

The Influence of Gerontology Teachers on Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Education in Ghana: Appreciative Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

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The indispensable significance of gerontology teachers in shaping teaching and learning in early childhood education has largely been marginalized in scholarly discourse, albeit intergenerational learning grooms the emotional, social, and cognitive growth of young ones by enabling comprehensive connections with the elderly citizens. The goal of this narrative inquiry, guided by Appreciative Inquiry (AI), was to explore the role of gerontology teachers and their influence on teaching and learning at the preschool level in Ghana. The study was a multi-case qualitative study where ten teachers were selected through snowball sampling from three preschools in Mampong Municipality. The narrative thematic analysis technique was used to generate insight. The study unearthed that gerontology teachers play a critical role in incorporating age-related content in the curriculum, preserving traditional value systems, and combating ageing misconceptions. Intergenerational learning results in holistic Development through Intergenerational Learning, innovative teaching strategies, and Enhancing Social and Cultural Alertness. Conclusions and recommendations for practices are provided.

1. Introduction

For ages, intergenerational education has been the unstructured method within families for the sequential transfer of knowledge, skills, abilities, standards, and values among generations, and is timeless (Davis et al. 2023). Customarily, the elders or grandparents of the family share their knowledge and are valued for their role in continuing the values, culture, and originality of the family (Dixit & Goyal, 2011). However, in recent days, and in a more complex society, intergenerational education is no longer passed on solely by the family and is occurring beyond the family, including in schools where disciplines simplify these exchanges (Davis et al. 2023).

In the past three decades, educational models have been formed that connect older and younger persons in “extrafamilial” multigenerational education. As people age across the world, there is a growing need to infuse ageing awareness into education at all stages (Samba et al., 2023). Gerontology trainers present specialisation on ageing, generational ties, and social development, forming training techniques. Niles-Yokum (2019) states that “the art and science of gerontological pedagogy is a balance of multifaceted approach that provide learners with a pathway to the scope of the field of gerontology”. This applies to how gerontology teachers form teaching practices by combining different academic points of view. Their role reaches over the transfer of knowledge to fostering positive attitudes

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toward older generations, which can inspire the younger generation's opinions of ageing and societal roles (Davis et al. 2023). Gerontology education in Ghana mostly targets adult students as a result the importance of gerontology in early childhood education is ignored. Looking into how gerontology educators shape childhood learning can broaden understanding into encouraging respect for aging permanently.

Ageing of people is often illustrated as an upcoming crisis that will greatly affect the institutional foundations of society (Asante & Karikari, 2023). While these illustrations are often unpleasant, they have drawn attention to some of the problems that our society deals with and will continue to deal with. Davis (2015) insists that younger students must be aware of the impact of the ageing process on their lives, their families, and society as a whole. Such early education has the ability to undo unpleasant biases and increase interest in gerontology from a young age (Larsen et al., 2024). There has been appreciable progress in gerontology programs in preschool; however, the inclusion of gerontology into kindergarten education has failed to keep pace (Samba et al., 2023). In Ghana, early childhood education is the bedrock for continuous learning, yet focus has been driven away from how gerontology teachers participate in this process (Samba et al., 2023). Their participation could affect the formation of course designs, teaching styles, and student engagement in ways that raise awareness of respect for ageing and generational engagement. As Levy et al. (2009) state, ageism is a well-versed conduct that can be solidified or confronted through education, underlining the necessity for early action. Addressing this issue is pivotal because the forecast guarantees that the ageing population will increase rapidly in the coming years. If gerontology educators' duty to form children's opinions about ageing is realised, the government can bring new curricula that encourage intergenerational respect and awareness. Actions like this will encourage an all-age society in which persons of all generations acknowledge the worth of continuous education and knowledge exchange.

Ghana's population ageing is forecasted to continue over the next few decades at a rate higher than that of most affluent nations (Aikins & Apt, 2016; Kpessa-Whyte, 2018). The ageing of the population offers individual challenges to traditional social institutions, featuring education (Davis et al., 2023). According to Asante & Karikari (2023), organised guidance about ageing in grades K-16 seldom happens; if educators give ageing information at all, it tends to focus on geriatric health and social problems rather than on thriving and industrious ageing. An evaluation of current literature, however, revealed that Ghana has a thorough gerontology education system (Asante & Karikari, 2023). However, Gerontology studies assessing the function of teachers in shaping teaching and learning at the preschool stage are scarce (Samba et al., 2023). Because of a possible worldwide interest in the gerontological education concept, the time is now to consider the broad role of teachers in shaping teaching and learning at the preschool stage. This research aims to bridge the gap by bringing to light the impact gerontology educators have on early childhood education in Ghana. The outcomes of this analysis have the potential to enlighten educational policies, influence teacher training programmes, and serve as the basis for blending ageing education into the curriculum nationwide. If the role of gerontology teachers in early childhood education is well understood, this research can lead to significant reforms in intergenerational education in Ghana.

2. Related Literature Review

2.1 Gerontology Education in Ghana

The growth in the older population in Ghana comes with several challenges that may need trained professionals with specialised knowledge in geriatrics and gerontology to handle. Gerontology is a discipline concerned with the awareness of ageing as a societal phenomenon. It targets the physical and psychological aspects of ageing, as well as the social and societal outcomes of ageing (Asante & Karikari, 2023; Alidu et al., 2016). As a multidisciplinary technique to the study of ageing, gerontology is committed to understanding societal systems and structures, policies and programmes, and biological, physical, social, economic, and environmental conditions that impact ageing. Ghana has created and carried out a considerable number of policies that seek to foster the well-being of Ghanaians of every generation. Accepting a tactical vision of an all-inclusive and socially unleashed society, these policies offer security to persons most likely to live in cases of intense hardship and closely tied weakness and exclusion (Ashirifi et al., 2022; Ghana Ministry of Gender, Children & Social Protection [GMGCSP], 2010).

Gerontology education is not a familiar trait of preschool curricula in Ghana. Early childhood education mainly stresses the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of children through interactive learning and nurturing care. The curriculum generally does not cover structured learning about ageing or intergenerational communication. However, early childhood teachers knowledgeable about gerontological knowledge may embrace teaching models that encourage intergenerational learning, fostering empathy and respect for older adults (Gelish-Gugliucci, 1999; Larsen et al., 2024).

Gerontology teachers are instrumental in shaping early childhood learners' views on ageing. Their knowledge and experience can help blend intergenerational operations into preschool settings, permitting children to interact with older adults through storytelling, common events, or mentorship programmes. These interactions can encourage pleasant attitudes toward ageing and assist children in understanding diverse life stages. Topics include practical and theoretical views and the what, why, and how gerontological educators do what they do and how it can affect the learning environment, not only for learners but for the masses (Niles-Yokum, 2019). Despite these potential advantages, the handful of gerontology-trained professionals in Ghana (Asante & Karikari, 2023) can restrict the scale at which intergenerational learning is assimilated into ECE. The effect of gerontology teachers on preschool education remains largely uncharted in Ghana. There is a requirement for more inquiry to assess how their expertise affects early childhood educators' procedures to teaching and learning. Understanding this bond can present knowledge about how intergenerational learning can be competently embedded into preschool education to strengthen children's social and emotional development.

2.2 The Role of Gerontology Teachers

Infusing gerontological education into early childhood settings is not broadly implemented. Meanwhile, gerontology tutors can play an important role in early childhood education by encouraging intergenerational learning experiences (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008).

2.2.1 Curriculum Development

Emel (2023) delved into understanding how educators view ageing and underlined how educators' past experiences with older adults and personal comfort level with ageing inspired their beliefs and passion to teach about ageing topics. The outcomes reveal that educators' behaviours toward ageing, their interactions with older people (whether pleasant or unpleasant), and their opinions of ageing do not affect whether they consider teaching about ageing. Rather, the encouragement of administrators and parents, professional training, and appropriate ageing materials that can be effortlessly embodied into their current curricula are more important.

Gerontology teachers shape these early opinions by creating and executing activities that interact with young minds in understanding the ageing process. Through thoughtful pedagogy, they can connect the dots between generations, fostering a profound sense of respect and empathy among children. Gerontology tutors can create activities suitable to introduce young children to theories of ageing and the elderly. This can help clarify ageing and promote pleasant opinions from an early age" (Kaplan & Larkin, 2004). The objective is to strengthen gerontological content by involving older adults as counsellors on curriculum content and as teachers in their classes. Research suggests that "seniors could verify the appropriateness of the course content, including experiential dimension, and make solid suggestions for curriculum amendment that would more precisely reflect golden agers' experiences" (Greaves et al., 1995, p. 70).

2.2.2 Facilitating Intergenerational Interactions

Facilitating Intergenerational Interactions: By organizing engagements among young children and older adults, tutors can encourage mutual awareness and respect. Such engagements have been portrayed to benefit both groups, improving social and emotional development. By sharing their stories, mature adults strengthen themselves as well as play an influential role in the lives of other people as teachers. Gerontology teachers at the early childhood education stage can create activities that initiate young children to ageing and the elderly, helping to instil pleasant behaviours and respect from a young age. This early exposure can establish the basis for a lifelong awareness and understanding of the older generation. Engagements between generations mirror how younger persons reason and feel about mature adults. The younger generation must have a caring intuition of the requirements and experiences of older adults to assist the increasing ageing population (Robinson & Howatson-Jones, 2014). Education and intergenerational contact interventions decrease ageism related to people's attitudes, knowledge, and comfort in socialising with older adults." (Burnes et al., 2019). Intergenerational relationships reward not only the people involved but also the community that grooms these emotional connections. When a culture transfers ethics and heritage and keeps them whole from one era to the next, social identity is safeguarded through the passage of time ...

Social interventions that understand the worth of our interdependence cultivate coherence and strength within our respective communities.” (Larkin & Kaplan, 2010).

2.2.3 Combating Ageism and Fostering Positive Perceptions of Ageing

Ageism starts in childhood, and there is enough data to account for interventions to decrease or stop ageist behaviour from growing in children (Emel, 2023). Ageism, in the forms of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination toward people on the basis of age, has long-standing adverse consequences on the physical and mental health of older people. (Burnes et al., 2019, p. e2). Gerontology teachers at the early childhood stage can play an important role in carrying out these interventions by designing age-appropriate curricula that encourage positive views of ageing. Through engaging activities, they can aid children unfold empathy and understanding toward older adults. Providing children with ageing education will improve ageing-related knowledge, encourage optimistic ageing, fight ageism, and avoid unpleasant consequences later in life (McGuire, 2017; 2003). Interventions are associated with a sizeable decrement in ageism and should be part of an international plan to better view older people and the ageing process (Burnes et al., 2019). The adverse effects of negative age stereotypes indicate the necessity to create interventions that will increase the impact of older individuals’ positive age stereotypes in their everyday lives.

2.3 Intergenerational Contact Theory

Intergenerational Contact Theory (Granville & Campbell, 2007) suggests that organized and purposeful communication among children and older people will foster social cohesion and minimize biases. This theory is seated deep in the broader intergroup contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), which argues that if there are more interactions between the younger and older generations, discrimination and preconceptions in society will drastically reduce. The efficiency of intergenerational contact is determined by factors including the quality, frequency, and context of interactions. Given that these interactions happen under cooperative conditions with unbiased status and collective aims, the views and opinions of both generations towards each other become more positive (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

In the framework of this study, the Intergenerational Contact Theory gives good logical explanations for introducing programmes that encourage interaction between children and older adults in academic institutions. As the structure of the traditional family is experiencing revolution, formal education can serve as an innovative setting for intergenerational learning. It is stated that these types of interactions help the youth cultivate supportive views toward ageing, increase their awareness of ageing-related issues, and strengthen social bonds across generations (Davis, 2023). Through the adoption of this theory, the study can shed light on how organised educational interventions can moderate ageism and improve social integration.

2.4 Gaps in Existing Research

Though attention is shifting more to ageing and intergenerational relationships in education, studies remain limited, especially in the case of early childhood. In most scenarios, the research performed targets the Western or Developed Countries where intergenerational initiatives are standardised under established protocols. On the other hand, research is scarce in low and middle-income countries, which involve parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, where ageing and intergenerational teaching may go through unusual sequences caused by cultural and community dynamics (Harbison & Fabricatore, 2011; Hoffman, 2020).

This research handles this by targeting elementary school educators on ageing and their informal activities that include the older generation. In places like Ghana, where formal intergenerational education is underdeveloped, being aware of how our cultural values and the beliefs of teachers affect the interactions with the aged in society is very necessary. The study gives us the needed information for global education and ageing by underlining how traditions, values, and identity are passed on from generation to generation through everyday teaching. The discussion is further stretched to low and middle-income countries to encourage a comprehensive understanding of intergenerational learning practices across the globe.

3. Methodology

The rationale for the methodology centres on the deployment of a primary analytical research design for this study. The basis of qualitative research is that individuals develop knowledge constantly as they take part in and explain a task, experience, or phenomenon (Riessman, 2008). This inquiry probed the phenomenon of ageism and elementary school educators’ ageing perspectives. Because of the precise insights required to be aware of this phenomenon, a case study design was the best technique. More precisely, a descriptive exploratory method to understanding educators’ beliefs via in-depth individual Q&A sessions gave insight into the educators’ profiles and experiences that

shaped their opinions about ageing. A basic qualitative study's main goal is to identify and interpret how meaning is formed or how people make sense of their lives and their surroundings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

3.1 Data Collection

The sample size was 10 elementary school educators nationwide from three preschools. Snowball sampling was employed to recruit volunteers. Snowball sampling is a form of purposeful sampling and involves requesting volunteers to refer other volunteers while being questioned (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). Snowball sampling was selected for this analysis because it can spot participants who have detailed insights into the phenomenon of ageism in educators. This method is very effective when the target population is not easily accessible or identifiable, and it allows us to utilise existing networks to employ participants who have the needed viewpoints and experience.

This study's validation process involved gathering data through semi-structured question-and-answer sessions guided by 11 free-form questions. The questions were sent to volunteers before the Q&A session to grant volunteers time to process the questions and give more detailed information. The semi-structured Q&A sessions were arranged over two weeks, each lasting approximately 30-45 minutes. Some of the questions were: How do you incorporate ageing-related topics into your teaching curriculum? And in your opinion, why is it important to include ageing-related content in early childhood education?

3.2 Data analysis

Data analysis requires preparing and organising the data for analysis, then reducing the data into motifs through writing and summary, and finally presenting the data in a discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The writing process began with Step 1 analysis, which included cleaning up the documented data while thoroughly reading the content to become acquainted with the data. Reading the data and considering its quality is necessary because not all information will add meaning or value. Different highlighting pens were used to highlight words, phrases, and sentences that responded to the preliminary research question(s). Step 2 involved reviewing the summary and adding matching responses and interconnected motifs. Step 3 summarised the discussion in one or two words to group information and add writings into broader motifs to create a narrative (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

We decided to present the outcome of this study in the conventional written report style because we wanted to publish this study in an educational publication. Our results were arranged according to themes because written findings are often presented by category or theme (Wæraas, 2022). We gave a succinct introduction to that theme before providing other anecdotal quotations to bolster it. Our data was described in detail thanks to the narratives we included, and their preservation guaranteed that the information was understood and delivered clearly. We included quotes in story form for all the themes to support our findings.

Snowball sampling was chosen for this study due to its ability to reach participants who possess specific insights into the phenomenon of ageism in educators. This technique is effective when the target population is not easily accessible or identifiable, and it allows for leveraging existing networks to recruit participants with relevant experiences and perspectives.

3.3 Validation technique

To guarantee that the themes of the analysis are trustworthy, various qualitative techniques were utilised. To ensure accuracy, the study employed member checking, where participants were required to repeatedly review and verify their responses, as well as peer debriefing. It involved seeking advice from colleagues to further understand the meanings derived and ensure consistency. Triangulation was also implemented by comparing data from various sources to validate the results and improve the credibility of the analysis.

3.4 Appreciative inquiry as a methodological framework

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strengths-based philosophy and method for organisational and social change. This resource-based approach agrees with gerontological views that realize the inborn value, knowledge, and potential growth enclosed in the real-life experiences of older adults (Aboderin, 2021; Bashi, 2023; Jarldorn, 2022).

To concentrate research on peak experiences, liberating narratives, and generative metaphors, AI uncovers constructive spaces for progress to the surface by means of inclusive, collaborative processes (Mayoh & Neville, 2022). The synergy between AI's generative approach and gerontological knowledge creates gateways to change Early Childhood Education (ECE) pedagogies in culturally sustaining ways. The study leveraged attribute-based means to enable a detailed, integrated assessment of how the convergence of gerontology and ECE is understood, experienced, and ascribed purpose across different stakeholder groups. An interpretive paradigm permits the examiners to interact with the entangled sociocultural contexts and subjective facts forming intergenerational teaching and learning (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A multi-case study design was utilized, with three preschools in Ghana serving as the embedded cases. The scenarios were intentionally chosen to symbolize different geographic regions, facilitating comparisons between rural, urban, and peri-urban contexts. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations, and analysis of important records and items. Preschool teachers participated, promoting a systemic exploration of the complex factors inspiring intergenerational pedagogies. Interview and focus group protocols were steered by AI's 4-D cycle of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

The Discovery stage drew out vivid accounts of participants' peak experiences with gerontology-integrated teaching and learning, cultivating confirmatory narratives. In the Dream stage, volunteers imagined their ambitions for an impeccable future where gerontology well-formed ECE practices. The Design phase engaged stakeholders in co-constructing techniques and rules to bring to life these visions through elder involvement and indigenous knowledge integration. Finally, Destiny centred the research on fortifying and growing progress for transformation. This appreciative, affirmative method originated in-depth data shedding light on strengths like cultural pride, ancestral wisdom, and life experiences that place elders as vital references of teaching and learning. It underlined the possibility of intergenerational pedagogies to establish consciousness around ageism, reclaim indigenous epistemologies, and empower children's holistic development. The interpretivist evaluation addressed context-specific meanings, power dynamics, and difficulties encircling the integration of gerontology in ECE settings. Narrative and thematic techniques manifested common stories, metaphors, and widespread narratives that shaped case understandings (Riessman, 2008). Special focus was placed on unearthing different viewpoint and opinions frequently disenfranchised in popular educational discourse. This, decolonising, community-engaged study focused on Ghanaian stakeholders' experiential wisdom and aspirations. It showed pathways for restoring ECE using culturally grounded, intergenerational tactics that disturb ageist biases, foster interdependence across generations, and reinvigorate indigenous knowledge transmission. By synthesising gerontological knowledge through an appreciative lens, new visions came to light for holistic, revolutionary early childhood pedagogies established in homegrown value systems.

4. Findings

4.1 Role of gerontology teachers in teaching and learning

Findings related to the first objective, the role of gerontology teachers in teaching and learning are presented in this section. The themes that evolved were integrating ageing-related content into early childhood education, combating ageism through early education, and cultural preservation through intergenerational teaching.

4.1.1 Integrating Ageing-related content into Early Childhood Education

Creating a systematic order of learning that exposes the young ones to the ideas of ageing demands creativity, collaboration and a good comprehension of how preconceived notions are modified from an early age. Teachers narrated how they create age-appropriate lessons which makes ageing an interesting and relevant topic for the young ones:

"I incorporate ageing-related activities into the curriculum in such a way that young students find it interesting. I create age-appropriate activities that expose them to the idea of ageing and help them build a good perspective on senior citizens." (TA1).

"I plan exercises about ageing which is appropriate and interesting for young learners. Through these children are initiated to the concept of ageing and guides them to appreciate the older adults. These exercises can be modified by Teachers with a background in gerontology to help the children develop positive mindsets for ageing starting at an early age. I collaborate with elders in the community to form the content, their inclusion ensures that the exercise exemplifies realistic experiences and exalts the older generation" (TA3).

The account indicates teachers create lesson plans that include storytelling, hands-on activities that emphasize the experience of the elderly citizens and interesting discussions. They engage with the elders from the society as significant contributors to the systematic order of learning. This guarantees that the young ones obtain an original and respectful comprehension of ageing by including the voices of the elderly citizens (Larsen et al., 2024). They work with local elders to shape the content through joint discussions, shared decision-making, and collaborative lesson planning. An example of impactful lessons included a retired nurse who disclosed her experience with the young ones, lighting their curiosity and engaging in comprehensive discussions. With this approach, participant sees a shift in how the young ones understand ageing. Teachers understand it is a natural stage of life which is filled with meaning, value, wisdom, knowledge, empathy, and strong intergenerational connections.

4.1.2 Fostering Connection Through Intergenerational Learning.

Another theme “fostering connection through intergenerational learning” was evolved. Teachers who practice this method elaborated on how they use these discussions to build lasting connections between the young and old:

“Connecting generations is one of my favourite aspects of my work. I plan events that invite elder citizens to talk about their lives in schools. Children can also directly learn from their experiences. As teachers, older people encourage themselves and make a big difference in the lives of others by telling their stories” (TA2).

I design programmes that allow kids to engage with elders through music, storytelling, and group art projects. Children benefit from these activities by learning about and appreciating the ageing process. To help the ageing population, the younger ones need to be sympathetic to the needs and experiences of elderly ones” (TA5).

Interrogations indicate that through the involvement of elders in knowledge acquisition teacher encourage intergenerational connection. Ageing becomes realistic and thought-provoking because storytelling, music, and collaborative art are blended into the curriculum. Beyond teaching, the exercises help cultivate empathy, respect, and recognition of elders' contributions. This strategy enforces a mutual exchange as children acquire knowledge and elders also gain reenergized commitment. (McGuire, 2017). Out of the many participants, one admitted how this exercise made him feel valued when he shared his life stories. He continued to suggest that these interactions have mutual benefits as they also uplift the old. These intergenerational venues serve as opposition to ageist behaviours by presenting the elderly as active, wise, and worthy of attention. The duty of the teacher in this situation is to be helpful and promote the use of a structure in which instead of abstract lessons, bonds are the foundation of understanding ageing. The implementation of this approach changes the classroom into an avenue for mutual growth and social connection across age groups.

4.1.3 Combating Ageism Through Early Education.

Ageist stereotypes are able to develop at an early age in life, modifying how single persons imagine and communicate with elderly citizens. The theme “Combating Ageism Through Early Education” means teachers are catalysts in solving these. Devoted teachers disclosed how they incorporate activities that promote respect for the elderly and challenge myths about ageing:

“I realized that preconceptions against the ageing population can start from an early age, so I take it upon myself to handle it in my class. In most scenarios, I include exercises that will guide the children to ask questions about the elderly and how they behave. For example, we talk about myths such as older adults being frail and inactive. I advise them to analyse these myths carefully through realistic scenarios that show them elders who are still active and have a significant impact on the community.

“I deliberately oppose stereotypes about ageing in my lessons. One way I implement this is through segments where fallacies about the elderly are discussed. Another way is through Q&A sessions between the children and the elders in the community. The mentioned exercises help us to shape the mindset of children in a positive way which enlightens them to see ageing as a natural phenomenon and an important part of life”.

Teachers observed that tackling age-related stereotypes is very important because these illusions can be formed even at very tender ages. (Kaplan & Larkin, 2004). Consequently, exercises that encourage straightforward interactions are intentionally embedded in the curriculum. Through guided discussions and real-life examples like illustrating how elders who are still active contribute to the community, children become truer and more respectful to the ageing population. Additionally, the teacher pays critical attention to interactive learning through which children are permitted to question elders about their concerns. When the teacher includes the strategies mentioned in his lessons, opposing stereotypes is not the only benefit because the children develop empathy and respect towards the elders. Seeing to it that children are aware of their cultural heritage using cross-generational education is the main motive of my work, as a result, I make sure the older generations pass on their knowledge of traditional values, customs, and practices to younger students. This guarantees that the social identity of the community stays whole and is transferred from one generation to the other.

4.1.4 Cultural Preservation Through Intergenerational Teaching

An essential way of saving social identity is by passing down cultural traditions, values and practices from one generation to another. The account indicates how they involve the elderly in the learning process to sustain tradition and empower identity among young students.

"Making sure that kids learn about their cultural background through intergenerational education is a significant aspect of my job. I urge elders to teach young students about traditional values, customs, and traditions. Children develop a stronger sense of identity and maintain their cultural traditions through various social and educational experiences. These include exposure to their own culture in educational settings, family and community interactions, and opportunities to learn about and engage with their cultural heritage. Social identity is preserved over time when a culture transmits and maintains its values and customs from one generation to the other" (TA4)

"Ensuring that children are taught about their cultural heritage through intergenerational learning is a central part of my work. I encourage older generations to share their knowledge of traditional values, customs, and practices with younger students. This enables children to develop a deeper understanding of their cultural identity, and these traditions are preserved as a result. Over time, a culture's social identity remains intact when its values and customs are passed down from one generation to the next" (TA6)

The method teachers use highlights the role of lived experiences and storytelling in cultural education. Through songs, personal narratives, and hands-on activities, pupils gain a clearer understanding of their cultural roots and develop a sense of pride and belonging. Teachers noted that personal stories create a stronger connection to ancestry and help children appreciate the relevance of cultural customs. In addition to storytelling, they incorporate practical activities such as food preparation, dancing, and traditional crafts, allowing pupils to engage with cultural practices directly. These immersive experiences encourage deeper appreciation, as children acquire meaningful knowledge and skills. Teachers also observed that elders feel valued when participating in these lessons, contributing to a mutual exchange. Preserving cultural traditions through intergenerational learning, they believe, supports the continuity of cultural identity for future generations.

4.2 Influence of Gerontology teachers on teaching and learning.

This session presents a conversation between me as a researcher and a teacher of gerontology, talking about the themes of holistic improvement through intergenerational learning, creative teaching strategies, and upgrading cultural and social alertness in early childhood education.

4.2.1 Holistic Development Through Intergenerational Learning

Intergenerational learning grooms the emotional, social and cognitive growth of the young ones by enabling comprehensive connection with the elderly citizens. Teachers who are devoted to intergenerational learning describe how these connections benefit the young ones and elder citizens.

"Children benefit socially, emotionally, and cognitively from intergenerational learning. Young children acquire patience, empathy, and good communication abilities when they interact with older individuals. Children who regard ageing as a normal part of life are better able to develop favourable attitudes toward elderly people when they observe them in the classroom.

By sharing their stories, older people encourage themselves and also play an important role in the lives of other people as teachers. Observing the knowledge of elders teaches the young ones to be nice and respectful.

Many kids build deep bonds with their elder mentors, which upgrades their emotional health and sense of safety. To aid the ageing population, the younger ones must be sympathetic to the needs and experiences of the elderly ones."

Participants further observed that the young ones who constantly converse with the elders tend to build a good sense of emotional intelligence (Crisp, 2025). However, through mentorship, storytelling, and shared experience, they acquire an alertness of the challenges and lives of the elderly citizens. Participant, however, remembers situations where the young ones who were hesitant to collaborate with the elders became freer, relaxed and also eager to partake in activities with the elderly citizens. These discussions encourage patience and communication skills that go beyond the classroom (Emel, 2023). Participants also emphasised the reciprocal benefits of intergenerational learning. As the young ones acquire life lessons and wisdom, elder citizens experience a renewed sense of purpose. Most elders show joy in sharing their knowledge, and some elders find new reasons in their later years through their duty as mentors. Participant, believes that encouraging these connections aids in breaking generational challenges, building a more compassionate community where ageing is valued and respected.

4.2.2 Innovative teaching strategies

Innovative teaching strategies play an important role in encouraging comprehensive intergenerational learning experiences (Chroeder, 2015). Teachers disclose how they involve different strategies to make learning both interesting and meaningful.

"We use diverse methods to engage young learners. Commonly, one is narrating or storytelling with elderly characters. When the young ones hear stories about intelligent and active elderly persons, it challenges stereotypes about ageing. However, this approach not only upgrades literacy but also enhances their ideas of ageing" (TA1).

"Indeed! We incorporate music and art projects with the elderly citizens. For instance, elders teach the young ones traditional songs in music classes, which encourages a sense of cultural identity in kids. Similarly, group art projects give the young ones and elders a platform for creative expression. This method encourages multimodal literacy learning, in which the young ones communicate both verbally and nonverbally" (TA4).

The excerpt shows the different learning methods used and emphasises the power of storytelling, art, and music in modifying the comprehension of the young ones about ageing and cultural heritage. By presenting elder characters in stories, they guarantee that the young ones view ageing as a natural and important part of life rather than something to be panicked about or misunderstood (McGuire, 2003). The young ones not only build an appreciation for cultural history but also encourage their emotional connection with the older generation. Art projects give another face of interesting learning, where the young ones and elders work hand in hand to build a comprehensive visual representation of their experiences. These activities empower teamwork, creativity, and shared learning, enabling further intergenerational bonds. Also, the multi-modal structure of these strategies upgrades literacy skills, as the young ones involve both spoken and unspoken forms of expression, such as illustration, gestures, and symbolic representations. In the quest to upgrade these creative strategies, Participants build a dynamic learning environment where the young ones acquire knowledge, grow sympathy, and challenge age-related issues.

4.2.3 Enhancing Social and Cultural Alertness.

Interactive learning experiences aid the young ones in holding information more effectively, making them more energetic and eager to participate. It was elaborated on how teachers who are socially and culturally alert through their teaching approach:

"The young ones learn better when they are actively involved in the process. They want to participate and are more involved. They can hone their problem-solving abilities through practical experiences, such as role-playing. Both explicit interventions and emergent approaches can be used to implement intergenerational programmes in early education, and each has advantages. Elders are essential in preserving values, traditions, and rituals" (TA7).

“The young ones acquire a greater comprehension of their cultural identity when they learn from them. Social identity is preserved over time when a culture transmits and maintains its values and customs from one period to the next. The tales and experiences that elders tell captivate most young ones. Instead of viewing them as merely “old people,” they start to consider them as reservoirs of wisdom. This promotes closer community ties and aids in the dismantling of generational boundaries. Furthermore, they discover that ageing is a stage of life with meaning and purpose rather than a sign of decline when they are exposed to constructive discussions with elderly citizens” (TA6).

The methods used here highlight the relevance of direct involvement with elders in the learning process. By involving indigenous knowledge and oral traditions, they guarantee that the young ones build necessary connections to their cultural heritage. However, these discussions aid the young one build an appreciation for the wisdom of older generations, breaking down negative stereotypes associated with ageing. Through storytelling, role playing and other interesting methods, participant builds an environment where the young ones see elders as sources of knowledge rather than the other way around. These experiences enable social responsibility, encouraging young learners to build respect for older generations and an alert of their duty to maintain cultural traditions (Larsen et al., 2024). Furthermore, intergenerational learning goes beyond teaching about ageing—it grooms a sense of belonging and shared responsibility within society. By involving these strategies in early education, participants aid in modifying the young ones into individuals who value inclusivity, strong community relationships and cultural heritage.

5. Discussion

In order to shape attitudes towards ageing and promote socialisation between various age groups, we must involve gerontology teachers. Early education programmes play a major role in enhancing positive attitudes towards the older generation, upholding cultural customs, and encouraging social alertness. Research has demonstrated that ageist biases can be evaded if children have exposure to positive ageing narratives at a young age (Burnes et al., 2019). Teachers perceive this as very important, particularly when ageing is initiated in mischievous ways. If ageing is presented in a way children can relate to, the chances of them becoming curious and showing empathy are higher.

It has been observed that children who interact with older people through structured education are more inclusive when they come of age which emphasises why gerontology education must be blended into early childhood education (Kaplan & Larkin, 2004). Early education prepares the groundwork for lifelong respect for older generations by presenting ageing-related topics through creative methods like storytelling, experiential learning, and project-based tasks (Larkin & Kaplan, 2010). Again, it came to light that both generations profit from the knowledge exchange that gerontology teachers promote. It was observed by one teacher that students ask questions and show concern for the older generation after lessons. These are responses to social and emotional learning sparked because of their encounter with the older generation. From the perspective of Gonzalez-Mena, (2005) the social awareness, empathy, and communication abilities of children are improved through intergenerational education. This means that the appearance of the older in educational settings helps to handle negative biases by underlining how they are contributing to society.

The study has again stated that these programmes help to boost social involvement and increase the older adult's sense of purpose as well. One teacher revealed how a grandmother felt “useful again” after she shared her childhood experience with the children in their class. Consequently, this two-sided benefit supports the importance of including gerontology education in early childhood education. When children are allowed to participate in cooperative projects, music, and storytelling it fortifies intergenerational relationships. These encounters are affectionately remembered by both children and elders and promote social-cultural awareness (Heydon, 2007). Equality advocacy is a vital duty of gerontology educators. Ageist behaviours in children begin at a young age. (Levy, 2009). This problem is opposed through stories, discussions, and hands-on learning. The research indicated that teachers continued to tackle this problem because they used those instances to modify how children think. When the ageing population is characterized by positivity, discrimination is minimized and it gives room for children to engage more with the elders (Burnes et al., 2019).

Gerontology educators also participate in sustaining cultural traditions because they involve elders to assist in their lessons which oversees those cultural traditions are transferred from elders to the younger generation. Through their interactions with elders, children have a clear understanding of cultural practices and customs. A teacher remembered how an interaction with the elders in the class headed by elders inspired children to embrace their culture. Prior studies have emphasised that intergenerational cultural education supports social identity and creates a richer

connection which ensures diversity (Ames & Youatt, 2004; Heydon, 2007). In the end, these endeavours bolster relationships and influence social cohesion.

6. Conclusion

Intergenerational Contact Theory suggests that if meaningful interactions among age groups are maintained, the negative biases gradually decrease and encourage mutual understanding over time. Through illustrating how direct engagement with elders assists children to shape the opinions of the younger generation, the study supports that point of view. In the course of repeating positive contact, stereotypes are challenged, and empathy becomes more prevalent among young people. The theory also validates that children put up respectful attitudes, including language and appreciation concerning ageing. These findings also enhance Social Learning Theory by confirming that children adopt respectful behaviours when educators model inclusive language and values about ageing. Gerontology educators become key players by utilising various methods that are appropriate for every age group which encourages critical thinking. The study enriches the sparse findings on ageism in early childhood and emphasizes the need to begin this education at a young age. Methodologically, the research sheds light on the significance of the educationist and how academic activities help to record behaviour changes.

6.1 Recommendations

The study recommends that ageing-related topics must be included in early learning topics to promote positive preconceived notions about elderly citizens by the Ghana Education Service. Schools should work in hand with society elders to enable storytelling, cultural exchange activities and mentorship. Gerontology education should be introduced into the Teacher Training Colleges' curriculum to equip them with strategies to solve ageism issues. Resources used in teaching should reflect Ghanaian tradition and also highlight the duty of elders in society and cultural preservation.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

Intergenerational Contact Theory is backed by this study, which illustrates that consistent, influential interactions between children and elders help minimise ageist attitudes. The outcomes comply with Social Learning Theory because children demonstrated respectful behaviours stimulated by teachers. This study serves as an addition to the insufficient studies by focusing on the role of gerontology educators in forming open-mindedness through planned and creative approaches.

6.3 Limitations

This paper depends on qualitative data from educators, which in most scenarios mirrors personal biases or subjective interpretations. The sample size is small, which reduces the credibility and the capability of the results to be generalised across all educational settings. The study also does not consider the attitudes children portray in the long run, but only the immediate effect the encounter has on them, which hinders long-term assessment of lasting impact. In addition, the distinct nature of cultures was overlooked, which can affect the transferability of findings to places where traditions and norms are different.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

The long-term impacts of early exposure to ageing-related content on the young ones' preconceived notions of elder citizens should be investigated in future studies. The effects of early intergenerational learning on later sympathy, social responsibility, and professional interests could be investigated through longitudinal studies. To determine how well various teaching strategies work to battle ageism and advance positive ageing narratives, more research is required. Research contrasting various cultural perspectives on intergenerational education would give ideas on the most effective methods for various learning environments. The effects of intergenerational programmes on the sense of purpose, social engagement, and mental health of older persons should also be researched.

Statement and declaration

Use of Artificial Intelligence: We hereby declare that generative AI technologies such as Quillbot and Grammarly have been used during the writing and editing of this manuscript. The case of Grammarly was used for grammar and

spellchecking, as well as suggestions for improving sentence structure and overall clarity. Whilst the Quillbot was employed for paraphrasing and refining sentence flow to enhance readability and coherence.

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