

Self-Concept and Self-Efficacy Beliefs as Determinants of Success among Equality Non-Formal Education Learners

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ABSTRACT

Background: Successful implementation of non-formal equality education requires learning centers to produce competent and independent learners. **Gap:** While much attention has been given to external factors and correcting educational weaknesses, there is a critical need to understand how internal self-constructs actively build learner competencies. **Method:** Therefore, the present study aims to explain the specific determinants of learner success by examining self-concept and self-efficacy beliefs. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed, utilizing in-depth, semi-structured interviews. **Participants:** Participants included adult learners such as farmers, industrial workers, and previous school dropouts enrolled in the vocational Package C (high school equivalence) program at Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in Malang District. **Findings:** Thematic content analysis revealed that successful learner development is rooted in distinct self-concept components, including self-image, idealism, and study-orientation. Additionally, self-efficacy manifests concretely through learners' ability to complete tasks, manage time, and respond positively to tutors' verbal persuasion. **Implications & Contribution:** Rather than merely identifying a broad "positive subjective experience," this study demonstrates how these internal constructs directly translate into tangible academic readiness, enhanced motivation, and the mastery of practical life skills. The primary contribution of this research is providing a targeted framework for CLCs to integrate tailored guidance and counseling services, ultimately leveraging learners' self-constructs to foster economic welfare and long-term social independence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Equality education is a crucial component of non-formal education that provides alternative learning pathways for heterogeneous communities, commonly referred to as "learning citizens," who cannot complete formal schooling [1], [2]. In Indonesia, this is implemented through programs such as Packages A, B, and C (equivalent to Elementary, Junior High, and High School), which are facilitated by community-based institutions such as Community Learning Activity Centers (CLACs). As local places of learning outside the formal system, CLACs share a common goal of helping people improve their quality of life through education and skills development [3]. Unlike standardized formal education, non-formal learning is highly diverse, learner-intentional, and specifically structured to meet local needs and learning objectives [4]–[6].

The successful implementation of equality education requires these learning centers to produce intelligent, independent, and competent learners, which is ultimately reflected in maximized learning outcomes. Historically, much attention has been paid to the individual and external social factors necessary for successful non-formal education, often with a primary focus on correcting educational weaknesses and preventing undesirable outcomes. However, scholars and practitioners are increasingly realizing that major progress towards sustaining successful educational development must come from a perspective that actively builds competencies. Achieving this mastery relies heavily on internal learner factors, particularly psychological constructs such as motivation, attitude, self-concept, and self-efficacy.

Non-formal education is the tool by which governments and international and local NGOs can, in partnership, contribute to the fulfilment of learning targets across all sectors [7]. Particular attention has been paid to the study of individual and social factors that may help citizens achieve equality in non-formal education [8]–[10]. Concerns about potential risks have often led to a focus primarily on the critical aspects of the education transition, with the goal of preventing undesirable outcomes. However, scholars and practitioners are increasingly realizing that major progress towards sustaining successful educational development may come from a perspective focused on building competencies, no less than from one focused on correcting weaknesses. Much of the task of prevention in this new century should be to create a science of human strength with the mission of understanding and learning how to foster the virtues and skills of young people [11].

Along this line of reasoning, and in accordance with the present study's purposes, this study explains the determinants of subjective success and the influential role of self-concept and self-efficacy beliefs in contributing to positive subjective experience over the course of non-formal education [12]–[14]. In many places, not just in developing countries, educationalists and policymakers are talking about non-formal education [15]–[17], and with it comes a recognition of its essential characteristics: as UNESCO: In contrast to the standardized system of formal education and vocational training, non-formal literacy and skills learning manifests high diversity, little standardization, few comparable results, and outcomes that differ by location and by individual learner [18].

Non-formal learning was discovered alongside formal and informal learning. An educational or training institution does not provide non-formal learning and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective [17], [19]. Equality education aims to provide equal education for people who cannot complete formal education. Communities that participate in the equivalent education learning process are commonly referred to as learning citizens. Learning citizens are heterogeneous, not limited to age, origin, religion, ethnicity, and gender. Equality education Package A, Package B, and Package C are choices for people who want to attend education at the Elementary School, Junior High School, and High School levels. Equality learning activities in Indonesia are facilitated by informal educational institutions such as the Community Learning Activity Center (CLAC) [6], [20], [21].

As UNESCO wrote in the definition of Community learning centres, they are local places of learning outside the formal education system. Located in both village and urban areas, they are usually set up and managed by local people and for local people, and their focus on lifelong learning often makes them a central component of community development. They may offer diverse learning opportunities, but all share a common goal: helping people to improve their quality of life through education and skills development.

Successful education implementation requires schools and learning centers to produce intelligent, innovative, independent, critical, and competent learners. Thus, to produce quality learning in the form of mastery of skills and knowledge, learning citizens is reflected in the highest learning outcomes. However, achieving this poses some challenges, including internal and external factors. Suggests that internal factors affecting student achievement include intelligence, motivation, attitude or learning style, self-efficacy, self-concept, interests, and students' physical condition. Furthermore, external factors are those that originate outside the individual, such as the self-teachers, family environment, school environment, and peer environment [22], [23].

One internal factor in the self is self-efficacy. States that self-efficacy is essentially the result of a cognitive process of decisions, beliefs or expectations about the extent to which individuals estimate their ability to perform certain tasks or actions to achieve desired outcomes [22], [24]. Some factors can affect a person's self-efficacy. The better the student's family environment, the higher the student's self-confidence in their abilities. Self-efficacy interacts with the environment, previous behaviour, and other variables, especially expectations of results, to influence aspects of a person's cognition and behaviour [25]–[27]. Specifically, self-concept is a general view that uses more general measures, carries stronger evaluative implications, relies heavily on social comparison, reflects perceived competence, and is past-oriented and relatively stable. In contrast, self-efficacy is more specifically measured by context-specific assessments, focuses on whether capability reaches objective goals or standards, indicates perceived confidence, and is future-oriented and malleable [28], [29].

While both self-concept and self-efficacy are critical internal determinants, they function differently within a learner's psychological framework. Self-concept represents a general view of oneself; it is relatively stable, past-oriented, heavily reliant on social

comparison, and reflects perceived competence. In contrast, self-efficacy is a context-specific, malleable, and future-oriented construct that measures a learner's confidence in achieving objectives or standards. Self-efficacy is a cognitive process in which individuals estimate their ability to perform necessary tasks or actions to achieve desired outcomes. Together, these constructs interact with a learner's environment and previous behaviors to shape cognition and motivation.

Despite the acknowledged importance of these internal factors, there remains a critical gap in understanding how self-concept and self-efficacy are actively constructed and experienced by learning citizens within the unique, diverse setting of non-formal education for equality. Prior research has often lacked deep qualitative exploration into the lived experiences of these adult learners. Therefore, a phenomenological methodology is necessary to explore these personal perspectives and understand the essence of their collective experiences regarding self-constructs

2. METHOD

Phenomenological methodology is concerned with understanding subjects' experiences, understandings, perceptions, and views [30]. A goal of phenomenology is to understand the variations as well as the collective experience of a particular phenomenon among a group of persons and to ultimately identify the essence, or meaning, of their experience [31]. It also allows the researcher to take insightful views of the participant's personal world [32].

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing a phenomenological methodology. Because academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy are internal psychological constructs, this approach is optimal for exploring the variations and collective lived experiences of citizens regarding their self-constructs within the context of non-formal equivalence education. This design enables an insightful, in-depth understanding of participants' personal worlds and perceptions.

Participants and Sampling

Participants in this study were learning-enrolled citizens in the vocational Package C equivalence program at Community Learning Activity Centers (CLACs) in Malang District. To ensure the collection of information-rich data, participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach based on the following inclusion criteria: having attended the program for at least 6 months and being active in vocational classes. The final sample consisted of 65 learners, aged 17 to 40. The demographic composition included 10 males and 15 females with diverse occupational backgrounds, including farmers, industrial workers, and former school dropouts.

Data Collection

Data collection was carefully conducted through a combination of in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation study. The primary data were gathered through semi-structured, one-to-one interviews, which provided the flexibility needed to explore insights in depth while maintaining a guided focus. To aid in providing

comprehensive answers, participants were given an interview guideline in advance. The interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and were conducted in a private room at the CLAC or the participant's workplace to ensure comfort. All interviews were audio-recorded to capture participants' narratives accurately.

To complement the interview data, the researchers also conducted participant observation of the learners' daily academic and vocational activities within the CLACs to observe their behavioral engagement and interactions firsthand.

Data Analysis

The collected interview and observational data were analyzed utilizing a systematic thematic content analysis. The analytical procedure comprised five distinct phases: (1) verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews; (2) checking and editing the transcripts for accuracy; (3) initial open coding to categorize raw data; (4) analysis and interpretation to synthesize codes into the core themes of self-concept and self-efficacy; and (5) final verification.

To ensure the trustworthiness and accuracy of the findings, the data were continuously sorted and triangulated across multiple sources, including observational notes and secondary documentation. Furthermore, the interpretation strategy was validated through member checking, in which the research team consulted participants to confirm the analysis of their responses. Finally, peer debriefing was conducted by collaborating with an external social science researcher to review the analytical process objectively.

Ethical Considerations

This research strictly adhered to established ethical standards for the use of human subjects. Prior to data collection, institutional approval was obtained from the Local Education Authority of Malang District. The researchers provided full transparency by briefing all participants about the study's steps and objectives. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, emphasizing that their involvement was entirely voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any time. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all personal identifying information was removed from the transcripts. The recorded data collection materials were securely stored during the research phase and designated for permanent destruction upon the study's completion.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The phenomenological inquiry revealed how learning citizens construct their subjective reality within the non-formal education ecosystem. Based on thematic content analysis, the findings are categorized into two distinct but interconnected psychological constructs: the formation of self-concept (identity and internal meaning-making) and the manifestation of self-efficacy (context-specific belief in task capability).

Construction of Self-Concept

Self-concept among adult learners in the Package C program is deeply rooted in their diverse life histories, ranging from farmers and overseas workers to cooperative employees. Rather than merely seeking a diploma, learners undergo a process of identity transformation, negotiating their self-worth and societal roles. Table 1 outlines the components synthesized for this self-concept.

Table 1. Findings of self-concept components of learning citizens in CLACs, Malang District.

No	Self-Concept Components	Details
1	Self-image	Displays confidence in familiar domains while relying on others in unfamiliar areas; accepts constructive criticism; values collaborative and relaxed learning environments.
2	Idealism	Harbors internal aspirations and goals; draws inspiration from role models to pursue desired values.
3	Pride	Exhibits a strong drive to fulfill self-esteem needs through proactive thoughts and actions.
4	Role-self model	Demonstrates attitudes and behaviors aligned with expected societal and national roles.
5	Self-identity	Demonstrates a clear awareness of their social position and community belonging.
6	Experiences	Draws upon diverse life experiences and social interactions across community levels.
7	Study-orientation	Focuses on tangible needs such as financial stability, life skills, and academic credentials.
8	Knowledge needs	Seeks practical knowledge for daily problem-solving (e.g., carpentry, culinary arts, fashion, administration, disaster response, and tourism services).
9	Study-motivation	Displays high engagement when the curriculum aligns with personal needs; exhibits reduced engagement when relevance is ambiguous.

The phenomenological essence of their self-concept is inherently tied to their immediate reality. For instance, learners working in construction construct positive academic identities when taught applicable math skills, such as calculating volume using the Pythagorean theorem. Conversely, when faced with abstract subjects detached from their daily lives, they experience a crisis of academic identity, feeling "too old" or inadequate.

"I used to feel less valued in society before getting a proper education. But learning computer science here became the most interesting part for me. As someone who works as a village official, having these computer skills has drastically increased my self-confidence and provided me with many new opportunities for my work."

This indicates that self-concept is not static; it is an emotional and identity-driven transformation where adult learners transition from feeling marginalized as "school dropouts" to viewing themselves as capable, recognized members of society.

Manifestation of Self-Efficacy Beliefs

While self-concept dictates a non-formal learner, self-efficacy dictates what they believe they can do. Self-efficacy manifests concretely through learners' persistence, their ability to overcome specific academic obstacles, and their response to external motivation.

Table 2. Self-efficacy components of learning citizens in CLACs, Malang District.

No	Self-Efficacy Components	Details
1	Task completion	Demonstrates varying diligence; some complete tasks meticulously, while others prioritize mere completion.
2	Obstacles	Experiences specific academic difficulties, predominantly in Mathematics and English.
3	Confidence	Believes in personal capability to complete tasks successfully, though some lack sustained assurance.
4	Persistence	Younger learners often show higher persistence, whereas struggling learners may disengage until final exams.
5	Tenacity	Maintains diligence in completing assignments and evaluations when actively engaged.
6	Consistency	Shows a focus on developing specific talents and interests through curriculum alignment.
7	Goals	Maintains focus on Package C milestones, though peer interactions may influence long-term consistency.
8	Self-awareness	Successfully navigates evaluations, though some approach assessments with minimal effort.
9	Time management	Successfully balances work and study through active coordination with tutors and instructors.
10	Verbal persuasion	Responds positively to encouragement and capability-affirming feedback from tutors and program managers.

The lived experience of self-efficacy is highly dynamic. Participants report that their confidence to tackle difficult subjects is heavily reliant on "verbal persuasion" the constant encouragement from tutors and Community Learning Center (CLC) managers.

"There were times I experienced significant difficulties in learning, especially with Mathematics and English subjects. I felt unable to follow the lessons well and honestly tended to become lazy, thinking I would just show up right before the final semester exams. However, the program managers and my tutors always provided understanding and consistently encouraged me to believe in my own abilities. By coordinating with the tutors and technical resource persons, I figured out how to properly manage my time between my work and my studies. Because of their support, I stayed consistent and focused on my goal of finishing Package C."

When learning, citizens who successfully manage their time between demanding jobs (like farming or trading) and their studies experience a surge in self-efficacy, proving to themselves that they can execute complex, multi-step goals.



Figure 1. Skill learning class in one of the CLACs in Malang District

The self-efficacy of learning citizens in Community Learning Centers (CLC) in Malang City is a multi-dimensional construct that significantly influences their academic journey. Based on the findings in Table 2, self-efficacy manifests as the ability to navigate task difficulties, confidence in professional and academic settings, and the stability of beliefs about task completion.

3.2. Discussion

Theoretical Integration and Interpretation

This study highlights the critical distinction and interplay between self-concept and self-efficacy in adult non-formal education. Aligning with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the findings confirm that self-efficacy is a context-specific, malleable belief system driven by mastery experiences and verbal persuasion. The learners' ability to confidently solve daily occupational problems using new knowledge acts as a cognitive catalyst, directly enhancing their future-oriented self-efficacy.

Simultaneously, the research expands upon adult learning theory by demonstrating how identity transformation occurs. Adult learners enter CLCs with past-oriented, often negative academic self-concepts due to previous educational failures. The phenomenological evidence suggests that when curriculum design respects their specific "knowledge needs" (e.g., vocational skills, disaster response), it validates their life experiences. This validation shifts their self-concept from "dropout" to "competent professional," significantly improving subjective well-being and academic resilience.

Practical Implications for CLC Management

The blurred lines between self-belief and academic success necessitate a strategic shift in how Community Learning Centers (PKBM/SKB) are managed. The strong reliance on verbal persuasion and task-specific confidence underscores the critical need for integrated counseling and guidance services within equality education. CLC managers and tutors must function not merely as instructors, but as career and psychological facilitators who map individual talents to vocational relevance. Furthermore, educational policy and vocational curriculum design must remain highly localized and flexible. Because motivation spikes when mathematical or administrative concepts are taught through the lens of the learners'

actual professions (e.g., carpentry or trading), standardized national curricula must be adapted to incorporate local, practical realities to sustain adult learner engagement.

Study Limitations

While this study provides deep phenomenological insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the qualitative nature and small sample size limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Second, the research is confined to a single regional context (Malang District), which may possess unique socio-cultural dynamics not present in other regions. Finally, the absence of a longitudinal perspective limits the ability to track how these self-constructs evolve throughout learners' lifespans or post-graduation careers. Future research should consider longitudinal tracking of non-formal learners across diverse geographical settings.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that adult learners in the vocational Package C equivalence program construct positive self-concepts and high self-efficacy when their education directly aligns with their practical needs and occupational realities. The success of these learners is heavily supported by the institutional flexibility of Community Learning Centers (CLCs), particularly in creating community-based schedules that accommodate their work responsibilities. Theoretically, this research expands upon adult learning and social cognitive theories by illustrating how identity transformation and context-specific self-efficacy are actively built through vocational relevance and verbal persuasion in non-formal environments. In practice, the findings highlight that CLC managers and tutors must act as psychological facilitators, underscoring the importance of integrating tailored counseling and guidance services to map learners' talents, address academic difficulties, and sustain their confidence. Furthermore, this study offers critical policy implications, emphasizing the need for policymakers to adapt standardized national curricula to incorporate local, practical life skills and vocational training, which is essential for improving learners' economic welfare and social independence. Despite these insights, the study acknowledges certain limitations, primarily that the phenomenological approach relies on a small qualitative sample confined to a single regional context (Malang District), thereby restricting the statistical generalizability of the findings. To build upon this research, future studies should conduct comparative studies across different geographical and socio-cultural regions. Additionally, longitudinal studies are recommended to track how these self-constructs evolve during the learners' post-graduation careers, alongside future research employing quantitative validation to statistically measure the impact of the identified self-concept and self-efficacy components on overall non-formal academic achievement.

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