

Impact of Intergenerational Learning on the Wellbeing of Young and Old: A Qualitative Study

Prasun Chatterjee*

Department of Medical Health Research, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Abstract

Intergenerational Learning Centre (IGLC) classes create an opportunity for older people. The Grand Mentors (GM), to exchange their experiential knowledge to mentor School Children (SC). Aim of the study was to assess the impact of IGLC on the overall wellbeing of GMs, SC and their parents. Forty students of class VI were randomly chosen to participate in two hours of class session weekly 6 days by 11 GMs (>60 years) for 6 months. The pilot qualitative study was conducted in a junior high school situated in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, after obtaining ethical clearance from the all India institute of medical sciences, New Delhi (IEC/748/12/2017). Qualitative assessment was done after 6 months (October 2017 to April 2018) through focus group discussion. Through IGLC, GMs became happier and felt connected. IGLC imparted substantial improvement in the reading, writing and speaking skills of the SC. It was pocket friendly and helped parents to build trust in the secured future of their children. IGLC is a scalable educational model, where older people get connected with the younger generation through purposeful teaching learning processes within school premises, which are mutually beneficial. This model could also fulfil the SDG-4 goal of "quality education for all" especially those who lagged behind in academics.

Keywords: Intergenerational learning; Grand mentors; School children; Parent

Introduction

Intergenerational learning (IGL) is the systematic transfer and interactions of knowledge, skills, competencies, wisdom, norms and values between generations Aemmi, Seyedeh, Karimi Moonaghi and Hossein. Intergenerational learning program: A Bridge between Generations. Hence, it can be considered as the reciprocal exchange of knowledge between people of all ages belonging to different culture, environment, sociability, education, meditation, prevention, recreation, digital learning, etc [1].

Population ageing has been identified as one of the most significant social transformations in India with implications on nearly all sectors of the society, including health, finance, social security, family structures and intergenerational ties. The compelling impact of the ageing cluster in India would be an increase in the dependency ratio and government spending on health care and pensions. One of the effective strategies to mitigate the dependency in late life and increase the productivity of older people would be the promotion of healthy ageing through purposeful engagement. However, there is no mechanism to engage older people systematically in order to improve their wellbeing, which is very subjective. Wellbeing can be defined as the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g. contentment, happiness) the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety) and satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning. In simple terms, well-being can be described as judging life positively and feeling good (CDC HRQOL).

On the other side, the school children of India, especially from underprivileged and minorities, are struggling in their formative years (10-18 years) for their existence, identity, jobs and family responsibility. The present education system of India is unable to retain 100 per cent students in the school for multiple reasons. Economic instability at home, absence from school (truancy) due to poor comprehension, low teacher-student's ratio, unwelcoming behaviour of the teachers, distance from schools, early marriage for girl child are few cited reasons for discontinuation of education [2-5].

According to the UNESCO-UIS report, India is one of three countries in South Asia with the largest out of school populations at the primary and secondary level. The highest dropout was noted among children, especially from economically weaker sections like backward community and Muslims community, before completing higher secondary education. The adolescent children are becoming more prone to disruptive behaviours, depression, learning disabilities, deterioration of school performance and identity crisis [7-10].

Due to the unprecedented growth of older people and increased rate of school dropping out, the concept of IGL is gaining grounds in modern societies as it helps to increase cooperation, interaction and exchange between people of different generations enabling them to support each other in relationships that benefit both the individual and their community.

The research questions for carrying out the present study were:

- **RQ1:** Would the Grand Mentors (GMs) be able to impart knowledge?
- **RQ2:** Whether the wellbeing of the GMs is affected by IGL?
- **RQ3:** Whether the parents would accept and appreciate the efforts of the GMs who teach their children after school hours?

***Corresponding author:** Prasun Chatterjee, Department of Medical Health Research, University of Delhi, Delhi, India, Tel: 9354905538; E-mail: drprasun.geriatrics@gmail.com

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Hence, the authors hypothesized to create an opportunity in which a grand mentor would support underprivileged children to improve their interest in studies through extra class coaching. This would also engage the grand mentor purposefully to achieve healthy aging [11-13].

Aim and objectives

The aim of this study was to assess the impact of the intergenerational learning programme among school children, their parents and Grand Mentors (GM) with the following objectives:

- To assess the impact of intergenerational learning programmes on the wellbeing of a grand mentor.
- To assess the impact of intergenerational learning programmes on the school attendance, interest for study and moral value.
- To assess the perception of parents about the grand mentors as a mentor.

Materials and Methods

Study population

Grand Mentors (GM): Senior citizens aged 60 years and above, who were functionally independent, graduate and willing to participate in this teaching learning process to improve the quality of education of underprivileged school children were recruited. Preference was given to the GM who was residing within ten km radius of the school in Sector-12, Noida. Baseline health assessment was done by the geriatrician at the department of geriatric medicine in AIIMS, New-Delhi and those with severe depression (GDS>10/15) and dementia (CDR>0.5) were excluded from the study.

Students: The students who were studying in three different sections of VI standard aged between 10 and 14 years and were willing to attend intergenerational learning centre after the regular school hours were chosen from Purva Madhyamik Vidyalaya (the Government junior high school) sector 12, NOIDA, Uttar Pradesh, India, randomly, after obtaining informed-written consent from their parents.

Parents: A detailed discussion on IGL was held with the parents of selected students and informed written consent was taken from their parents.

Sample: Purposive sampling

Sample size calculation: After extensive review of literature on this topic by using key words 'intergenerational learning', 'overall improvement in quality of life of students', 'society and older people through this model', 'older Indians as change makers', etc there was no study close to these topics in India. So, as per feasibility we decided to engage 35 students, 10 older Indians and 35 parents as participants. Considering 10 percent dropout due to various issues, the sample size was kept as 40 students, 11 GMs and 40 parents [14].

Study period: The present study was conducted for six months from October 2017 to April 2018.

Study design: The experimental phase, including the baseline record and post-data collection.

Ethical clearance: Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institute Ethics Committee, AIIMS, New Delhi (IEC/748/12/2017).

Study settings: Purva Madhyamik Vidyalaya (PMV) (Junior High School), sector 12, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Implementing agency: Healthy Aging India, a national NGO registered with govt of India, NITI Aayog and UN ECOSOC.

Location was identified and selected as per the consent and willingness from junior high school authority, availability of resources and transport convenience to study location. A written permission was obtained from Basic Shiksha Adhikari of Gautam Buddha Nagar district, Uttar Pradesh to run an intergenerational learning centre for two hours in school premises of junior high school, sector 12, Noida after the regular school timing [15].

Procedure: Sensitization of GMs for capacity building: Grant mentors (GM) from various professional backgrounds were oriented with new patterns of education system and academics. Training sessions were conducted to build the capacity in GMs on the learning strategies of the children and teaching methodologies before inducting them in Government schools. Training techniques were in adherence to the methods prescribed by the National Council for Teachers Education (NCFTE-2009).

Out of the ten training sessions conducted, eight sessions were by expert faculties from various fields and two were demonstrative sessions of the teaching practices by GMs and after induction into the school, another five sessions were peer to peer training by GMs.

The themes of the training sessions were:

- National Education Policy and Right to Education.
- How learning happens in children and patterns of differential learning.
- Pedagogical processes of teaching Hindi and English language to school children.
- Understanding constructivist and pattern recognition approach to use mathematical operations, equations and instructions.
- Activities to develop scientific temper in children.
- Art integrated-creative learning with theatre, drawing, craft, puppets and music.
- Emotional intelligence with life experiences of older adults, storytelling and value-based education.
- Orientation of older people with IGLC program and regenerative-experimentalism team work.

On the completion of training sessions by the expert faculties, GMs took demonstrative sessions and played an important role in analyzing the teaching skills of each other. Every GM was assigned a lesson to demonstrate and prepare lesson plans, teaching learning material, etc.

Class schedule for Noida School: The IGLC timing at Noida school was from 3 pm to 5 pm in summer and 1 pm to 3 pm in winter post-school. Each period was of thirty-five minutes duration. A break of 15 minutes was given to the students before beginning the class as per the timetable. The classes were held for six days a week (Monday to Saturday). While the teaching activities were conducted from Monday to Friday, Saturday was reserved for extracurricular activities. The mentor-student ratio was 1:20 and two such batches were running simultaneously in separate classrooms. Every GM conducted two classes per week depending on their availability. The subjects covered were value education, language (Hindi and English), science, mathematics, reading, writing and comprehension through real life experience. The teaching approaches were constructivist, collaborative, integrative, reflective and inquiry based in order to increase the interest of the children towards education. The unique

methods followed in this model were conducting outdoor classes, practical demonstration of the theoretical concepts, peer to peer teaching and role reversal and keeping parents in the loop.

Extracurricular activity: On every Saturday, a wide range of extracurricular activities were conducted which encouraged the students to participate and ensure their holistic development. These activities had also served as an opportunity for the children to explore their passion. The children were encouraged to pursue in-depth training if they found any of these activities interesting.

Nutritional support: Considering the high prevalence of under nutrition among school children, they were provided with a vegetarian diet with high carbohydrate and protein content (1 gm/kg) per day. The diet included dried chana, puffed rice, chapati-vegetable curry and fruits.

Qualitative data collection at the end of six months: The impact of IGLC was explored through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) at the end of six months. Three FGD formats were prepared separately for students, their parents and the GMs. The interview guides for the FGDs consisted of open-ended questions both in Hindi and in English, which were translated and back translated with the help of language experts. FGDs were conducted at the place, time and date which was convenient for the participants and each group was homogenous. Pre-session preparation like scripts, seating arrangement and the familiarity with the key questions were performed prior to the FGDs. The FGD was conducted after obtaining the consent from the students, their parents and GMs.

The FGD consisted of five to six members including a moderator, note maker and the participants. The participants were randomly selected from the original group, 20 school children (out of 40), 20 parents (out of 40) whereas all GMs (11) took part in the FGD. There was no dropout in any of these three groups. The moderator ensured that all the participants had an equal opportunity to answer the questions and a probing method was used wherever required. The

information collected in the FGDs was debriefed to the participants to clarify the information given by them. The interview guide explored the impact of IGLC on the overall well-being of students in terms of academic progress, behavioural changes, extra-curricular activities and ways distinct from regular classes, their opinion on GMs and how IGLC is helping their families. While four FGDs were conducted for school children and their parents, two FGDs were conducted for the GMs.

Analysis and statistics

The information collected was initially transcribed and then translated to English on the same day of the interview by language experts. The qualitative data was analyzed using manual thematic analysis method. The initial coding and theme generation was done by the principal investigator which was reviewed by a co-investigator. The differences in the analysis were sorted out by discussion between the investigators. Thematic network analysis method described by Attired Stirling was used wherein, initially basic themes were grouped followed by organizing themes and finally a global theme was framed.

Results

Perception of students after IGLC implementation

Student: In IGLC education is beyond books through examples. The educators repeat the topic as many times we want.

The students felt that the GMs followed a unique method of teaching where they engaged them creatively with practical demonstrations, outdoor classes, peer to peer teaching, role reversal, keeping parents in the loop providing examples and activities. The GMs also explained each topic as many times as the students want.

Student: “I have become more interested. Educators in IGLC classes teach us through games and so that we do not forget” (Table 1).

Summary and Interpretation of Themes Present in Interviews		
Theme	Code	Definitions
Impact of IGLC	Purposeful engagement.	This code defines the opportunity where older people get connected with the younger generation through purposeful teaching-learning processes.
Elderly	Subcode	
	i. Opportunity for elderly	
	ii. Knowledge sharing	
	iii. Meaningful ways of active ageing	
	iv. Social transformation	
	Code	
	Dependency Mitigation.	Mitigating the dependency in late life and increasing their productivity are meaningful engagement, promotion of healthy ageing.
	Code	
	Impact of poverty on education.	This code defines the link between education and poverty. Lack of financial resources leading to discontinuation of education (higher rate of dropouts).

Impact on children	Intergenerational learning. Subcode	This code defines IGLC, proving to be an instrument to help underprivileged children to improve their interest in studies.
	Overall development of underprivileged children (Mental/Physical/Behavioural).	
	Increased quality education.	
	Increased participation of underprivileged children.	
	Instilling Value System.	
Impact on parents	Code Belief on the ability of older people	This code defines how parents feel satisfied to see their children learning and growing under the guidance of Elderly as their teachers.
	Subcode	
	Overall positive change.	
	Satisfaction.	
	Less financial strain.	
	Hopes for the better future of their children.	

Table 1: Summary and interpretation of themes present in interviews.

The GMs encouraged them to speak and frame their own sentences which has increased their reading, speaking and handwriting skills. Each child was given equal chances to participate in extracurricular activities. The attendance, creativity and interest have substantially increased through IGLC implementation.

Student: “Previously I had no interest in attending the school. After I joined the IGLC classes I feel like attending school regularly, even on Sundays if I could.”

Since I have joined IGLC classes I feel my personality has gone through positive changes. I was also taught that every individual should be proud of their honesty, responsibility and courage. If these three are followed then we all will be great.”

There are a lot of behavioural changes through IGLC implementation. The children realized the importance of sharing things with friends.

Student: “Earlier money went for tuition and transport. Now we are getting free coaching, food and transportation through IGLC.”

The students felt that IGLC had reduced the family burden of tuition fees and extra books. It has also provided nutritious food and transportation free of cost.

Student: “After joining IGLC classes we have become more respectful towards elderly people and we sympathize for them.”

After attending IGLC, the children became more respectful towards older people; they started loving them more and enjoyed their teaching. They also wished to spend more time with them.

Perception of Grand Mentor (GM) after IGLC implementation.

The GM felt that IGLC was an energy exchange between the two generations and it helped them to creatively think about how well they can engage the students and make them easily understand the subjects. They also felt that it is a great platform to share their life experiences and wisdom with younger generations.

Grand mentors: We are getting an opportunity to interact with the younger generation to provide value education.

The participation in IGLC has made the GMs more active and productive as they are preparing for the class well in advance. They also feel themselves to be more physically fit.

Grand mentors: “Yes, through IGLC we are learning in many ways. “They felt that the students at the IGLC are innocent, confident, healthy, focused and disciplined.

Grand mentors: “After teaching these children at IGLC, we have got a broad perspective about the environment in which these children have been raised.”

It was also an opportunity for the GMs to see children from various socio-economic backgrounds and to be aware of their problems.

Grand mentors: “Yes definitely the attitude of family members has undergone a drastic change and we are getting lot of respect from our family members.”

The IGLC has brought about a positive change in the life of GMs. They also opined that there is a lot of opportunity for this program to replicate at a larger level throughout the country. The GMs are proud of their service to the community.

Perception of parents after IGLC implementation

The parents of the school children under IGLC considered themselves fortunate and blessed that GMs are teaching their kids. They felt that the mentors are respectful and sensible in teaching their kids about moral and ethical values while sharing life experiences. They also wished that their children would serve their grand mentors in the future.

Parent: "IGLC supports the development of our child."

Parents felt that there is a lot of improvement in the scores, attendance and creativity with more interest in the studies. The kids are more active and involved in many extracurricular activities such as dance, music, drawing etc.

Parent: "The knowledge and experience of the grand mentors is more." The parents had an opinion that the GMs instill more interest in students by using creative methods for teaching and by conducting a lot of activities with high energy levels.

Parent: "My kid is taking an interest in reading. Now she gets up on time! She is very calm." The parents felt that there was an improvement in the studies and positive change in their daily routine and behaviour of the children after joining IGLC.

Many parents thanked IGLC for providing their children with value based quality education completely free of cost. This was a helping hand for the parents with a lower economic background.

Discussion

In the changing paradigms of epidemiological shift of the family system in India, from joint to nuclear family, intergenerational teaching-learning approach is proving to be an instrument to help multiple generations to engage gainfully and to tackle some serious social issues like school dropout for underprivileged school children and social isolation for older people.

Our qualitative analysis showed promising results for the Grand Mentors (GM) as they felt connected with school children and more creative to make education comprehensible for the children who lagged behind in academics. They were happy to be physically and mentally healthy through this productive teaching-learning process. Within a short span of time, the GM noticed positive behavioral changes respect for others, compassion and truthfulness amongst children. Similar to the concept of the university of the third age, which proposes that retired elderly can learn and nurture new knowledge, IGL model in India allows the seniors to apply and amplify their knowledge with purpose and goal. There is evidence from Tokyo and USA that older people who were engaged in meaningful intergenerational relationships had improved physical health, personal relationships, social support, behavioural changes and perception towards school children. It changes the perspective about their own life when serving as role models or mentors for the students. These findings are in concurrence with our study, where the GMs perceived that IGLC helped in active and creative learning and subjective well-being through purposeful engagement. It was also noted that the attitude of the family and society towards GMs was changing towards a more welcoming and respectful manner. This may be a major leap towards an age friendly society. Furthermore, the concept was acceptable to all the GMs and they felt that this model is scalable and much needed in India.

IGLC is a means of reciprocity, joint engagement and co-learning that explores the fullest potential of the child and simultaneously promotes the concept of lifelong learning for the older adults for their cognitive independence. The school children in our study felt that methodology of teaching in IGLC was more practical and socially connected unlike usual school teaching. The students felt through IGLC their reading, writing and speaking skills had improved substantially. So, the students were keen to attend IGLC, thereby automatically improving their school attendance and reducing truancy. They also felt more responsible, courageous, confident and clear about their life goal, which has been imbibed from the GM. These findings were similar to the studies by Fujiwara and Fried, which have shown that there was improved behaviour of children in public elementary schools, with improvement in reading, attention, concentration, motivation to learn, self-respect and decrease in disruptive classroom behaviour, with high rates of future educational and occupational achievement. The children in the present study were encouraged to take part in extracurricular activities like singing, dancing, painting etc. It was also noted that the school children enjoyed the company of their GMs and became more respectful towards them. The parents of IGLC students felt themselves and their children as fortunate and blessed to be guided by sensible teaching of the GMs. The parents noted that the children became happier, peaceful and more disciplined after they joined IGLC. The parents were also happy as IGLC helped them to give extra support to their children. This study clearly showed that the intergenerational learning model within government schools is a win-win-win model for all the three generations, the grand mentors, the school children and the parents. The school children from underprivileged clusters who lagged behind, showed remarkable improvement in multiple domains after joining IGLC, from school attendance to character building and necessary academic skills, whereas the GM *i.e.* older people became more engaged, active, creative and connected, while the parents who survived on a hand to mouth income, were happy to surrender their children to these wise GMs. This model is both in line with and is achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) *i.e.* good health and well-being and SDG 4 *i.e.* to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

This model if implemented on a large scale would not only reduce school dropout across the country. It would promote purposeful engagement of an ever increasing grey population.

Conclusion

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the potential of educated older people as grand mentors to mentor underprivileged school children (10-14 years) simultaneously improving overall wellbeing of older people.

Intergenerational teaching learning classes seems to be a double effective way to engage senior citizens (>60 years) and handhold academically weaker underprivileged upper primary school students from six institutes of national capital.

As per our literature search this is the first effort from south East Asia to bring these two generations together and empower each other. As the world continues to age, the IGL model would be increasingly relevant, as we need a mechanism to allow older people to enhance their roles in society.

Future implication: IGLC, a cost effective and scalable model, which provides the space to both the generations, where the

enthusiasm of youth and experience of older people could develop a synergy of an effective inter-generational learning environment. India, with more than 100 million older adults, residing across the country can be engaged to handhold millions of school children, especially from the underprivileged sector, through the IGLC model with minimal financial implication.

Limitation: The duration of the present study was only 6 months; a long-term follow-up with more sample size is warranted.

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