

# Model of Online Class Services in Supporting Self-Directed Learning in the Equivalency Program

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to explore how the model of online class services can support Self-Directed Learning (SDL) for students in the Equivalency Program. Online learning has become an essential solution to various educational challenges, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study identifies factors contributing to the success of online class models in enhancing SDL, such as tutor engagement, material quality, and technology accessibility. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected through interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions (FGD). The results show that the online class model effectively supports SDL, although there are challenges related to technology limitations and students' time management skills. The study suggests that program administrators should provide more support in time management and technology usage so that participants can fully utilize the flexibility of online learning.*

**Keywords:** Equivalency Education, Self-Directed Learning, Online Learning, Equivalency Program

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## 1. Introduction

The Equivalency Program is an educational initiative designed to provide access for individuals who, for various reasons, cannot follow the formal education pathway. This program plays a crucial role in addressing educational challenges for those who have dropped out of school, started working at a young age, or face geographical and economic barriers. With flexible time and learning methods, the equivalency program allows participants to continue their education at their own pace and conditions, without being bound by the rigid structure of formal education. The equivalency program offers opportunities for those who have not had the chance to pursue formal education to earn diplomas and acquire equivalent skills, which are essential for improving competitiveness in the labor market and supporting social mobility (Basri, 2018). Moreover, the equivalency program not only provides access to education for those left behind but also serves as an important tool in supporting social inclusion and community development. This program helps reduce the educational gap between marginalized groups and the general population (Supriatna, 2017). Through this program, individuals who previously felt marginalized by the formal education system can regain a sense of value and empowerment. The equivalency program also instills confidence in participants to actively engage in society (Zuhdi, 2019). Thus, the equivalency program is a vital foundation for realizing a more inclusive and equitable vision of education for all segments of society.

The growing need for more flexible and independent learning has become increasingly relevant with the development of technology and changes in societal lifestyles. Flexible learning allows students to manage their study time and location according to their circumstances, particularly for those with limited access or other responsibilities such as work. Research has shown that flexibility in non-formal education helps increase participation and success among students in educational programs. Digital technology also expands access to a more diverse range of learning resources, enabling participants to learn in ways that better suit their needs (Genc, 2020).

The demand for self-directed learning has also increased as students are expected to manage their learning processes without relying too heavily on direct instruction from teachers. Self-directed learning (SDL) enables individuals to develop critical thinking and time management skills, which are essential in the modern workforce. Technology plays a key role in supporting SDL by providing broader access to learning materials and enabling more dynamic interactions among learners. Research has shown that technology-supported independent learning tends to be more effective in improving learning outcomes, especially in non-formal education contexts like the equivalency program (Azevedo et al., 2021; Song & Hill, 2018).

Challenges in equivalency learning, particularly in the context of self-directed learning (SDL), often arise because program participants frequently have other responsibilities, such as work or family, that hinder consistency in their learning process. Learners in these programs, who do not have a formal learning routine, often struggle to build independence in learning, especially in terms of time management and motivation. A lack of a supportive learning environment, such as access to technology and supporting devices, exacerbates the challenges in effectively implementing SDL, particularly in equivalency programs that often face infrastructure limitations (Kayacan & Ektem, 2019; Vaičiūnienė & Kazlauskienė, 2023).

Moreover, many participants in the equivalency program are unfamiliar with independent learning methods, making it difficult for them to plan, implement, and evaluate their learning process. SDL requires good time management and metacognitive skills, which participants in equivalency programs often lack. A deficiency in self-regulation skills poses a significant barrier to SDL success, particularly if there is no facilitator consistently providing feedback (Prasetio et al., 2019; Sang et al., 2016). This highlights the importance of facilitator support, alongside skill development, in helping learners acquire the skills needed for SDL.

The purpose of this research is to examine how the online class service model can support self-directed learning (SDL) in the equivalency program, particularly in providing the flexibility that students need. Online learning allows participants to access materials according to their schedule, offering greater freedom to set their own learning pace. The design of online courses, which allows participants to monitor their progress, has been shown to be effective in enhancing SDL, especially in environments that require independent learning, such as the equivalency program (Zhu & Bonk, 2019).

This research also aims to explore the challenges and opportunities in implementing online class services for SDL. Factors such as time management, material availability, and technological support are key to successful independent learning. Studies have shown that self-directed learning strategies supported by interactive online platforms can significantly improve learning outcomes (Yeh et al., 2019). Thus, this study will provide insights into how these elements can be effectively integrated into online-based equivalency programs.

The research questions posed in this article focus on how the online class service model can support self-directed learning (SDL) in the equivalency program. This study explores several key aspects, such as: (1) To what extent can the flexibility of online classes enhance students' ability to independently manage their learning process, (2) What elements are needed in online class services to effectively support SDL, such as material availability, technological support, and online interaction, and (3) What challenges and opportunities are faced in implementing this model in the context of the equivalency program.

## 2. Methods

A qualitative approach was used in this study to gain an in-depth understanding of how the online class service model supports self-directed learning (SDL) in the equivalency program. Semi-structured interviews were effective in exploring the experiences of learners regarding elements such as technological support and self-management strategies, which play a crucial role in the success of SDL (Porter et al., 2020). Additionally, qualitative analysis helped identify factors that influence independent learning attitudes in online learning, such as confidence in using technology and the accessibility of learning resources (Li & Wu, 2023).

The research subjects consisted of participants in the equivalency program who utilized online class services to support self-directed learning (SDL). These participants required the flexibility offered by online learning, especially because they often had work or family responsibilities. Readiness for SDL and academic motivation were key factors influencing success in online learning (Grande et al., 2022). The use of technology in online classes has also been proven to enhance learners' independence and academic outcomes (Garrison, 2021). The data collection tools used in this study included semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, aimed at understanding participants' experiences with self-directed learning (SDL) in the context of online class services. Semi-structured interviews allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' views and strategies in handling independent learning. Questionnaires were used to measure the level of readiness for SDL. The combination of these tools was proven effective in assessing academic motivation and SDL readiness, as demonstrated in research by Heo and Han (2018), which examined online learning.

The research process involved several stages, starting with the design of instruments such as semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to measure self-directed learning (SDL). Data were collected from participants in the equivalency program who used online class services. Interviews were conducted to gain in-depth insights, while questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data. After the data were collected, thematic analysis was conducted for qualitative data and descriptive statistical analysis for quantitative data. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of SDL in online learning (Gopal et al., 2021).

The data were analyzed using a thematic approach for the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, as well as descriptive statistical analysis for the quantitative data from the questionnaires. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns related to participants' experiences in self-directed learning (SDL), while descriptive analysis helped describe the distribution and trends in the quantitative data. According to Grande et al. (2022), the combination of these two methods allows for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between SDL and the effectiveness of online learning in the context of the equivalency program.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The main findings of this study indicate that the online class service model implemented in the equivalency program successfully supports self-directed learning (SDL). Learners experienced flexibility in determining the time and place to study according to their needs, which is a key element of SDL. This aligns with the research by Carpenter and Willet (2021), which emphasizes that digital learning environments supporting SDL can enhance learning outcomes. Additionally, peer-to-peer feedback can also serve as an effective tool to strengthen SDL and improve the quality of online learning (Morris, 2018). Online class services in the equivalency program have proven to support self-directed learning (SDL) well, particularly through the flexibility offered in the learning process. Learners can access learning materials anytime and anywhere, giving them full control over their learning schedule. This allows them to align learning with their daily activities, such as work or family responsibilities. Research by Wu et al. (2023) shows that flexibility in online learning significantly contributes to participants' ability to manage their time and study independently.

In addition to flexibility, this study also found that easy access to a variety of online learning materials greatly increases participants' motivation to learn independently. Participants can access materials anytime without being bound by a fixed schedule, allowing them to study at their own pace. The availability of diverse and easily accessible learning materials through online platforms helps learners manage their study time more effectively, ultimately enhancing self-directed learning (SDL) skills (Zhu & Bonk, 2019). Moreover, the application of technologies such as generative AI in online learning environments can boost learners' motivation and self-management skills, making them more confident in directing their learning independently (Wu et al., 2024). Furthermore, broader access to online learning materials also increases motivation and independence among participants. The availability of various materials, such as videos, articles, and interactive assignments, provides learners with the opportunity to choose the learning methods that best suit their learning styles. Chi-Hui et al. (2023) revealed that technology that supports SDL enables learners to take the initiative in seeking information and developing a deeper understanding of the learning materials. This strengthens their motivation to continue learning independently.

Another finding from this study shows that online interactions with facilitators and fellow learners play an important role in supporting self-directed learning (SDL). Although participants learn independently, support from facilitators through direct feedback on online platforms greatly helps them maintain focus and motivation. Interaction between learners and instructors, as well as with other learners, significantly enhances emotional engagement and learning outcomes in online environments (Kurucay & Inan, 2017). Additionally, using peer feedback can strengthen the quality of online learning and improve learners' critical thinking skills (Morris, 2018). Ongoing social interaction, both with facilitators and fellow learners, plays an important role in enhancing the success of SDL by strengthening engagement and a sense of community within the online learning environment (Zhang et al., 2017). Interaction between learners and facilitators also becomes a crucial element in supporting SDL. Through online class platforms, participants can receive direct feedback from facilitators regarding their assignments and learning activities. This helps participants stay motivated and focused on their learning goals. According to research by Francescucci and Rohani (2019), intensive interaction between participants and facilitators in an online environment strengthens learner engagement and improves their learning outcomes.

Regarding challenges in independent learning, some participants experienced difficulties in managing time and maintaining consistency. This is quite common, especially when participants face distractions from social media or other non-academic responsibilities. The use of social media often becomes a significant distraction for learners, although they acknowledge that it also helps alleviate academic stress (Dewi et al., 2023). Furthermore, good academic self-regulation skills are crucial in preventing procrastination and maintaining consistency in learning, particularly in online learning environments (Trigueros-Ramos et al., 2019). These strategies help learners manage their time more effectively and stay focused on their academic goals (Ragusa et al., 2023). However, time management challenges remain an obstacle for some learners. While online classes offer flexibility, some participants still struggle to manage their study time effectively without direct guidance. Trigueros-Ramos et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of time management skills for the success of SDL, particularly in online learning. Therefore, additional training in time management is necessary for learners to make the most of the online class services.

Overall, the online class service model in the equivalency program has a positive impact on the development of self-directed learning (SDL). Learners benefit from the flexibility and broader access to learning materials, allowing them to study at their own pace. However, challenges related to time management and technological skills continue to hinder some participants. Recent research by Wu et al. (2023) highlights the importance of improving learners' technological skills and confidence in using online tools to maximize the effectiveness of SDL. Additionally, other studies suggest that further training in time management is needed for participants to better utilize the flexibility offered by online learning (Chi-Hui et al., 2023). This approach can strengthen independent learning, particularly in non-formal education contexts such as the equivalency program.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The main findings of this study indicate that online class services in the equivalency program have successfully supported self-directed learning (SDL) by offering flexibility in terms of access to time and learning materials. Learners are able to study at their own pace, with easily accessible materials and support from facilitators who provide direct feedback. However, some challenges related to time management and technological skills continue to hinder participants from maximizing the potential of online learning. This study highlights the importance of deeper technological integration and time management guidance to ensure the success of SDL. The implications of these findings for the development of online class-based equivalency programs are that program administrators need to provide more in-depth training on technological and time management skills for learners. Administrators and policymakers are also encouraged to add stronger interaction features between participants and facilitators and improve access to digital learning materials. For future research, it is recommended to explore more deeply how social interaction in online classes can further support the development of SDL and to evaluate the effectiveness of time management guidance models in online learning environments.

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