the second grade visit

with elderly residents at two retirement facilities as grand friends monthly and they work together on a craft, draw pictures, or simply talk. Understanding of the needs of others and learn to interact with those of differing abilities, influences positively on the student's impressions of older adults, experience of giving and receiving assistance during activities for children, understanding and valuing for their role to create happiness in others were the results of this study for the children. All of the students said having a positive experience with their grand friend and recommend to other students for having interactions with older adults to learn from them and also helping the older adults to be happy (16).

Children who participated in an intergenerational internet tutoring program with older adult in Pennsylvania showed the improved recall, more important information remembered from their reading and increased the self-efficacy of the children (18). During an exploratory intergenerational program, the perception of school-aged children with language or reading concerns changed and became more positive about older adults with mild dementia and/or cognitive deficits. Also, changes in reading behaviors and mutual enjoyment were reported as results of this program (19). Synergy of interaction and time and guidance that given by the grandparents caused that child to do things that previously were not able to do it alone (16, 17). A transfer of traditions, values, culture and life-time skills were of the benefits of reciprocity learning as a result the intergenerational learning program for the young learner (5-8). Significant improvements in children's academic performance and self-management skills at school including reading, writing and increase social skills such as cooperation, communication, tolerance, concern and respect for the limitations of others, decrease negative behavior, prevention program for at-risk high school students,

create more positive attitudes toward older persons and the aging process and most importantly, provide emotional support and empathy were reported as outcomes of intergenerational learning programs for children and youth (9, 11, 21-23).

### 3-3. Application in health care system

Ageing is as an important stage in human life that require special attention (24). According to statistics of World Health Organization (WHO), ageing is a growing global phenomenon and problem (**Figures 2, 3**). WHO recommended for preparing and planning to active aging and enacting policies and programs that promote active ageing via increased participation and reduced costs in health care system. Intergenerational learning program introduce as one of these programs and services that it can be considered as a bridge for age differences, enhances the transmission of cultural values and promotes the worth among all ages. This program provides intergenerational activities in schools and communities and encourages older people to become role models for active ageing and to mentor the young people and provide for them this opportunity that assist to contribute the society (7, 25).

The intergenerational programs provide an opportunity of social engagement activities for older adults that it can help them to maintain mental and physical functioning levels and meaningful and impactful roles post-retirement (4, 17). The empowerment of the elderly in care of yourself and decrease of feel the need for the use of long-term care institutions, reduce economic costs related to the need for care, health and disease issues of this group of people, create a meaningful life and increase the quality of life, attention to the elderly as social capital that all of these are a part of the benefits of this program (8, 11, 24).

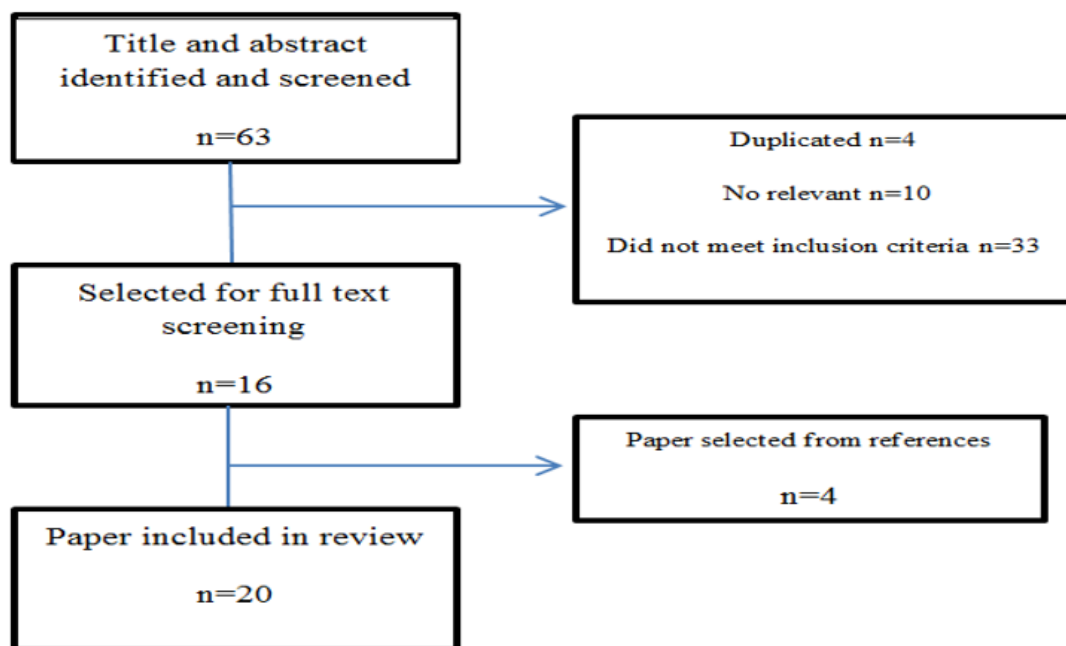


Fig.1: Flowchart search strategy.

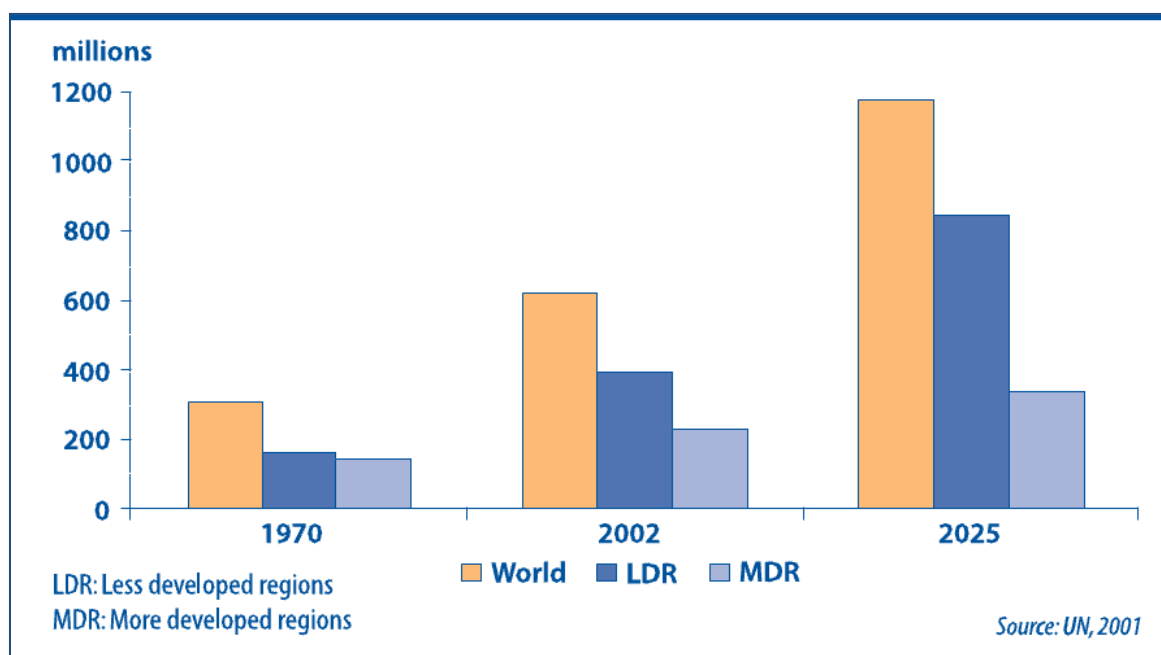
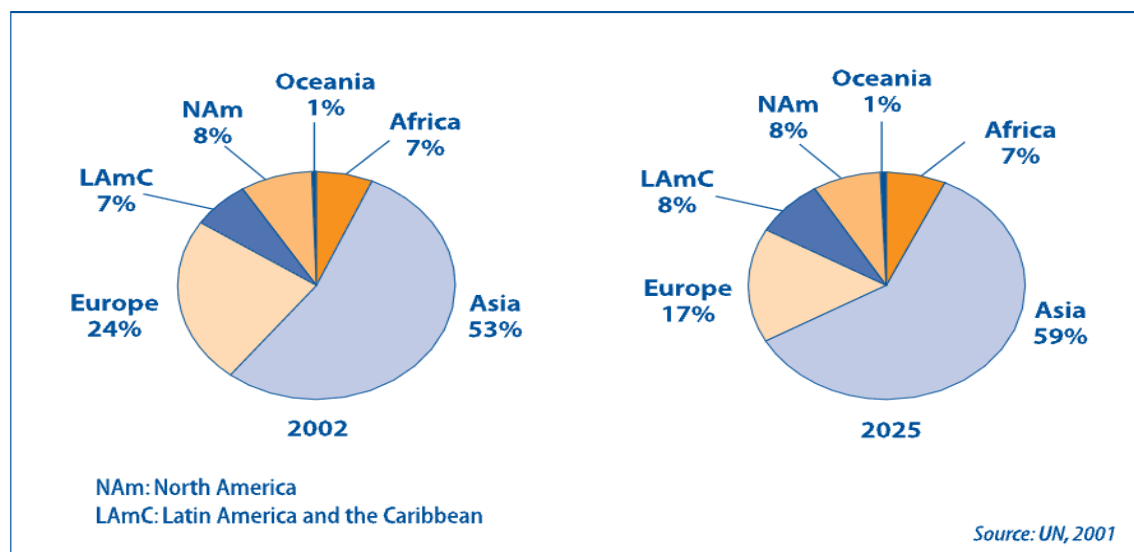


Fig.2: The number of people over age 60 in less and more developed regions, in 1970, 2000 and 2025 (25).



**Fig.3:** Distribution of world population over age 60 by regions in 2002 and 2025 (25).

#### 4- DISCUSSION

The main objective of this review was to investigate the benefits of the intergenerational learning program for the children and older adults and its application in health care systems. In all studies that above mentioned, intergenerational learning and program had a positive effect for children, older adults and in the healthcare system. The need of older adult and children to the caring, attention and learning can be provided in the intergenerational communication and interaction (7, 9, 26). According to personal communication importance in health and wellbeing, create the opportunities for a close and positive intergenerational interactions between children and older adults can be reduce the gap between the generations (7, 27).

Also, this program can be respond to the elderly need to more connected with the society according to theory of aging (28). This social engagement can be decrease the risk of cognitive impairment and incident dementia and has a positive and protective effect on cognitive performance (age-related hippocampal atrophy), mental

health and the affect (happier, calmer, and more valued) of older adults (29, 30). Of course, the benefits of this enjoyable program not be limited to improve the mental performance and it demonstrated some positive outcomes regarding the physical activity such as to reach target heart rate and levels of perceived exertion for older adults and children, as a promising obesity prevention program for children and improve the health habits of children (physical activity, health education and nutrition behavior practices) (31, 32). Intergenerational learning as one of the lifelong learning methods can be used in differently places, cultural and historical context such as schools, family life, social life and adult education (8).

Using of this learning and training method can be reduced costs of caring and education for children and older adults (5, 10, 33). However the intergenerational program can be provide wonderful resources for the social and emotional growth of the older adults and children and to reintegrate older adults into society but for its success needs attention to how programs planned, activities selection, facilitation strategies, create appropriate

opportunities for learning, mutually beneficial interactions, given meaningful roles to older adults, provide opportunities to reflect, close interaction and repeated contact and finally evaluation of this program (7, 11).

#### 4-1. Limitations of the study

This literature review was limited by the number and types of databases used. There was many articles published on intergenerational studies may include useful information, but did not inclusion criteria for the review in this study.

#### 5- CONCLUSION

The intergenerational learning program has the interesting benefits for children, older adults and in the healthcare system by providing a good opportunity for generation interaction and it can be considered as one of easy and convenient ways of life skills training to children. Since education is one of the important roles of nurses, they can get assist of this form of learning for caring, education and follow-up in these two age groups. Also this review highlighted the need for research about this form of learning in Iran.

**6- CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** None.

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