

Transformation of Package A Learning through Thematic Strategies to Increase Learner Participation

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ABSTRACT. The Paket A equivalency education program provides a non-formal pathway for individuals who have not completed primary education. However, the program often faces challenges related to low learner participation, including irregular attendance and limited engagement during learning activities. This study aims to examine the potential of thematic learning as an instructional approach to enhance learner participation in Paket A. Using a qualitative literature review method, this research synthesizes theoretical perspectives and findings from previous studies on thematic learning and non-formal education. The results indicate that thematic learning can increase learner motivation, improve attendance, and encourage active participation by connecting learning materials with real-life contexts and learners' experiences. This approach aligns with andragogical principles that emphasize relevance and experiential learning. Nevertheless, its implementation remains constrained by limited tutor competence and inadequate learning facilities. Overall, thematic learning shows considerable potential as an effective pedagogical strategy to strengthen learner participation and improve the quality of learning in the Paket A equivalency education program.

Keywords: *Thematic Learning, Package A Equivalency Education, Learner Participation*

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INTRODUCTION

Equivalency education is a non-formal educational pathway designed to provide learning opportunities equivalent to formal schooling through the Paket A, Paket B, and Paket C programs. It aims to address the educational needs of individuals who face barriers to accessing formal education due to school dropout, economic constraints, age factors, or other social limitations. As a form of second chance education, equivalency programs enable learners to acquire knowledge, skills, and fundamental competencies comparable to those obtained in formal education. Therefore, equivalency education functions not only as an alternative learning pathway but also as an important instrument for expanding educational access and improving human resource quality through the recognition of academically and functionally equivalent learning outcomes (Hafni & Rcl, 2019). In practice, Paket A learners demonstrate diverse characteristics in terms of age, learning experience, and socio-economic background, requiring adaptive and flexible learning approaches to ensure effective learning processes (Junanto et al., 2024)

That the implementation of learning in equivalency education programs continues to face challenges related to low learner participation. This condition is reflected in inconsistent attendance, limited interaction between learners and tutors as well as among peers, and a tendency for learners to remain passive during instructional activities. Such patterns indicate that the learning process has not fully succeeded in fostering active engagement among participants (Mahmud et al., 2021). The low

level of participation suggests that existing instructional approaches require further development to become more engaging, contextual, and responsive to learners' needs and real-life experiences. In this regard, Hajar (2025) argue that the adoption of more relevant and meaningful learning strategies can enhance learner participation in equivalency education, thereby improving both the effectiveness of the learning process and its outcomes.

Thematic learning is widely regarded as an effective approach to addressing various instructional challenges. This approach integrates competencies, concepts, and materials from multiple subjects into a unified theme that is closely related to learners' everyday experiences. Through thematic learning, learners do not study concepts in isolation but develop a holistic and meaningful understanding of the interconnections among them. Contextual themes also help stimulate learning interest, facilitate comprehension, and encourage active participation in the learning process. As a result, thematic learning contributes to the creation of more relevant, engaging, and learner-centered educational experiences that align with the needs and characteristics of learners (Subhan, 2025). Moreover, this approach enables learners to recognize the practical relevance of academic content in daily life. Previous studies further indicate that thematic learning can enhance learning motivation, promote active discussion, and improve conceptual understanding by providing contextual and meaningful learning experiences (Tulus et al., 2024)

Thematic learning also demonstrates a strong alignment with the principles of andragogy, which serve as a fundamental framework in adult education (Lewis & Bryan, 2021). Andragogical theory emphasizes that adult learners possess a rich reservoir of life experiences that can function as valuable learning resources. In addition, adults generally have practical learning needs that are closely related to their daily lives, social roles, and work responsibilities, and they tend to be driven more by intrinsic motivation than by external pressure. Within this context, learning approaches that acknowledge and integrate these characteristics are more likely to create meaningful and effective learning experiences.

Thematic learning provides such an opportunity by organizing learning content around themes that are relevant to learners' real-life contexts. Through this approach, participants in equivalency education programs can connect their prior experiences, knowledge, and social realities with the learning material being studied. As a result, the learning process becomes more contextual, reflective, and participatory. This integration not only encourages learners to actively contribute their perspectives during discussions and collaborative activities but also fosters a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility toward the learning process. Consequently, thematic learning can enhance learner engagement and participation while supporting the broader objectives of adult education in developing meaningful and applicable knowledge (Hasniar & Utama, 2023)

Despite the growing body of literature on thematic learning, studies examining its application within the context of equivalency education particularly in the Paket A program remain relatively limited. Most existing research on thematic learning has been conducted within formal education settings, such as primary and secondary schools, where institutional structures, curriculum frameworks, and learner characteristics differ significantly from those found in non-formal education. Consequently, the specific dynamics of implementing thematic learning in equivalency education programs, which often involve learners with diverse ages, backgrounds, and life experiences, have not been sufficiently explored. This gap indicates the need for more focused investigations that examine how thematic learning strategies can be adapted and applied in the Paket A program to provide a clearer understanding of their implementation, effectiveness, and the supporting as well as constraining factors that influence learner participation (Ardy & Budiarti, 2025)

In response to this gap, the present study aims to examine the implementation of thematic learning strategies within the instructional process of the Paket A program and to analyze their role in enhancing learner participation. Specifically, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how thematic learning contributes to improving learners' attendance and active engagement during the learning process. Furthermore, the study also aims to identify the key enabling and inhibiting factors that affect the implementation of thematic learning in equivalency education. By addressing these aspects, the findings are expected to offer

practical insights for tutors, program managers, and educational institutions in designing and implementing more effective and participatory learning strategies, thereby contributing to the sustainable improvement of learning quality in the Paket A equivalency education program.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a literature review method to systematically examine and synthesize existing scholarly works related to thematic learning strategies and learner participation in equivalency education, particularly in the Paket A program. A literature-based approach is appropriate for identifying conceptual patterns, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings from previous studies in order to build a comprehensive understanding of a research topic (J. W. & Poth, 2023) (Snyder, 2019). Through this approach, the study aims to map relevant concepts and highlight the potential contribution of thematic learning in improving learner participation within non-formal education contexts.

The data for this study were derived from secondary sources in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and relevant policy or educational documents. To ensure the relevance and contemporaneity of the analysis, the literature was limited to publications from the last ten years (2015–2025). The literature search was conducted through several online academic databases, including Google Scholar and accredited national journal portals, using keywords such as thematic learning, equivalency education, Paket A program, and learner participation. The selection process involved screening the titles, abstracts, and full texts to ensure alignment with the research objectives. Only literature that directly addressed learning strategies in non-formal education or learner participation was included in the analysis.

The collected literature was analyzed using content analysis techniques. Content analysis enables researchers to systematically identify key concepts, recurring themes, and patterns within textual data (Krippendorff, 2019);(Elo et al., 2014). In this study, the analysis focused on identifying how thematic learning is conceptualized, implemented, and evaluated in relation to learner participation. The findings from the selected literature were then synthesized to generate an integrated understanding of the role and potential effectiveness of thematic learning strategies in the Paket A equivalency education program.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, the study relied on reputable and peer-reviewed sources and conducted cross-comparisons among multiple studies to identify consistent findings and conceptual convergence. This triangulation of literature helps strengthen the reliability of interpretations and allows for a more comprehensive explanation of the relationship between thematic learning approaches and learner participation in non-formal education settings (Bowen, 2009); (Snyder, 2019)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on a review of relevant literature, thematic learning has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical approach to enhance learner participation in equivalency education, particularly in the Package A program. Participation is reflected not only in improved attendance rates but also in the increased engagement of learners during learning activities. In non-formal education settings, instructional approaches that connect learning materials with real-life contexts tend to stimulate greater interest and involvement among learners. Thematic learning organizes content around topics that are closely related to everyday experiences, enabling learners to

perceive the material as more relevant and easier to understand. Such contextualization has been shown to support deeper engagement and facilitate more meaningful learning processes (Syaikhu, 2023). These findings are consistent with broader studies in educational research that emphasize the importance of contextual and integrated learning in fostering active learner participation (Drake & Reid, 2018), (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020)

The literature review also indicates that thematic learning contributes positively to learner motivation in the Package A program. By integrating multiple subjects within a single theme, the learning process becomes more holistic and less fragmented, allowing learners to see clearer connections between knowledge and its practical application in daily life. This integrated structure encourages learners to perceive learning as purposeful and valuable, which in turn strengthens their intrinsic motivation to participate consistently in educational activities (Septiani & Rosmilawati, 2024). Previous studies in adult and non-formal education similarly highlight that learning approaches that emphasize relevance, experiential engagement, and problem-based contexts can significantly increase learner motivation and persistence (Bierema, 2019), (Knowles et al., 2020).

Furthermore, thematic learning has been found to enhance learner activeness during the learning process. Activities such as group discussions, collaborative tasks, and experience-based learning embedded within thematic instruction encourage learners to actively exchange ideas and engage in social interaction. This interactive environment not only strengthens learners' understanding of the material but also fosters a sense of community and collaborative learning among participants. In the context of non-formal education, learner activeness is often considered a key indicator of meaningful participation, as it reflects the learners' willingness to contribute, ask questions, and interact within the learning environment (Sun et al., 2022). Similar findings have been reported in studies on learner-centered pedagogy, which emphasize that active learning strategies significantly improve engagement and knowledge retention (Silva et al., 2024), (Mawardi & Hardini, 2024)

In addition to its positive impacts, the literature also identifies several supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of thematic learning within the Package A program. Supporting factors include the flexibility of the equivalency education curriculum and the ability of thematic learning to align instructional materials with the real needs and experiences of learners. Such flexibility allows tutors to adapt learning activities according to the social, economic, and cultural backgrounds of participants, which is particularly important in non-formal education settings characterized by diverse learner profiles. However, several constraints remain evident. Among the most frequently cited challenges are the limited pedagogical competence of tutors in designing and implementing thematic learning strategies, as well as inadequate learning facilities and instructional resources (Lailatul Alifah & Sukartono, 2023). Similar institutional and capacity-related challenges have also been documented in research on adult and community education programs in developing contexts, where limited professional development opportunities for educators often hinder the adoption of innovative teaching approaches (Silvi Ratnawulan et al., 2025)

The findings of this study have several practical implications for tutors and institutions implementing the Package A program. First, there is a need to strengthen the application of adaptive and context-based thematic learning strategies that align with learners' needs, experiences, and socio-cultural backgrounds. Tutors play a crucial role in facilitating participatory learning environments where learners feel encouraged to actively engage with the material and with one another. Second, institutional support is essential to enhance tutor competence through professional training and capacity-building programs focused on innovative pedagogical approaches (Yu et al., 2025). Finally, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on non-formal education by highlighting the potential of thematic learning as an effective strategy to improve learner participation, motivation, and overall learning quality in equivalency education

programs. Future research may further explore empirical evaluations of thematic learning models in diverse non-formal education contexts to strengthen evidence-based practices in adult and community education.

The findings of this literature-based study indicate that the enhancement of learner participation in the Paket A equivalency education program through the implementation of thematic learning demonstrates the strong potential of this approach to address the distinctive characteristics of non-formal education. Equivalency education requires learning models that are flexible, contextually relevant, and responsive to the diverse backgrounds of learners. Participants in Paket A programs typically come from heterogeneous socio-economic, educational, and occupational backgrounds, which necessitates pedagogical approaches capable of accommodating varied learning needs and experiences. Thematic learning provides such flexibility by integrating learning content around themes closely related to learners' everyday realities, thereby making the learning process more meaningful and accessible.

Through the organization of learning activities based on themes connected to daily life contexts, learners are not only physically present in the classroom but also actively engaged cognitively, emotionally, and socially in the learning process. This approach encourages learners to analyze real-life issues, participate in discussions, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and apply conceptual knowledge to practical situations (Sitorus et al., 2025). Such findings reinforce the argument that contextual and experience-based learning strategies are particularly effective in non-formal and adult education environments because they increase learning relevance and conceptual understanding while fostering active engagement (Rodrigo et al., 2024). In this sense, thematic learning aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches emphasizing contextualization, learner agency, and experiential knowledge in adult and community education.

The results of this study are consistent with previous research emphasizing that the relevance of learning content plays a crucial role in creating meaningful learning experiences, particularly in adult and non-formal education settings. Adult learners tend to demonstrate higher levels of motivation when they can directly connect learning materials to their personal experiences, social realities, and everyday needs (Mukhalalati & Taylor, 2019). When learners perceive tangible benefits from the knowledge being acquired, their willingness to participate actively in class discussions, attend learning sessions regularly, and complete learning tasks increases significantly. In the context of equivalency education programs such as Paket A, thematic learning offers substantial opportunities to utilize social, cultural, and economic issues as foundations for developing learning themes. This approach enables instructional materials to become more dynamic, realistic, and meaningful while simultaneously promoting critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and learners' readiness to face challenges in real-life situations (Brookfield, S. D. 2017). (Illeris, 2018)

Furthermore, thematic learning encourages learners to reflect on their personal experiences and compare theoretical concepts with practical realities in their communities. Through reflection and contextual discussion, learners are able to reinterpret their experiences and integrate them with new knowledge. As a result, the learning process evolves beyond simple knowledge transmission and becomes a transformative process that fosters the holistic development of cognitive, emotional, and social competencies. This learner-centered approach strengthens learners' sense of ownership of the learning process and encourages them to participate more actively in various stages of learning activities. Research in non-formal education consistently demonstrates that participatory learning environments enhance engagement and contribute to deeper conceptual understanding (Vaculíková et al., 2024)

From the perspective of learning motivation, thematic learning offers a more meaningful educational experience compared to conventional subject-based learning that often presents knowledge in fragmented forms. By integrating multiple competencies and subject areas into a

single thematic framework, learners are able to develop a holistic understanding of learning objectives and recognize the practical relevance of acquired knowledge. Intrinsic motivation emerges when learners perceive that learning content can be directly applied to solve everyday problems, improve self-reliance, and develop practical life skills. Studies in adult education indicate that relevance and applicability of learning content significantly influence learners' motivation and persistence in educational programs (Scholtz, 2023)

The integration of learners' life experiences within thematic learning also contributes positively to learners' self-confidence. Many adult learners participating in equivalency education programs possess valuable work and social experiences. When these experiences are acknowledged and integrated into classroom discussions, learners feel more competent and empowered to express their ideas, engage in dialogue, and contribute to collaborative activities. This process enhances their self-efficacy and strengthens interpersonal communication skills. Consequently, thematic learning not only facilitates knowledge acquisition but also supports the development of social competencies, reflective thinking, and life skills that are essential for personal and community development (Illeris, 2018)

Another important finding of this study is the transformation of the roles of tutors and learners in the learning process. The implementation of thematic learning shifts the traditional instructional paradigm from teacher-centered to learner-centered learning. Tutors no longer function solely as the primary source of knowledge but instead act as facilitators, mentors, and learning companions who guide discussions and encourage the exchange of experiences among learners. Such facilitative roles are widely recognized in adult education theory as critical for creating participatory learning environments (Sugito, 2024). Through facilitated discussions, reflective activities, and collaborative tasks, learners are encouraged to express opinions, share personal experiences, and learn from one another. This process enhances cognitive engagement as well as social and emotional involvement in the learning process.

Collaborative interaction among learners also plays a strategic role in strengthening participation within equivalency education programs. Through group discussions, collaborative projects, and problem-solving activities, learners not only acquire academic knowledge but also develop interpersonal competencies such as communication, teamwork, and mutual respect. Research in collaborative learning environments demonstrates that interaction among peers significantly contributes to the development of social skills and emotional resilience (Arslan et al., 2024). Active engagement in group activities can also increase learners' confidence, particularly among those who previously lacked the confidence to express their ideas.

Moreover, collaborative learning provides opportunities for learners to exchange diverse perspectives and experiences, thereby enriching the learning process. In heterogeneous learning groups, learners often bring different socio-economic backgrounds, work experiences, and cultural perspectives. This diversity creates opportunities for collective learning, where participants can analyze problems from multiple viewpoints and develop shared solutions. Such learning processes not only enhance academic understanding but also promote empathy, social awareness, and mutual respect among participants (Brookfield, 2017).

In addition to improving participation and academic engagement, thematic learning also contributes to the development of social and character competencies. Through collaborative activities and thematic projects, learners are trained to work together, respect different viewpoints, and develop empathy toward others. They are also encouraged to take responsibility for both individual and group tasks, fostering a sense of accountability and autonomy. These competencies are particularly important in equivalency education programs, where the ultimate goal is not only academic certification but also the empowerment of learners to function effectively in social and professional environments (UNESCO, 2022).

The effectiveness of thematic learning is also closely related to the principles of andragogy, which emphasize that adult learners bring valuable experiences that serve as important learning resources. In Paket A programs, where many learners already possess work or social experience, integrating these experiences into the learning process enhances the relevance and effectiveness of instruction. Thematic learning provides opportunities for learners to reflect on their experiences and connect them with new knowledge, thereby creating a more participatory and meaningful learning process (Akintolu & Letseka, 2021)

Despite its many advantages, the implementation of thematic learning in Paket A programs also faces several challenges. One of the most significant obstacles is the limited pedagogical competence of tutors in designing and implementing thematic learning effectively. Tutors are required to integrate multiple subject areas, develop contextual learning activities, and manage classrooms with diverse learner characteristics. These demands require strong pedagogical, andragogical, and facilitation skills. Without adequate training and professional development, tutors may struggle to implement thematic learning effectively, thereby limiting its potential impact on learner participation (OECD, 2021)

Additionally, limitations in learning facilities and instructional resources can hinder the optimal implementation of thematic learning. Non-formal education institutions often operate with limited infrastructure and funding, which may restrict the availability of learning materials, collaborative spaces, and technological resources. Institutional support in the form of tutor training, curriculum development assistance, and adequate learning facilities is therefore crucial for the successful implementation of innovative learning strategies in equivalency education programs (UNESCO, 2022).

Overall, the findings of this literature review suggest that thematic learning represents a promising pedagogical strategy for improving learner participation in Paket A equivalency education. By emphasizing contextual relevance, collaborative interaction, and experiential learning, this approach transforms the learning process from passive knowledge reception into an active and participatory experience. When supported by adequate institutional policies, tutor capacity development, and sufficient learning resources, thematic learning has the potential to significantly enhance the quality of equivalency education in Indonesia while equipping learners with critical thinking skills, social competencies, and practical life skills needed to navigate contemporary social and economic challenges.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature study, it can be concluded that thematic learning plays an important role in increasing learner participation in the Package A Program. This approach allows learning materials to be presented in a contextual, relevant, and integrated manner, so that learners feel that the learning process is more meaningful, their motivation increases, and their active involvement in learning increases. Thematic learning is also in line with the principles of andragogy, which emphasizes the life experiences of learners as a source of learning, making it more suitable for application in the context of equitable education with adult learners. However, the success of implementing thematic learning strategies is highly dependent on the readiness of tutors and the support of the organizing institution. Obstacles such as limitations in tutor competence, time, and learning facilities need to be considered so that the implementation of thematic learning can be optimized. Therefore, developing tutor capacity through training, careful learning planning, and the provision of supporting facilities are important aspects in efforts to increase learner participation.

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