

ABSTRACT

Senior universities in Portugal

This study aims to learn about the development and characterization of the senior universities (US) in Portugal and the possible impact they can have on their regulars. Senior universities in Portugal are a lifelong education project, involving more than 60.000 seniors, 368 organizations and 7.500 volunteer teachers. It is presumed to be the country with the highest number of senior students per number of elderly people, in the world.

Primary sources of information were used in this study such as academic theses and four surveys, with a total of 2.074 responses. The survey focused on senior students, volunteer teachers and promoters from senior universities. Another intended to find out which pedagogical method was most suitable for senior audiences.

The choice of application of these surveys was due to how senior universities are organized, based on three points: The promoting entity, the volunteering of teachers and senior students. The objective was to know how senior universities are organized, intended to know how they are organized, what resources they have and what difficulties they face. After the survey, we aimed to know their profile and the effect that the frequency of HUs has on their lives. As a complement to our survey, the 15-item geriatric depression scale (GDS-15) was used.

In the survey for the volunteer teachers, we wanted to characterize and learn what motivates them to be volunteers in these organizations. We added the VMS (Volunteer Motivation Scale) motivation scale to the survey. On the other hand, the survey direct at the teachers, students and technicians we wanted to know what their advice and suggestions are for teaching seniors.

Through this exploratory study, it was concluded that the senior universities in Portugal which follow the English model, were created essentially by associations, after the year 2000, on average have a paid employee and work mostly in assigned facilities. Senior universities are attended mainly by women, aged 65-75, retired or

domestic, married, from all socioeconomic backgrounds and with varying degrees of education.

They attend an average of four subjects weekly and go 3 days a week. Teachers are of all ages, mostly with higher education, give 2 hours of classes per week, also represented by retired and active people, are very satisfied with their volunteering at senior universities and the main motivations presented are the joy of teaching and helping others.

The positive influence of these organizations in the lives of seniors is well known. The data reveal an improvement in the perception of students' physical and mental health status; increase in the number of social contacts and consequently decrease in the feeling of loneliness; there was a reduction in the antidepressant medication taken; depression levels are substantially lower than in the general population; the level of knowledge has increased, essentially in the digital area, self-esteem has risen and students feel more active and better inserted in the community.

In summary, Portuguese senior universities are present basically on the entire national territory, are born of civil society, are an example of volunteering and contribute to improving the quality of life of seniors.

Keywords

Senior University, U3A, Active Aging, Volunteer, Seniors, Lifelong Education, Quality of Life, Aging.