

## The Impact of Equality Education on Improving the Quality of Life of Learners: A Narrative Study of Package C Alumni at the Alamamala Community Learning Center (PKBM) in Kayumalue Pajeko Village

Dewi Novianti<sup>1\*</sup>, Saude BA<sup>2</sup> & Mohammad Djamil M.Nur<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Islamic Religious Education Study Program State Islamic University Datokarama Palu, Indonesia

<sup>2,3</sup>State Islamic University Datokarama Palu, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Dewi Novianti, E-mail: [dewi.novianti1981@gmail.com](mailto:dewi.novianti1981@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the impact of equivalency education, particularly the Paket C program, on improving the quality of life of learners at the Community Learning Activity Center (PKBM) Alamamala, Kayumalue Pajeko Village. This study employs a qualitative approach using a narrative study method, focusing on the personal experiences of alumni in participating in the equivalency education program and the changes they experienced after completing it. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed thematically to explore the meaning and patterns of participants' experiences.

The findings reveal that the Paket C equivalency education program has a positive impact on improving the quality of life of alumni in four main aspects: (1) social, through increased community participation and social acceptance; (2) economic, by enhancing work skills and job opportunities; (3) educational, through the opportunity to pursue higher education; and (4) psychological, through greater self-confidence, motivation, and life satisfaction. Supporting factors include the role of tutors, flexible learning schedules, and a supportive social environment, while the main challenges are limited facilities and initial learner motivation.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, Becker's Human Capital Theory, and Sen's Human Development Theory, which collectively explain how equivalency education transforms perspectives, enhances individual capacities, and expands life opportunities. The results of this study are expected to serve as an evaluation and development reference for non-formal education programs to strengthen their contribution to improving community quality of life.

### 1. Introduction

The Community Learning Activity Center (PKBM) is a learning venue for the community that aims to empower the potential of society to contribute to development in the fields of education, social affairs, economy, and culture (Sudjana, 2004). PKBM is

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a continuation of the Community Learning Center (CLC) concept, which has been known in Indonesia since the 1960s. Institutionally, the establishment of PKBM in Indonesia began in 1998, in line with efforts to expand public access to educational services (Hutama, 2016). PKBM is an educational institution organized outside the formal education system, intended for both rural and urban communities. It is managed by the community itself and provides opportunities for them to develop various learning models with the aim of enhancing the community's abilities and skills to improve their quality of life (Kamil, 2011). Community Learning Centers (PKBM) are learning centers for communities that aim to empower communities to contribute to development in the fields of education, social affairs, economics, and culture (Sudjana, 2004). PKBMs are a continuation of the Community Learning Center (CLC) concept that has been known in Indonesia since the 1960s. Institutionally, the establishment of PKBM in Indonesia began in 1998, in line with efforts to expand community access to educational services (Hutama, 2016). PKBM is an educational institution organized outside the formal education system, aimed at both rural and urban communities. PKBM are managed by the communities themselves and provide opportunities for them to develop various learning models with the aim of improving the abilities and skills of the community in order to improve their quality of life (Kamil, 2011).

The objectives of PKBM are (1) to reduce community dependence on the government, which is directed at community self-reliance in improving knowledge and skills to develop PKBM; (2) PKBM develops programs and involves and utilizes community potential; (3) motivates the community to participate directly in planning, implementation, and evaluation; (4) to explore, nurture, and utilize the untapped potential that exists in the community through a persuasive approach; (5) to implement programs aimed at developing knowledge and skills in line with the needs of the community so as to improve the economy (Widodo, 2017). The function of learning in PKBM is as a place for non-formal learning activities to facilitate the community in acquiring knowledge and skills, sources of information, and as a forum for community learning (Tinja, 2017).

The existence of this community learning center has been well received by the community, leading to its establishment as a Community Learning Center (PKBM) in various regions throughout Indonesia. One example is the Alamamala Community Learning Center (PKBM) located in Kayumalue Pajeko Village, Palu City. As a non-formal education unit, PKBM Alamamala was established in 2008 to serve the community in the field of education, with reference to the vision, mission, and objectives of non-formal education, including serving, developing, and coordinating community services in the field of education. Equivalency education, particularly Package C, is a solution for citizens who are unable to complete formal education due to economic, social, or access limitations. However, its effectiveness in improving the quality of life of alumni has rarely been studied in depth. Therefore, this research is important to provide empirical data on the real impact of equivalency education on the social, economic, educational, and psychological aspects of alumni, as well as to serve as a basis for evaluating and developing PKBM programs to be more effective in supporting the development of superior human resources. Based on the background of the problem described above, the research question in this study is: How does equivalency education impact the improvement of alumni's quality of life (social, economic, and personal aspects)?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **A. The concept of non-formal education and equality**

#### **1. Non-Formal Education**

##### **a. Definition**

According to Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Sisdiknas), non-formal education is a form of education outside of formal education that can be implemented in a structured and tiered manner. Non-formal education serves as a supplement, substitute, and/or complement to formal education to support lifelong learning.

##### **b. Objectives**

1. To provide access to education for people who are unable to attend formal education.
2. To equip learners with knowledge, attitudes, and skills relevant to their needs in life.
3. To serve as a means of empowerment to improve quality of life

##### **c. Characteristics**

1. Equivalent to formal education, but more flexible.
2. Organized by PKBM, SKB, or similar institutions.
3. The curriculum refers to the national curriculum, adapted to the needs of learners.

4. Diverse learners: school dropouts, workers, housewives, marginalized communities.

## **B. The concept of quality of life (social, economic, educational, and psychological aspects)**

According to Soedjatmiko (2002: 15): Quality of life is a condition that indicates an individual's level of well-being, whether physically, psychologically, socially, or spiritually, which enables a person to live a meaningful life.

### **1. Social aspects**

According to Putnam (2000), social quality of life is related to social capital, namely social networks, trust, and norms that strengthen social cohesion. It concerns the interactions, relationships, and social roles of individuals in society.

Indicators:

- a. Participation in community activities.
- b. Social acceptance and sense of belonging to the community.
- c. Social status and recognition from the environment.
- d. Social support (family, friends, community).

### **2. Economic aspects**

According to Todaro (2003), improvements in economic quality of life are characterized by: increased income, reduced poverty, and increased access to basic needs.

This relates to the ability of individuals to meet their basic needs and improve their material well-being.

Indicators:

- a. Level of income and decent work.
- b. Availability of basic needs (food, clothing, shelter).
- c. Access to health and transportation facilities.
- d. Economic security (savings, social security, financial independence).

### **3. Educational Aspects**

According to Tilaar (2002), quality education empowers people to overcome life's problems and increase their participation in development. Education is the main instrument for improving the quality of life because it functions as human capital.

Indicators:

- a. Level of education attained (formal and non-formal).
- b. Access to information, literacy, and new skills.
- c. Opportunities to continue to higher levels of education.
- d. Life skills acquired through the education process.

### **4. Psychological Aspects**

According to Ryff (1989) in the Psychological Well-Being Model, psychological well-being is determined by six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. This concerns the mental and emotional state of individuals and their feelings about their lives.

Indicators:

- a. Level of life satisfaction and happiness.
- b. Mental health (free from excessive stress, anxiety, depression).
- c. Self-confidence and self-esteem.
- d. Motivation to develop and optimism about the future.

## **C. Transformative learning theory (Mezirow), human capital theory, and human development theory.**

### **1. Transformative Learning Theory (Jack Mezirow)**

The transformative learning theory developed by Jack Mezirow (1991, 2000) emphasizes that adult learning is not only about acquiring knowledge, but also changing ways of thinking, perspectives, and life frames of reference. The transformative process occurs through critical reflection on experiences, enabling individuals to form new meanings, increase self-awareness, and act more independently. In the context of Package C equity education, this theory is relevant because learners are often adults or out-of-school youth, so the learning process they experience can change their perspectives on education, work, and the future.

## 2. Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory was popularized by economists Theodore W. Schultz (1961) and Gary Becker (1964). This theory assumes that education is a form of long-term investment that improves a person's skills, productivity, and economic potential. Higher education provides greater opportunities to obtain better jobs, higher incomes, and improved welfare. Equivalency education Package C can be seen as a means of human capital investment, as it provides opportunities for citizens to obtain high school equivalency diplomas, improve their skills, and open access to the job market and higher education.

## 3. Human Development Theory (UNDP/Amartya Sen)

Human development theory emphasizes that development is not only measured by economic growth, but also by improvements in the quality of human life in various aspects, such as health, education, and decent living standards. This concept is adopted in the Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the UNDP based on the ideas of Amartya Sen and Mahbub ul Haq. In this study, human development theory is relevant because equivalency education serves not only to provide diplomas but also as a means of improving the quality of life of learners in social, economic, educational, and psychological aspects, so that they can play a more active role in community development.

### Relevance of the Three Theories to the Research

Mezirow → emphasizes changes in the perspectives and self-awareness of learners through learning experiences in Package C.

Human Capital → emphasizes education as an investment that improves the skills and economic opportunities of alumni.

Human Development → emphasizes the contribution of equity education to holistic improvements in quality of life (social, economic, educational, psychological).

Several previous studies have examined equitable education and its impact on society. Research by Fuadi, M. R., & Himmah, I. F. (2021). Implementation of Package C Equitable Education Program Learning on Improving the Standard of Living of Learners at PKBM Al Muttaqin, Jember Regency. *Learning Community Journal*. This study describes how the input, process, and output of Package C learning impact the standard of living of learners at PKBM Al Muttaqin.

Then Risady, I. E., Wilson, W., Maemunaty, T., Bahar, A., & Handoko, T. (2020/2021). The Effectiveness of Package C Equivalency Program Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic. *Citizenship Journal*. This study focuses on the effectiveness of Package C learning in a pandemic situation, the learning methods used, and the challenges faced by administrators and learners.

Sari, W. A., Permana, R. U., Gustomi, A., Karwati, L. (2024). The Application of Life Skills Education in Equivalency Education. *Cendekia Journal: Education and Community Empowerment*. This study discusses how life skills education is integrated into the equity education program at SPNF-SKB Ciamis Regency, its effectiveness, and its impact on learners.

## 3. Methodology

This research was conducted directly in the field to obtain the necessary data. The research location was PKBM Alamamala, Kayumalue Pajeko Village. The method used was a qualitative method that produced analysis procedures without using statistical analysis procedures or other quantification methods. This study aims to describe and analyze the impact of equivalency education, particularly Package C, on improving the quality of life of students at PKBM Alamamala, Kayumalue Pajeko Village. Subjects: Package C alumni (5–7 people) with different backgrounds. Data Collection Techniques In-depth interviews, observation of the PKBM environment, documentation (archives, PKBM reports, participant data). Data Analysis Techniques Narrative analysis (Creswell): story organization, theme coding, interpretation of the meaning of experiences. Data Validity Triangulation of sources and methods. Member check. Audit trail. Research Stages Preparation (literature study, licensing). Data collection. Data analysis. Compilation of research results report.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Based on in-depth interviews with six alumni of Program C, several key themes emerged that illustrate the impact of equality education on quality of life, covering four aspects: social, economic, educational, and psychological.

### 1. Social Aspects

Alumni feel that they have gained greater social acceptance after completing the Package C education program. They are more confident in participating in community activities, such as neighborhood meetings, youth organizations, and religious activities. Previously, some felt inferior because they did not have a high school diploma.

*"I used to feel embarrassed when participating in village activities because I hadn't graduated from high school. After obtaining my Package C diploma, I became more confident, and now I am even trusted to be a youth organization administrator."* (Respondent A)

This change shows a transformation in social perspective, in line with Mezirow's transformative education theory, in which the learning process helps individuals reflect on their experiences and change their views of themselves and their environment.

## 2. Economic Aspects

Most alumni reported economic changes after completing Package C. With this certificate, they have broader access to job opportunities, especially in the formal sector such as administration, retail, and services.

*"After graduating from Package C, I was able to apply for a job at a company, and now my income is much more stable."* (Respondent B)

This reinforces the relevance of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which explains that education is an investment to improve individual skills and productivity, which in turn leads to increased income.

## 3. Educational Aspects

The Package C program also opens up opportunities for alumni to continue their education to a higher level, such as studying at open universities or polytechnics. Several alumni said that their enthusiasm for learning was rekindled after completing this program.

*"I thought I had stopped learning forever. But after joining Package C, I became motivated to learn again."* (Respondent C)

These findings show that equivalency education not only serves as a substitute for formal diplomas, but also as a catalyst for lifelong learning.

## 4. Psychological Aspects

Psychologically, alumni experience increased self-confidence, motivation, and life satisfaction. They feel more empowered and optimistic about the future.

*"Now I am more confident. I feel proud to have completed my education, even though it was through a non-formal pathway."* (Respondent D)

These psychological changes indicate the success of the self-empowerment process, which is at the core of Mezirow's theory. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that Package C equivalency education has a significant impact on improving the quality of life of alumni. These findings are in line with various previous studies, such as Fuadi & Himmah (2021) and Sari et al. (2024), which state that equivalency education can improve living standards and community empowerment.

From the perspective of Transformative Education Theory (Mezirow), the learning process at PKBM Alamamala provides a means for students to reflect on their life experiences, change their perspectives about themselves, and increase their critical awareness of their potential and opportunities. According to Human Capital Theory (Becker & Schultz), equivalency education is a form of human resource investment. Improving skills and formal qualifications through Package C enables alumni to obtain more decent jobs, thereby contributing to their economic well-being. Within the framework of Human Development Theory (Amartya Sen), equity education plays a role in expanding individuals' capabilities or freedoms to choose a meaningful life. This program not only increases knowledge but also improves the quality of life socially, economically, and

psychologically. Thus, Package C at PKBM Alamamala has proven to function as a tool for social transformation and human empowerment, not merely as an alternative to formal education. This program has great potential to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in the areas of inclusive education and improving community welfare.

## **5. Conclusion**

Based on the results of the research and discussion presented, it can be concluded that Package C equivalency education at PKBM Alamamala has a positive and significant impact on improving the quality of life of alumni in various aspects, including social, economic, educational, and psychological aspects.

Social aspect: Alumni experience increased self-confidence and social involvement in the community. They are more active in participating in social activities and feel that they have an equal standing with formal education graduates.

→ This shows a transformation of social awareness, as explained by transformative education theory (Mezirow).

Economic aspect: The Package C certificate provides broader opportunities to obtain more decent jobs, increase income, and open up new economic access.

→ This finding supports the Human Capital theory (Becker), which states that education is an investment in increasing individual productivity.

Educational aspect: The Package C program serves as a bridge for alumni to continue their education to a higher level and fosters a spirit of lifelong learning.

Psychological aspect: Equitable education has an impact on increasing self-confidence, motivation, and self-satisfaction. Alumni feel more empowered and have a more positive outlook on life.

→ This is in line with the theory of human development (Amartya Sen), which emphasizes that education expands individuals' ability to make valuable life choices.

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