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Revival in the later periods of life: A phenomenological study on the experiences of older adults at the Rejuvenation University

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the learning experiences, motivations, obstacles encountered, and gains obtained from the educational process of students at the Rejuvenation University from a qualitative perspective, with a focus on how learning is experienced and given meaning in later life. The study was conducted with 26 older adult participants who had been studying at the Rejuvenation University at Kırşehir Ahi Evran University for one year during the 2024–2025 academic year. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and evaluated using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method, informed by interpretive engagement. The analysis was analytically consolidated into four main themes with related subthemes, capturing participants' lived experiences of revival. Participants articulated their experiences through metaphors such as 'resprouting' and 'reaching the light,' reflecting a reorientation toward meaning and agency in later life. Motivations for participation included personal development, social bonding, and giving meaning to time. Health issues, transportation difficulties, and social pressures emerged as challenges; however, these were negotiated rather than experienced as reasons for withdrawal. Social and cognitive gains, including friendship, belonging, solidarity, knowledge acquisition, and keeping up with the times, were identified as central outcomes. Participants also reported renewed future orientation and strengthened commitment to life. The Rejuvenation University offers not only a learning environment for older adults, but also a multidimensional experience that supports relational belonging, sustained agency, and intentional living in later life. The findings highlight revival as a phenomenological process shaped through learning, vulnerability, and social connection.

1. Introduction

Globally, population aging has gained momentum with increased life expectancy, advances in health-care, and rising living standards. The World Health Organization projects a rapid increase in the population aged 60 and above in the forthcoming years (World Health Organization, 2024). This demographic transition has significant implications for health, social policy, and education. In Turkey, we observe a similar trend. According to TSI data, the share of the population aged 65+ in the total population rose from 8.5% in 2017 to 10.2% in 2023 and reached 10.6% in 2024 (TSI, 2023, 2024). Population projections predict that this rate will be 12.9% in 2030 and 16.3% in 2040 (TSI, 2023). This change in demographic indicators has a direct impact on the increasing care burden for older individuals, as well as on their levels of loneliness, life satisfaction, and social participation.

Low social participation and loneliness in old age are important determinants that increase the risk of cognitive decline and dementia. A study revealed that loneliness increases the 10-year risk of

dementia (Sutin et al., 2020). During the same period, an increase in social participation was reported to have a reducing effect on loneliness, anxiety, and depression, while improving subjective well-being and quality of life (Yang et al., 2024; Yen et al., 2022). These results emphasize the central importance of the social participation dimension in interventions that support the well-being of older adults. Health literacy and self-efficacy are also strong determinants of well-being in older adulthood (Ishikawa & Yano, 2008). Studies on health literacy highlighted significant differences in health literacy among different sociodemographic groups and suggested interventions aimed at reducing inequalities (Beauchamp et al., 2015). In this context, intergenerational learning and university-based lifelong learning environments can enhance older persons' social engagement, health literacy, disease management, and psychosocial well-being (Chesser et al., 2016). A systematic evaluation reports that intergenerational programs are advantageous for cognitive and social outcomes in older individuals, with minor to moderate positive impacts on self-esteem and depression (Petersen, 2022)

In the Türkiye context, Rejuvenation Universities (RU) are a unique initiative that brings together these educational and social goals. Developed in 2016 and implemented in a limited number of universities, this four-year program aims to promote active, productive, and meaningful aging among adults aged 60 and over within the framework of lifelong learning. The curriculum design and founding philosophy of RU can be interpreted through the lenses of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2018) and existential gerontology (Reker & Chamberlain, 2000), both of which emphasize cognitive renewal and the reorientation toward meaning and agency in later life. From a phenomenological standpoint, this process reflects the lived experience of being embodied, temporal, and relational, as described by van Manen (1990) and Merleau-Ponty (1962). Meanwhile, critical geragogy (Formosa, 2011) positions the revitalization fostered by RU as an empowering practice in later life -one that nurtures autonomy, reflexivity, and resistance to age-based stereotypes. Through RU, the act of 'returning to life' and 'reengaging with the times' signifies not merely personal rejuvenation but a form of existential learning that enables older adults to move, interpret, and contribute meaningfully within their shared lifeworld (Findsen & Formosa, 2012; Jarvis, 2001).

Studies indicate that older individuals participating in RU programs age successfully and actively, maintain physical, mental, and social engagement, and exhibit improved health and technological literacy, heightened social participation, and enhanced psychological well-being (Bahar & Başbüyük, 2019; Erol et al., 2016; Gülsoy et al., 2023; Hastaoğlu, 2023; Terletmez et al., 2024). The subjective meanings that older individuals attach to their educational experiences are only partially reflected in quantitative studies, which have mostly chosen standardized measurements while providing valuable insights about the results. This fact points to a critical gap. Older participants' experiences of the learning process and their ways of interpreting and making sense of them have not yet been sufficiently researched. In this regard, analyzing participants' metaphorical and narrative expressions will elucidate the subjective aspects of older persons' learning processes and enhance previous quantitative results. This investigation will also reveal practical insights that will increase the effectiveness and sustainability of programs. This study aims to examine the RU experiences of older adults using qualitative methods and to describe the personal (self-efficacy, life goals), social (belonging, solidarity), and cognitive/functional (health literacy, digital adaptation) effects of the program from the participants' perspective.

2. Method

2.1. Study design

This study adopted a phenomenological qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the rejuvenation experiences of older adults. This approach was chosen because it allows participants to describe their lived experiences from their own perspectives, providing rich and meaningful insights into the essence of the phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). The research followed Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method, which involves identifying significant statements,

formulating meanings, clustering themes, and validating the findings with participants. Throughout this process, the researchers sought to minimize bias and preserve the authenticity of participants' narratives by using their own expressions as faithfully as possible. During data collection and analysis, reflexive notes were kept to document the researcher's interpretive process and to enhance transparency and consistency between data interpretation and the descriptive orientation of the study (Morrow et al., 2015; Willig, 2013).

2.2. Study sample

RU was established on August 15, 2024, within Kırşehir Ahi Evran University and began education with 60 students. During the fall and spring academic terms, a curriculum consisting of courses such as Health Education, Psychology, Lifelong Learning, and Music, each lasting 10 weeks per term, was implemented, and a final exam was conducted at the end of each term. The study population consisted of 60+ RU students ($N = 55$) who had been studying at Kırşehir Ahi Evran RU University for one year during the 2024–2025 academic year. Criteria sampling, a form of purposive sampling, was employed for sample selection in the study (Patton, 2015). Criterion sampling is selecting a sample from individuals, events, objects, or circumstances that exhibit specific traits pertinent to the issue at hand (Altunay et al., 2014). The inclusion criteria were defined as being 60 years of age or older, being an RU student, and voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria were being 59 years of age or younger, not being an RU student, and not volunteering to participate. The sample size (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016) was determined based on data saturation, and a total of 26 participants were interviewed. Furthermore, the study was reported in accordance with the Consolidated Guidelines for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) (Tong et al., 2007).

2.3. Data collection tools

Research data were collected using the 'Descriptive Characteristics Form' and the 'Semi-Structured Interview Form.'

Participant Characteristics Form: This form was developed to determine participants' socio-demographic, educational, professional, and family structure characteristics. It consists of a total of 9 questions.

Semi-Structured Interview Form: Prepared by researchers to investigate participants' motivations for engaging in RU, their experiences, and their expectations comprehensively, it was submitted to three experts in the field and revised according to their response. Subsequently, it was evaluated with three participants who were students at RU during a pilot application, and additional questions were incorporated. These analyses were not included in the study. During data collection, participants were prompted to furnish comprehensive explanations by probing inquiries such as 'What else?' when further information was required. The interview form consists of a total of 8 open-ended questions. The questions included in the semi-structured interview form are:

- (1) If you were to compare RU to an object, what would it be and why?
- (2) What are your views and thoughts about RU?
- (3) How did studying at RU make you feel?
- (4) What are your reasons for joining RU?
- (5) Can you tell us about your experiences with RU?
 - How did it affect your life?
 - How did it affect your daily life?
 - How did it affect your family dynamics?
 - How did it affect your relationship with your social circle?
- (6) What are the positive aspects of RU in your opinion?

- (7) What aspects of RU need improvement in your opinion?
- (8) What are your suggestions for improving RU?
 - What are your suggestions regarding the program content?
 - What are your suggestions for educators?
 - What are your suggestions regarding the materials used in education?

2.4. The data collection process

The required institutional permission and ethical approval for the implementation of the research have been obtained. The data collection process for the research took place immediately after the completion of the 2024–2025 academic year, between June 1 and 30, 2025. The first author is the founder and instructor of the RU. She has been involved not only in developing the RU curriculum, appointing faculty members, and coordinating course delivery, but also in managing administrative and technical processes such as student registration and problem solving. The second author, a master's student, attended several RU courses as an observer and kept reflective field notes. The data collection process, including participant recruitment and interviewing, was conducted by the second author under the first author's supervision to minimize potential bias. This arrangement was particularly important to prevent any perceived pressure on participants or a tendency to provide socially desirable responses due to the first author's institutional role. Both researchers maintained reflexive diaries to acknowledge their assumptions, remain aware of their positionalities, and stay attuned to participants' lived worlds throughout the study. All participants were apprised of the study, and it was indicated that their participation was voluntary. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews, and audio recording devices were used with the participants' consent. Moreover, the researcher took field notes during the interviews. All interviews were performed face-to-face by the same researcher in an appropriate setting and at a predetermined time, with data collected in conditions conducive to participants' comfortable self-expression. Although the codes were seen to repeat after the 23rd participant in the study, coding continued. Despite interviewing three more participants, no new codes were obtained in a similar manner, and it was considered that coding saturation was reached after the 26th participant.

2.5. Data analysis

The demographic data, numerical data, percentages, and counts were evaluated using mean and standard deviation values. For the analysis of qualitative data obtained from the interviews, the 7-step analysis method developed by Colaizzi for phenomenological studies was used (Morrow et al., 2015). The audio recordings of the interviews were listened to by the researchers after they were completed, and all the statements made by the participants were transcribed word for word. The in-depth interviews yielded a total of 130 pages of written text. Two researchers read the interview texts independently and repeatedly. This approach aimed to comprehend the explanations found in the data. Important statements in the interview transcripts were selected, reorganized, and summarized. Subsequently, the data conveyed in the statements were identified and analyzed. The researchers discussed and formulated the meanings until they reached a consensus and approved them. The researchers then identified and organized the themes into main and sub-themes. The themes and subthemes of the research were developed with clear expressions. The results of the study were presented to the participants to reinforce the accuracy of the themes and content. Furthermore, the participants' statements were incorporated to enable the reader to validate the interpretation and analysis of the data.

Although this study was grounded in Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method, the analytic process was not treated as purely mechanical or atheoretical. While Colaizzi's systematic steps guided the identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, and thematic clustering, interpretation was understood as an inevitable and necessary component of meaning construction. In this

sense, the analysis can be described as primarily descriptive in orientation, while remaining informed by interpretive engagement with participants' narratives. This positioning acknowledges that phenomenological description is always situated within the researchers' horizon of understanding and that meanings emerge through a dialogical process between data, analytic reflection, and theoretical sensitivity. Such an approach is consistent with contemporary phenomenological scholarship, which recognizes descriptive phenomenology as compatible with careful and transparent interpretation when reflexivity is explicitly maintained.

2.6. *Trustworthiness of the study*

The criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, encompassing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. To enhance credibility, a semi-structured interview form was used in the interviews, and observation notes were taken. The interviews were conducted by the same researcher, who did not act as a guide during them but ensured that they were in-depth by asking probing questions. The data obtained from the interviews were examined by two researchers to increase dependability, and themes and sub-themes were created. After reaching consensus on the themes and subthemes, expert opinions were obtained from two experts in the field of gerontology who were independent of the research and had experience in qualitative research. Peer debriefing sessions and iterative coding discussions were also held between researchers to refine interpretations and maintain analytic consistency.

Reflexive strategies were also applied throughout the analytic process to ensure transparency and minimize researcher bias. Both authors continuously reflected on their positionalities and maintained audit trails to document interpretive decisions.

Rather than conventional member checking, participants were invited to reflect on the preliminary findings and comment on the resonance of the themes with their lived experiences (member reflections). An audit trail and reflexive journal were maintained to document methodological decisions and enhance transparency. Direct quotations from participants' statements were included in the study to strengthen transferability and allow readers to evaluate the interpretation and analysis of the data. These reflexive and methodological strategies collectively enhanced the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study within a phenomenological framework.

2.7. *Ethical principles*

The study was carried out after obtaining approval from the Kırşehir Ahi Evran University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Number: 2025/10/08/Date: May 28, 2025) and institutional permission from the RU Coordination Office. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, confidentiality and voluntariness principles were adhered to, time was allowed for them to make a decision, and verbal and written consent was obtained from all participants. The Helsinki Declaration was followed throughout all stages of the study.

3. *Results*

Twenty-six participants took part in the study, and Table 1 presents their demographic characteristics. Participants were 64.54 ± 4.04 (60–74) years old, mostly female, married, high school graduates, living in nuclear families, and had incomes equal to their expenses.

Table 2 presents four main themes and related subthemes derived from participant statements. These themes reflect how participants made sense of learning, social engagement, and future orientation in later life.

The participants' metaphors regarding the "rejuvenation university" are given in Figure 1.

Main Theme 1: Revival as Embodied and Existential Meaning

Table 1. Introductory characteristics of the participants.

Order no	Age	Gender	Marital status	Educational status	Job	Economic situation	Family structure
P1	63	Male	Married	Secondary Education	Tradesmen	Income is higher than expense	Nuclear
P2	65	Male	Married	License	Teacher	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P3	60	Female	Single	License	Teacher	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P4	65	Female	Single	High school	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Alone
P5	61	Female	Married	High school	Housewife	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P6	63	Male	Married	High school	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P7	60	Female	Married	High school	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P8	65	Male	Married	Associate degree	Farmer	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P9	69	Female	Single	Associate degree	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P10	68	Male	Single	High school	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nursing home
P11	66	Female	Married	High school	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P12	66	Male	Married	License	Teacher	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P13	74	Male	Married	License	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P14	61	Female	Married	Secondary Education	Housewife	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P15	71	Male	Married	High school	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P16	66	Female	Single	License	Teacher	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P17	69	Female	Married	Associate degree	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P18	60	Female	Married	High school	Housewife	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P19	70	Female	Married	Associate degree	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P20	62	Female	Married	High school	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Extended
P21	65	Female	Married	Primary school	Housewife	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P22	60	Female	Single	Secondary Education	Housewife	Income Less than expenses	Alone
P23	69	Female	Married	High school	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P24	68	Female	Married	High school	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P25	62	Female	Married	High school	Retired	Income is Equal to Expense	Nuclear
P26	60	Female	Married	High school	Housewife	Income Less than expenses	Nuclear

Participants frequently described their experiences at RU using metaphors that conveyed a sense of renewal, awakening, and re-engagement with life. Metaphors such as resprouting, reaching the light, and a new journey were used to articulate how participation in RU was experienced as a turning point in later life.

One participant expressed this renewal by stating, *‘I feel like a flower blooming in spring; I have been reborn’* (P4). Similarly, another participant noted, *‘Coming here is like resprouting; I have roots, but new*

Table 2. Main themes and subthemes of the revival experience at the Rejuvenation University.

Main Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Revival as Embodied and Existential Meaning	Resprouting Reaching the Light New Journey Empowerment Meaningful Use of Time Adding Vitality to Life
Theme 2: Revival as Learning-Driven Transformation	Self-Development Gaining Knowledge Keeping Up with the Times
Theme 3: Revival as Relational Belonging	Building Social Connections Friendship Belonging Solidarity Call for Peer Participation
Theme 4: Revival as Forward-Oriented Agency under Constraints	Health Issues Transportation Difficulties Social Pressure New Goals Dreams Coming True Commitment to Life

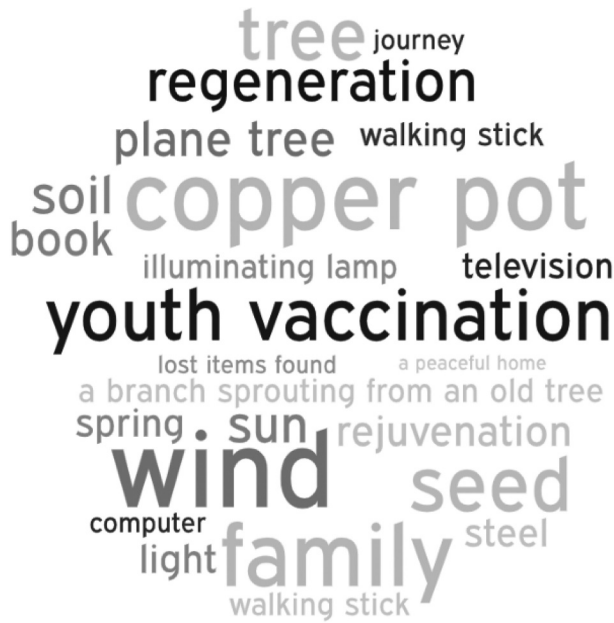


Figure 1. RU metaphors.

branches are growing' (P17). The metaphor of light was also commonly invoked, as participants described RU as 'the light at the end of the tunnel' (P9) or 'a sun rising during a dark period' (P14). These expressions conveyed not only emotional relief but also a renewed sense of direction and purpose.

Empowerment emerged as a central aspect of this embodied revival. Participants described feeling stronger and more resilient in the face of daily challenges. As one participant stated, '*It's like a pole that keeps me standing*' (P5), while another added, '*I've transformed into a stronger and more resilient individual*' (P15). Alongside emotional renewal, participants emphasized that their time gained new meaning through participation in RU. Several described previously empty or monotonous days being replaced by purposeful routines. One participant explained, '*My days were very empty after retirement, but now I have a reason to get up in the morning*' (P6).

Taken together, these accounts depict revival as an embodied and existential experience through which participants reinterpreted aging, purpose, and vitality in later life.

Main Theme 2: Revival as Learning-Driven Transformation

Learning was described not merely as the acquisition of new information but as a transformative process that fostered self-development, confidence, and continued relevance. Participants highlighted the pleasure of learning and its contribution to personal growth. One participant stated, '*Learning new things excites me; it opens my mind and gives me more confidence in myself*' (P3).

Knowledge acquisition was frequently linked to practical improvements in daily life. Participants reported applying health-related knowledge and developing technological skills that enhanced their independence. For example, one participant shared, '*I immediately apply what I learn in health classes to my life. I now know better how to use my medications*' (P2). Another participant noted, '*I was keen to learn how to use a computer, and now I feel more confident around my grandchildren*' (P12).

Keeping up with the times was also emphasized as an important outcome of learning. Participants described gaining digital competencies that helped them feel less excluded from contemporary life. One participant reflected, '*Artificial intelligence was explained in class, so I downloaded the program and tried it myself. I feel closer to the younger generation now*' (P6). Such experiences contributed to a sense of competence and continuity rather than decline.

Overall, educational participation was experienced as a learning-driven transformation that sustained mental activity, self-efficacy, and personal relevance in later life.

Main Theme 3: Revival as Relational Belonging

Social connection emerged as a central dimension of the revival experience. Participants described RU as a space where they formed meaningful relationships, overcame loneliness, and developed a sense of belonging. One participant expressed this shift clearly: *'I felt very lonely at home, but when I came here, I found a new family'* (P2).

Friendship and solidarity were repeatedly emphasized. Participants spoke about shared experiences, mutual support, and emotional closeness. As one participant stated, *'I made new friends here; we laugh and have fun together'* (P5). Another shared, *'When I got sick, my friends called and asked how I was doing. That meant a lot to me'* (P6). These relationships extended beyond the classroom and contributed to feelings of being valued and accepted.

Belonging was often described in familial terms. Participants referred to RU as 'a second home' (P15) and emphasized feeling respected and included. This sense of belonging motivated some participants to encourage others to join RU. One participant stated, *'I tell my peers not to stay at home. This place adds so much to your life'* (P25).

Collectively, these social gains positioned RU as a relational environment that countered isolation and reinforced a shared sense of communal identity.

Main Theme 4: Revival as Forward-Oriented Agency under Constraints

Although participants described revival as a positive and motivating experience, they also reported facing various challenges. Health-related issues, transportation difficulties, and social pressure were commonly mentioned. Participants spoke about chronic pain, visual impairments, and mobility limitations that made participation demanding. One participant stated, *'Sometimes my knees hurt and climbing stairs is difficult, but I still try to come'* (P20).

Transportation barriers were also highlighted. Participants described long journeys, unfavorable weather conditions, and reliance on public transportation. Despite these difficulties, many emphasized their determination to continue attending RU. As one participant noted, *'I live far away and have to change two buses, but it's worth the effort'* (P7).

Social pressure emerged as another constraint. Some participants reported being questioned or criticized by peers or family members for attending university at an older age. One participant shared, *'My neighbors teased me, saying "school at this age?" but I don't listen to them'* (P9). Despite such comments, participants continued to engage with RU.

Alongside these constraints, participants articulated new goals, aspirations, and a renewed commitment to life. They described setting future-oriented goals and believing that long-held dreams were still attainable. One participant stated, *'I thought life was over, but now I still have goals. I want to learn more and maybe even travel'* (P21). Another shared, *'The education I received here showed me that my dreams can still come true'* (P26).

Overall, difficulties were not described as reasons for withdrawal but as challenges negotiated through determination and perceived meaning, highlighting revival as a fragile yet forward-oriented form of agency.

3.1. Essence of the experience

Taken together, the four themes reveal revival as a multidimensional process encompassing embodied meaning, transformative learning, relational belonging, and future-oriented agency. Participants described 'coming alive again' through learning, social connection, and renewed purpose, even in the presence of age-related constraints. Revival was experienced not as a denial of aging but as an active reorientation toward possibility, meaning, and continued engagement with life.

4. Discussion

This study, carried out to elucidate the reasons for older adults' arrival at RU, their experiences, and their expectations, identified core experiential patterns that were reorganized into four analytically coherent themes, reflecting participants' lived meanings rather than discrete outcome categories. We observed that they used metaphors such as rebirth, hope, and empowerment to describe the educational process at RU. Participants described the education as 'the light at the end of the tunnel' (P9) or 'a flower blooming in spring' (P4), indicating that education for older adults is not only a process of acquiring knowledge but also of reconstructing the meaning of life. Taken together, these metaphorical expressions point to revival as a phenomenological reorientation in later life, through which aging is reinterpreted as a phase of continuity and renewed agency rather than decline. These findings reflect the essence of the experience formulated in this study, revival as a multidimensional reawakening that integrates learning, belonging, and renewed agency in later life. Interpreted through transformative learning theory and existential gerontology, this revival can be understood as a perspective transformation in which meaning and self-positioning are actively reconstructed in response to aging (Mezirow, 2018; Reker & Chamberlain, 2000). These results are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that learning in old age has a transformative effect on individual identity and life satisfaction (Formosa, 2019; Narushima et al., 2018).

Furthermore, self-development, social bonding, and giving meaning to time stood out among the motivations for participation. One participant's statement, 'When I came here, I found a new family' (P2), strongly reflects the social dimension of education and its impact on loneliness. However, participants observed health issues, transportation difficulties, and social pressures as barriers to participation. The statement, 'My eyesight is poor; I have difficulty reading the text' (P10), also highlights the need for the educational environment to meet standards appropriate to the characteristics of old age. Rather than functioning as reasons for withdrawal, these difficulties were described as conditions that participants negotiated through commitment and perceived meaning, indicating that revival unfolded alongside vulnerability and constraint. These results are consistent with the literature indicating that the barriers elderly individuals encounter in the educational process are influenced by physical and environmental conditions (Boulton-Lewis, 2010; Friebe & Schmidt-Hertha, 2013; Hu, 2023). Such findings underscore the importance of institutional strategies to mitigate barriers related to transport, accessibility, and stigma. Creating age-friendly campuses, flexible schedules, and digital support mechanisms can enhance equitable participation and sustain engagement among older learners.

The social contributions of the RU experience are noteworthy. The RU experience has emphasized the development of participants' friendships, strengthened their sense of belonging, and created an environment of solidarity. One participant's statement, 'RU has become my second home' (P15), reflects the power of social belonging. Likewise, studies indicate that older adults' participation in educational programs reduces social isolation and supports psychosocial well-being (de Lima Flauzino et al., 2022; Narushima et al., 2018). Moreover, the learning process has been highlighted for its dimensions of knowledge acquisition, adaptation to the times, and adding vitality to life. Participants stated that they applied health information in their daily lives, used technology more effectively, and felt more mentally active thanks to learning. These accounts suggest that learning functioned as a relational and embodied process, supporting both cognitive engagement and sustained feelings of competence and relevance in everyday life. This indicates that educational processes both support the cognitive functions of older adults and increase their life energy (Findsen & Formosa, 2016; Hu, 2023). These outcomes are consistent with international lifelong learning movements such as the University of the Third Age (U3A) and intergenerational universities, which emphasize social participation, intellectual stimulation, and intergenerational solidarity. By situating RU within this global context, it can be viewed as a locally adapted model that contributes to the international discourse on aging education and active citizenship (Formosa & Higgs, 2015; Findsen & Formosa, 2011).

Another striking result is the increased hope for the future. Participants have seen the RU experience contribute to setting future goals and increasing their commitment to life. Participants acquired new goals and gained motivation to realize their dreams. Moreover, they drew attention to the importance of lifelong learning by inviting their peers to participate. This future orientation challenges deficit-based models of aging by demonstrating that later-life learning can sustain intentionality and forward-looking agency even in the presence of age-related limitations. In particular, acquiring digital skills and strengthening health competencies are considered among the most critical contributions RU offers to older adults. These results align with studies emphasizing that digital literacy and health literacy are fundamental requirements for independent living, social participation, and well-being in old age (Chesser et al., 2016; Czaja et al., 2018; Xie, 2012). Indeed, effectively using technology and integrating health information into their lives offers participants not only individual empowerment but also the opportunity to play an active role in social participation. Therefore, RU provides older adults with multidimensional gains in terms of individual development, social integration, and institutional contribution. These findings suggest important implications for curriculum design and aging policy: programs should integrate intergenerational interaction, experiential learning, and psychosocial support components to promote both empowerment and inclusion.

Beyond the national context, the findings of this study align with international models of later-life learning, particularly with the U3A and various intergenerational university programmes developed across Europe, Australia, and East Asia. Similar to the U3A framework (Laslett, 1991; Formosa, 2019), the RU offers a non-formal and socially embedded learning environment that enables older adults to cultivate a sense of agency, belonging, and personal meaning through active participation and shared learning experiences. However, the Turkish model reveals distinctive structural and cultural characteristics. Unlike most U3A initiatives, which are primarily operated by volunteers and community groups, the RU is institutionally integrated within public universities, offering a structured four-year curriculum and regular intergenerational learning encounters. This institutional embedding appears to support sustained engagement and reinforces revival as a continuous, socially situated process rather than a temporary educational outcome. This design situates the programme as a contextually adapted form of later-life education that blends global principles of lifelong learning with local sociocultural values and policy priorities (Findsen & Formosa, 2011; Narushima et al., 2018).

5. Result

This study analyzed the educational experiences, motivations, difficulties, social gains, and future expectations of elderly adults enrolled in RU. It demonstrates that RU is not merely an educational environment for participants but also a multidimensional experience that provides social support, a sense of belonging, and life satisfaction. Participants stated that their feelings of renewal and empowerment, expressed through metaphors, integrated with their learning processes and gave new meaning to their lives. Furthermore, individuals made significant progress in adapting to the times by acquiring digital skills and health competencies. Despite obstacles such as health problems and transportation difficulties, the participants' strong motivation to learn and form social bonds was noteworthy. In general, this research demonstrates that RU plays a critical role in lifelong learning and active aging processes.

5.1. Limitations

This study has certain limitations. The study was conducted only with individuals aged 60 and over who were receiving education at an RU. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to elderly individuals in different cities or sociocultural contexts. The sample size of the study is limited, and in-depth data was sought using qualitative methods; however, this limits the transferability of the results to wider populations. The results obtained may vary due to personal and contextual differences, as the

participants' responses are based on subjective experiences, feelings, and perceptions. The results depend on the participants and the environment in which the study was conducted.

5.2. Recommendations

Future research involving larger samples and RU participants from different provinces would increase the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, it is recommended that studies be conducted to examine the educational experiences of older adults in different dimensions (e.g., health behaviors, digital literacy, social adaptation, psychological well-being). Examining the long-term effects of RU on older adults through longitudinal or experimental designs would also make significant contributions to the literature.

These study results offer some practical directions for policy and institutional action. Universities and local governments should broaden access to later-life learning, ensure age-friendly transportation and environments, and promote digital and health literacy programs that meet older adults' needs. Collaboration among universities, health systems, and community organizations can further support participation and reduce barriers. Overall, lifelong learning initiatives emerge as a key pathway to healthier, more active, and socially connected aging, warranting continued institutional and policy investment.

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Data availability statement

Datasets are available on reasonable request by contacting the corresponding author

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